

**NOTICE**

There will be no edition of The Hills Times on October 1 and 2, 2025, as office will remain closed on November 30 and October 1 on account of Durga Puja.

We wish you all a very happy Durga Puja.

-PUBLISHER



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## I want justice! I want a proper inquiry: Zubeen's wife

We want to know what happened in my husband's last moments: Garima • 11<sup>th</sup> day rituals of iconic singer performed



**GUWAHATI, Sept 29:** Zubeen Garg's wife, Garima Saikia Garg, on Monday said that the singer's family wants to know what had happened in his last moments that led to his death, and that a proper inquiry should be conducted.

"We want to know what happened to him, why it happened and how this negligence could be allowed to happen? We want answers," Garima told reporters after the conduct of the 11th day rituals for the singer here.

She said all those who were there with him on the yacht and at the event for which he had gone to Singapore "must answer this".

"Why did they not lift him from

provide no medical assistance, no security or make special arrangements for his stay, food or take care of him. He did nothing for Zubeen," she alleged.

It is evident from the singer's last moments in a video that he was 'very exhausted and it was the responsibility of those who were there with him. Siddhartha, his musician Shekhar Goswami and members of the Assam Association should have brought him out of the water immediately', she said.

"I want justice! I want a proper inquiry and answers to all our questions. I have full faith in the investigation process," Garima added.

She said that the family had hoped that the people accompanying him would take care of him, but "now we realise that they did not do so". Asked whether Garg had taken the medicines prescribed, his wife said that she was not aware of that, but his medicines were sent along with him from here when he travelled to Singapore.

"He has been taking only one medicine since August 2024 after he had a seizure attack and I had ensured that his medicines were there wherever he went, whether in the house, car or the studio," she said.

Asked why she did not accompany (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## SIT findings to be submitted to court: DGP

Zubeen's death: One police team in Delhi, 2 officers to go to Singapore



**GUWAHATI, Sept 29:** Assam Director General of Police Harmeet Singh on Monday said that the CID's Special Investigating Team (SIT), inquiring into the death of singer Zubeen Garg, will reach its 'final conclusion' and the findings will be submitted to the court.

The DGP said that a police team is already in Delhi, and two other officers will soon go to Singapore.

The Assam government constituted a 10-member SIT, led by Special DGP M P Gupta, to probe into the singer's death in Singapore due to drowning in the sea on September 19.

"This is a very important SIT, and the investigations have progressed far. The findings will be submitted in the court of law," the DGP told reporters on the sidelines of a programme here.

The findings cannot be announced publicly and 'it will be legally wrong from my side', Singh said.

"One aspect is, however, clear that as per the directives of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and the law of the country, the inquiry will be transparent and a proper scientific investigation will be carried out," he said.

The DGP pointed out that the process of invoking the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) with Singapore has already started.

The MLAT is an agreement between countries that facilitates the exchange of information and evidence for law enforcement purposes and India has it with Singapore.

Singh said that the related papers will go from the Ministry of Home Affairs to that country 'so that we can seek the help of Singaporean authorities in the investigation'.

"Let us follow the legal process (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## State moves MHA to invoke MLAT with Singapore

**GUWAHATI, Sept 29:** The Assam government has submitted a formal request to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to invoke the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) with Singapore in connection with singer Zubeen Garg's death in the Southeast Asian country, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Monday.

The MLAT is an agreement between two countries that facilitates the exchange of information and evidence for law enforcement purposes.

"Once invoked, this will ensure full cooperation from Singaporean authorities -- giving us access to case details and assistance to bring back the accused and secure justice," Sarma said in an X post.

The Assam government constituted a 10-member SIT, led by Special DGP M P Gupta, to investigate the singer's death in Singapore due to drowning in the sea on September 19. He had gone there to perform in the North East India Festival.

"After the Ministry forwards the request to Singapore, our police team, which is already there, will act in coordination with local authorities," he said. During the next (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## New BTC admin: Ulema Council seeks 4 key posts

Hagrama urged to give recognition to contributions of Muslim candidates

### HT Correspondent

**KOKRAJHAR, Sept 29:** The Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) is witnessing a rising political influence of the migrant Bengali Muslim community, with four Muslim candidates elected from a single party in the recently concluded BTC elections.

After a five-year hiatus, the Bodoland People's Front (BPF), led by party president Hagrama Mohiary, returned to power with a sweeping majority, winning 28 of the 40 seats in the BTC elections.

In this context, the BTC Ulema Council has demanded that three elected Muslim members be included as Executive Members (EMs) in the



new council, along with one nominated member.

The demand was made during a press confer-

ence at the Kokrajhar Press Club on Monday by BTC Ulema Council president Mohammad Keramat Ali and general secretary Hafiz Jehirul Islam.

Addressing the media, they urged BPF president Hagrama Mohiary to recognise the contribution and representation of the Muslim community by assigning three EM positions and one nominated member post to Muslim leaders elected under the BPF banner.

For the first time in BTC history, four Muslim candidates were elected from a single party, marking a significant rise in the community's political influence. Observers note that this development may play a (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Warfare now measured in hours and seconds, not months: Rajnath at ICG conference

**NEW DELHI, Sept 29:** Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday said that warfare is now "measured in hours and seconds, not months", with satellites, drones and sensors redefining the nature of conflict, as he urged the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) to develop a futuristic roadmap that anticipates new challenges, integrates cutting-edge technologies and continuously adapts strategies.

In his address at the 42nd ICG Commanders' Conference held at the force's headquarters here, Singh also underlined that cyber and electronic warfare are "no longer hypothetical threats", but present-day realities.

"A nation may attempt to paralyse our systems not with missiles, but through hacking, cyber-attacks and electronic jamming. The ICG must continuously adapt, upgrade its training and equipment to guard against such threats. Automated surveillance networks and AI-enabled systems are essential to reduce response times to seconds and ensure readiness at all times," he said.

The defence minister said warfare is now "measured in hours and seconds, not months, with satellites, drones and sensors redefining the nature of conflict".

Singh underlined that India's 7,500-km coastline, along with island territories such as the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep, poses "enormous challenges", requiring advanced technology, well-trained personnel and round-the-clock surveillance.

He emphasised that maritime threats are becoming increasingly technology-driven and multi-dimensional.

"What were once predictable patterns of smuggling or piracy have now evolved into sophisticated operations using GPS spoofing, remote-controlled boats, encrypted communications, drones, satellite phones and even networks operating on the dark web," he said.

Singh also warned that terrorist organisations exploit modern tools, such as digital mapping and real-time intelligence, to plan their activities.

"Traditional methods are no longer sufficient, we must be ahead of criminals and adversaries by integrating artificial intelligence, machine learning-based surveillance, drones, cyber-defence systems and automated response mechanisms into our maritime security framework," he said.

The conference is being held from September 28 to 30 in the backdrop of "evolving maritime security challenges" and the growing strategic significance of the Indian Ocean Region.

Singh described the ICG as a vital pillar of national security that has transformed itself from a modest fleet at inception into a formidable force with 152 vessels and 78 aircraft.

Since its establishment, the ICG has apprehended 1,638 foreign vessels and 13,775 foreign fishermen involved in illegal activities within (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Durga Puja in Jorhat begins amid state mourning for Zubeen Da

### HT Correspondent

**JORHAT, Sept 29:** Durga Puja celebrations in Jorhat began on Monday with Saptami marked on a subdued note, as the state continues to mourn the demise of legendary singer and musician Zubeen Garg.

Many residents said the festive mood was dampened by grief.

A young woman noted that she could not bring herself to shop for the Puja, feeling teary-eyed most of the time due to the loss of the iconic singer.

Decorations at the pandals were scaled down, with the usual grand lighting displays largely absent.

Devotional songs, along with Zubeen Garg's popular tracks, were played on loudspeakers.

Several pandals also installed portraits and cutouts of the singer as a mark of tribute.

Despite pleasant weather throughout the day, footfall at the pandals was lower than in previous years. Devotees primarily visited temples during the day to offer prayers.

Early morning, the 229-year-old Buri Goxani Deval, an Ahom-era temple in the heart of the town, witnessed devotees offering obeisance to the goddess.

Around 100 Durga Puja celebrations have been organised across Jorhat district.

The district administration, in coordination with police authorities, has implemented elaborate arrangements to ensure the festivities proceed smoothly and peacefully. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Union minister Pabitra Margherita to visit Moscow

### HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Sept 29:** Union Minister of State for Textiles and External Affairs, Pabitra Margherita, is scheduled to undertake an official visit to Moscow, Russia, from October 1 to 3, 2025.

During the visit, Margherita will hold bilateral meetings with the Ministry of Industry & Trade of the Russian Federation and the Russian Union of Entrepreneurs of the Textile and Apparel Industry, according to an official statement.

The discussions aim to strengthen cooperation in trade, industry, and textiles, and explore avenues for enhancing collaboration between Indian and Russian businesses.

The Minister will also inaugurate the "Best of India - Indian Apparel and Textile Fair" in Moscow, being held from October 1 to 3.



The exhibition and buyer-seller meet will provide a strategic platform for Indian exporters to expand their presence in Russia and CIS markets.

Over 100 Indian companies are expected to participate, showcasing handloom and handicrafts, home furnishings, carpets, linens,

apples, and garments.

Around 1,000 domestic and international buyers are expected to attend, enabling direct engagement with leading importers, wholesalers, and retailers from Russia.

The fair is being presented by the Handloom Export Promotion Council (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Tributes paid to Zubeen Garg at Zonal Karbi Youth Festival

### HT Bureau

**DIPHU, Sept 29:** The Langbar Zonal Committee of the Karbi Cultural Society (KCS) on Monday paid tribute to Assam's cultural icon and noted singer late Zubeen Garg during the 33rd Zonal Karbi Youth Festival (ZKYF) at Langbar Karbi Jutang Aklam, Bakulia.

A shradhanjali was organised with floral offerings and the lighting of diyas (earthen lamps) before a portrait of the late singer.

The tribute was led by Bhoen Gosh, retired lecturer of Toknobe College, Dokmoka and former president of Karbi Anglong Sahitya Sabha, in the presence of Kamsing Hanse, president of Karbi Lammet Amei (KLA), Joysing Tokbi, adviser of KLA, and Madhuram Lekthe, Executive Member (EM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Start-up carried out its maiden sub-orbital test flight last year Agnikul unveils plans to build fully-reusable rockets

**NEW DELHI, Sept 29:** Space start-up Agnikul Cosmos announced on Monday that the rockets it plans to build will be fully reusable, allowing it to offer satellite-launch services at globally-competitive prices.

The Chennai-based start-up made the announcement at the International Astronautical Congress in Sydney and asserted that it is aiming to ensure that no part of its rockets is fully expended or left behind.

Agnikul carried out its maiden sub-orbital test flight of its 3D-printed rocket, Agnibaan SORTeD, last year and plans to carry out its orbital launch soon.

"We have consistently designed our vehicles to ensure that affordability and flexibility are never afterthoughts but are built in from



day one," Srinath Ravichandran, co-founder and CEO of Agnikul Cosmos, said.

"We are grateful to the critical support from IN-SPaCE and ISRO. Their willingness to allow us to explore rocket-stage recovery and reuse has empowered us to at-

tempt this feat both from a policy friendliness and tech support standpoint," he added.

Backed by multiple patents secured in the United States, Europe and India for Agnikul's proprietary multi-purpose and reusability technologies, the company is scaling

up towards commercially-viable, fully-reusable launch vehicles, it said in a statement.

Central to this effort is Agnikul's patent on combined launch vehicle and satellite systems, along with its semi-cryogenic propellant technology, chosen to enable efficient refurbishment and cost-effective re-flights.

Following a fully-successful controlled-ascent launch using Agnikul's proprietary autopilot algorithms and software, the company is accelerating development to validate commercially-valuable reusable spaceflight technologies.

Agnikul's in-house development facilities are one of the main driving forces of this new attempt, with every patent and system designed to support more affordable, customisable (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## India announces two ₹ 4,000 crore cross-border rail links with Bhutan



**NEW DELHI, Sept 29:** India on Monday unveiled its plan to build two cross-border train links with Bhutan at a cost of over ₹ 4,000 crore, in first such railway connectivity projects with the Himalayan nation to boost trade and economic engagement.

The details on the new rail projects linking the Bhutanese cities of Gelephu and Samtse with Kokrajhar in Assam and Banarhat in West Bengal respectively was made public by Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri.

Under the two projects, 89 kms of railway lines will be laid and work is expected to be completed in

the next four years.

"India and Bhutan share a relationship of exceptional trust, mutual respect, and understanding," Misri said at a joint media briefing with Vaishnaw.

"This is a relationship that is rooted in cultural and civilizational ties, extensive people-to-people relations, and our shared developmental and security interests," he said.

India's announcement of the projects came amid efforts by China to increase its strategic influence over Bhutan.

Misri said the two governments have agreed to establish two cross-border rail links between Banarhat and Samtse and Kokrajhar and Gelephu.

"This will be the first set of rail connectivity projects with Bhutan," he said.

The agreement for setting up of the rail links was signed during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bhutan last year.

Vaishnaw said the projects will take off from the network of Indian Railways at Kokrajhar and Banarhat and that investment planned is about ₹ 4,033 crore. "As most of the EXIM (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Stock markets close marginally lower in volatile trade ahead of RBI rate decision

**MUMBAI, Sept 29:** Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty closed marginally lower in a volatile session on Monday, extending their downtrend to the seventh day mainly due to selling in banking shares and persistent foreign fund outflows ahead of the RBI's interest rate decision later this week.

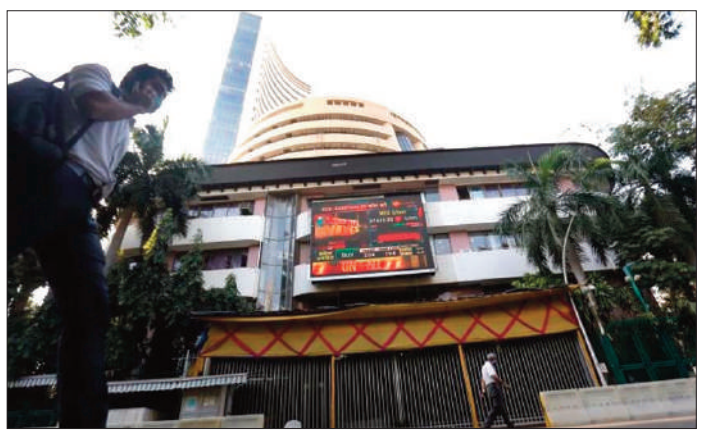
After gyrating between gains and losses in a restricted trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 61.52 points or 0.08 per cent to settle at 80,364.94. During the day, it hit a high of 80,851.38 and a low of 80,248.84.

Falling for the seventh consecutive session, the 50-share NSE Nifty slipped 19.80 points or 0.08 per cent to 24,634.90. Nifty has dropped more than 3 per cent in the seven straight sessions due to selling by foreign investors.

Auto and FMCG shares retreated while realty, energy, and metal shares advanced.

Among Sensex firms, Maruti, Axis Bank, Larsen & Toubro, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, Infosys, Adani Ports and Hindustan Unilever were the laggards.

However, Titan, State Bank of India, Eternal and Trent were among the major gainers.



"The domestic market concluded a volatile session on a flat note as investors turned more cautious ahead of a holiday-led truncated week and continued FI selling. Lack of clarity in the US-India trade deal and prolonged pressure on IT & pharma indices are near-term concerns for the market," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited said. The BSE midcap gauge went up by 0.34 per cent while smallcap index dipped 0.17 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, teck declined 0.33 per cent, industrials (0.32 per cent), IT (0.25 per cent), auto (0.12 per cent) and capital

mark, the broader indices also closed on a flat note.

"On one hand, the overhang of recent US policy actions has eased slightly; however, persistent foreign fund outflows and caution ahead of the MPC meeting continue to weigh on sentiment," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng settled in positive territory, while Japan's Nikkei 225 index ended lower.

Equity markets in Europe were trading higher. US markets ended higher on Friday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹5,687.58 crore on Friday, while Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth ₹5,843.21 crore, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 1.25 per cent to USD 69.25 a barrel.

On Friday, the Sensex tanked 733.22 points or 0.90 per cent to settle at 80,426.46. The Nifty tumbled 236.15 points or 0.95 per cent to an over three-week low of 24,654.70. (PTI)

Oil & Gas jumped 1.96 per cent, energy (1.10 per cent), realty (0.97 per cent), power (0.46 per cent), services (0.41 per cent) and metal (0.39 per cent).

In seven trading days, the BSE benchmark has tanked 2,649.02 points or 3.19 per cent, and the Nifty dipped 788.7 points or 3.10 per cent.

"Markets started the week on a volatile note and ended almost unchanged, taking a breather after the recent slide. Following a flat start, the Nifty oscillated sharply on both sides before finally settling at 24,634.90. In line with the bench-

"Spot gold prices extended its weekly winning streak to the sixth straight week and touched a new record high, driven by trade concerns, huge ETF inflows and Fed rate cut expectations.

"Last week, US President Donald Trump announced fresh tariffs on pharma, heavy-duty trucks and furniture, which will come into effect on October 1," Praveen Singh, Head of Commodities and Currencies at Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said.

In the domestic futures market on Monday, gold for October delivery appreciated by ₹1,702, or 1.5 per cent, to hit a record high of ₹1,15,490 per 10 grams. The December contract for the yellow metal futures rallied by ₹1,606, or 1.4 per cent, to touch a fresh peak of ₹1,16,497 per 10 grams on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX).

Silver, too, witnessed gains on the MCX. The white metal futures for December delivery bounced ₹2,290, or 1.61 per cent, to hit a lifetime high of ₹1,44,179 per kilogram.

The March 2026 contract for silver futures jumped ₹2,559, or 1.78 per cent, to hit a fresh new peak of ₹1,45,817 per kg on the commodities bourse.

"Gold prices rose to hover near an all-time high, while silver breached the psychological mark of USD 45 per ounce on COMEX, supported by a weaker dollar and growing expectations that the Federal Reserve is likely to continue with interest rate cuts later this year and surge in overall demand.

"Focus now shifts to US jobs market data, ISM manufacturing PMI for further clues on the economy's health, scheduled later this week," said Manav Modi, Analyst - Precious Metal - Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services. Globally, gold futures for December delivery climbed to hit a record high of USD 3,860.45 per ounce. Silver futures for December delivery also hit a high of USD 47.39 per ounce. (PTI)

## Silver scales ₹ 1.5 lakh/kg for first time; gold hit record ₹ 1,19,500/10g on safe-haven buying

**NEW DELHI, Sept 29:** Silver prices on Monday soared by ₹7,000 to hit an all-time high of ₹1.5 lakh per kilogram in the national capital, while gold also scaled a fresh peak of ₹1,19,500 per 10 grams amid strong global trends as investors turned to the safe-haven asset amid concerns over a possible US government shutdown.

According to the All India Sarafa Association, the precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity climbed ₹1,500 to touch a lifetime high of ₹1,19,500 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes). It had closed at ₹1,18,000 per 10 grams on Saturday.

In the local bullion market, gold of 99.5 per cent purity also advanced by ₹1,500 to hit a fresh peak of ₹1,18,900 per 10 grams, up from ₹1,17,400 per 10 grams in the previous session.

"In the domestic market, both gold and silver reached new record highs, driven by strong bullish cues from overseas markets," said Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities.

So far this year, the yellow metal prices have risen ₹40,550, or 51.36 per cent, surging from ₹78,950 per 10 grams on December 31, 2024.

Silver prices, too, witnessed a sharp rally, and climbed ₹7,000 to touch a record ₹1,50,000 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes), extending gains for the fourth straight session. The white metal had ended at ₹1,43,000 per kg in the previous trade.

The white metal prices have skyrocketed by ₹60,300, or 67.22 per cent, in the current calendar year, rallying from ₹89,700 per kg on December 31, 2024.

In the overseas market, both gold and silver posted robust gains. Spot gold surged 2 per cent to hit an all-time high of USD 3,831.33 per ounce, while spot silver advanced more than 2 per cent to USD 47.18 per ounce.

## PhonePe, Mastercard collaborate to launch 'tap & pay' feature for smartphones

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Sept 29:** PhonePe and Mastercard have partnered to enable contactless payments for Mastercard cardholders in India through NFC-enabled smartphones.

The new Tap & Pay feature allows users to make in-store payments by simply tapping their smartphones at payment terminals using the PhonePe app.

The collaboration offers secure and frictionless in-store payments while also supporting tokenised e-commerce transactions.

Mastercard credit, debit, and prepaid cards issued in India can be saved on NFC-capable Android smartphones, allowing users to enjoy all the benefits of card-based payments.

By combining Mastercard's global expertise in tokenization with PhonePe's 618 million registered users, the feature expands access to digital payments within India and internationally.

Deep Agrawal, Head of Payments at PhonePe, said that the collaboration brings device-based tokenization to millions of users, merging NFC smartphone capabilities with growing consumer preference for Tap & Pay.

He added that the feature enhances both convenience and security for in-store and online payments.

Ravi Datla, Senior Vice President, Products & Solutions, South Asia, Mastercard, said the partnership broadens the reach of digital payments, empowering Mastercard cardholders to Tap & Pay at merchant outlets in India and abroad.

He noted that India continues to set the pace of digital commerce globally, and Mastercard is proud to support this momentum.

Users can securely add their Mastercard credit and debit cards to the PhonePe app through a simple one-time process.

Once tokenised, they can make seamless payments by selecting the card and tapping their smartphone at any PoS terminal or using it for online shopping.

### AFFIDAVIT

I, Safar Uddin, S/O Abdur Rahman, R/O Vill. Padumpukhuri, PO-Ikrabari, P.S. Rowta, Dist Udalguri, BTR (Assam), hereby solemnly affirm do and declare that I am a Permanent resident of the above noted address and Citizen of India by birth. That my actual and correct name is Safar Uddin. That my name has been recorded in my Aadhaar Card Vide No. 4883 5708 5990 as Chafaruddin Ali in place of Safar Uddin and my name has been recorded in my PAN Card Vide No CNQPA6903B as Chafaruddin Ali in place of Safar Uddin. That Safar Uddin and Chafaruddin Ali are the same and one person. Sd/- Safar Uddin

## Industrial production grows 4 pc in August: Govt data

**NEW DELHI, Sept 29:** India's industrial production grew at 4 per cent in August, mainly due to better performance by the mining sector, according to government data released on Monday.

The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) growth rate for July has been revised upwards to 4.3 per cent from the earlier estimate of 3.5 per cent. In August 2024, the IIP recorded flat growth.

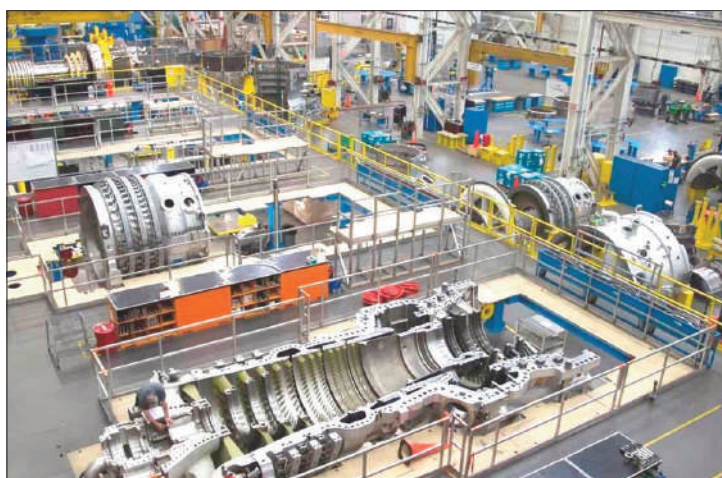
"With the mining sector growth at 6 per cent, the All India Index of Industrial Production (IIP) recorded a 4 per cent year-on-year growth in August 2025," the National Statistics Office (NSO) said.

The mining sector output in August 2024 had shrunk by 4.3 per cent. The manufacturing sector, which accounts for more than three-fourths of the index, expanded by 3.8 per cent in August this year, up from 1.2 per cent in the year-ago month.

Manufacturing of 'basic metals' and 'motor vehicles, trailers and semi-trailers' reported a healthy growth of 12.2 per cent and 9.8 per cent, respectively. The NSO data further showed that the growth in the electricity segment was 4.1 per cent against a decline of 3.7 per cent in August 2024.

During the April-August period of the current fiscal, the IIP growth was slower at 2.8 per cent compared to 4.3 per cent in the year-ago period.

Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist, Ipra, said that despite a low base, the



IIP growth unexpectedly eased to 4 per cent in August 2025 from the upward revision to 4.3 per cent in July 2025.

The slowdown was entirely led by manufacturing growth, which eased sharply to 3.8 per cent from 6 per cent in July 2025. In contrast, while mining output witnessed a year-on-year expansion after a gap of four months, growth in electricity generation inched up to a 5-month high, she said.

"Looking ahead, the GST rationalisation is expected to boost consumption demand during the festive season, which is likely to augur well for manufacturing output in September-October 2025, once the older inventories are off the shelves," Nayar added.

As per use-based classification, NSO data showed that the capital

goods segment grew by 4.4 per cent in August 2025 compared to a flat growth in the year-ago period.

Consumer durables (or white goods production) growth slowed to 3.5 per cent from 5.4 per cent in August 2024.

In August 2025, consumer non-durables output shrank by 6.3 per cent against a contraction of 4.4 per cent in the year-ago month.

Infrastructure/construction reported a growth of 10.6 per cent in August 2025, up from 2.7 per cent expansion a year ago.

The data also showed that the output of primary goods increased by 5.2 per cent against a contraction of 2.6 per cent growth in August 2024. The expansion in the intermediate goods segment was 5 per cent in August against 3.1 per cent a year ago. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## I want justice!

the singer to Singapore, Garima said that there were several domestic issues to be tackled as both his father and her parents were unwell and some of the people taking care of them were on leave.

"I had to sort out these issues before the Durga Puja as his festival shows were to begin after his return from Singapore and I had plans to accompany him then," she added. She said that they were yet to get the singer's mobile phone. Garima said that the singer had spoken to her on the previous day of the incident and had not mentioned plans for the yacht trip. "He is usually very excited about these things and I am surprised that he did not talk about it. Perhaps he was not aware of it," she said.

Regarding whether the manager had indulged in any financial irregularities, Garima said that she was not aware of any financial dealings of the singer as he had made it clear from the very beginning that 'I should not get involved in his professional and business dealings as it may create problems with others'.

She said that she had always stayed away from these dealings but now 'I am hearing these from others and so I have to find out and learn more about these issues now'. Garima said that she is getting strength from Zubeen's words as he always said that he was "a tiger and so I, too, should be a tigress in difficult times". She also thanked the people of the entire state for extending immense support and strength to the bereaved family. (PTI)

## SIT findings to

or else the case will become weak in the court. Let the SIT do its work and all should support the team,' the DGP said. He said that lookout notices have already been issued against the North East India Festival organiser Shyamkanu Mahanta and Zubeen Garg's manager Siddharth Sharma in the singer's death case. Garg had gone to the island country to perform at that fest.

"The accused will be brought back to the state and there should not be any doubt about it. It is a legal process. If they do not respond, we will take the next step of the law which will be much harsher," Singh said.

The CID will inform the people about investigations through the media from time to time, he said. Urging the people to believe in him, the Assam police and the state government, the DGP said, "The inquiry will reach its final conclusion, it is my promise." The DGP also requested that if anyone has any evidence then they should inform the authorities, and none should indulge in rumour-mongering. The SIT has already issued notices to 10 people, including Mahanta, Sharma and members of Singapore Assam Association, to appear before it and record their statements. The CM had said earlier that a 'lookout notice' through the Interpol had been issued against Mahanta and Sharma, asking them to appear before the CID on October six. More than 60 FIRs, including one by his family, have been filed in connection with Garg's death. (PTI)

## State moves MHA

few days, "we expect significant progress in the next few days, and I do not want to disclose the details right now but the next two to three days are very crucial," Sarma said after visiting a Durga Puja pandal in the evening. Regarding the whereabouts of Zubeen's manager Siddhartha Sharma, who is an accused in the case, the CM said that they have leads on this. "If he does not surrender to the Assam police within the stipulated time then he will be arrested, and we have already made arrangements for this," he said.

The Assam Director General of Police Harmeet Singh said that India has MLAT with Singapore and now the necessary papers will go from the MHA to that country, "so that we can seek the help of Singaporean authorities in the investigation." "The process has already started," he said on the sidelines of a programme here.

Investigations in a different country require a process and 'therefore, I appeal to people through the media to continue having faith in Assam police in the same way as they have shown during the last one week since Zubeen's death', the DGP said.

Meanwhile, the Chief Organiser of the North East India Festival (NEIF) Shyamkanu Mahanta, the other accused, in a post on his Facebook page said that he has already informed the police that will return to Assam soon and cooperate fully with the government and administration. "I have nothing to hide...will answer all the questions asked by the SIT. There should be an investigation at the highest level and all angles must be covered," he said.

Mahanta said that he also wants that all aspects related to Zubeen's death should be unraveled as he was "the pride of Assam and someone who was very dear to me". The SIT has already issued notices to 10 people, including Mahanta, Garg's manager Siddharth Sharma and members of Singapore Assam Association, to appear before it and record their statements. The CM had said earlier that a 'lookout notice' through the Interpol had been issued against Mahanta and Sharma, asking them to appear before the CID on October six.

The singer, who the NEIF organisers claimed to be their brand ambassador, had gone to Singapore on September 17 and was scheduled to perform on September 20, a day after the three-day festival was scheduled to be inaugurated. The festival was cancelled following the death of Garg who had gone with members of the Assamese community in Singapore on a yacht trip and drowned in the sea while swimming. More than 60 FIRs, including one by his family, have been filed in connection with the popular singer's death. (PTI)

## Durga Puja in Jorhat

As part of security measures, the entire town has been declared a pedestrian zone, barring vehicle entry during Puja days. Police personnel have been deployed extensively, with patrolling, makeshift control rooms, and CCTV surveillance in place to maintain law and order.

## Warfare now measured

Indian waters, the defence ministry said in a statement. "It has also seized 6,430 kilograms of narcotics, valued at ₹37,833 crore, highlighting its increasing effectiveness in combating transnational maritime crime. The ICG's dedication to search and rescue (SAR) operations has been notable, with 76 missions conducted by July this year, saving 74 lives, and a cumulative record of over 14,500 lives rescued in disaster response operations," it said. "Whether it is responding to cyclones, oil spills, industrial accidents, or foreign vessels in distress, ICG has always acted swiftly to protect lives and property. The world judges India by how we act in such crises, and the ICG has consistently brought us honour," Singh was quoted as saying in the statement.

The defence minister also underscored the ICG's unique mandate of operating at the intersection of external and internal security.

"By patrolling the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), the ICG not only deters external threats but also addresses illegal fishing, drug and arms trafficking, smuggling, human trafficking, marine pollution and irregular maritime activities," he said. Singh also said the "seamless manner" in which the ICG works in real time with the civil administration and other forces strengthens the entire national security architecture, adding, "You are no longer just a security provider, you are a true force multiplier."

The senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader reaffirmed the government's commitment to modernising the ICG, noting that nearly 90 per cent of its capital budget is allocated to indigenous assets.

Singh drew the contrast between land and maritime borders, noting that while land boundaries are permanent, clearly marked and relatively predictable, maritime borders are fluid and constantly shifting due to tides, waves and weather. "A smuggling vessel may look like a fishing boat, a terrorist group may exploit the openness of the sea, and threats may emerge invisibly. Maritime security is far more complex and unpredictable than land borders and demands constant vigilance," he said.

The defence minister commended the ICG's strides in women empowerment, pointing out that women officers today serve not only in support roles but also as frontline warriors.

Citing developments in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Nepal and other countries in the region that impact coastal security, especially in the Bay of Bengal, he urged the ICG to maintain not just routine surveillance but also geopolitical awareness and readiness to respond swiftly to external developments.

"A disruption in maritime trade, whether physical or cyber, can have cascading effects on security and economy alike. We must treat national security and economic security as one and the same," Singh said, adding, "Preparedness, adaptability and rapid response must be the cornerstones of the ICG's vision." (PTI)

## Tributes paid to

Council (KAAC). Speaking on the occasion, Gosh described Zubeen Garg as a true cultural icon of Assam who revolutionised Assamese music and culture.

"It is very rare to find a person like late Garg. He was not only a singer, songwriter, playback artist, film actor and director, but someone who transformed Assamese culture through his immense contribution. His love and dedication to Assamese culture should always be remembered," he said. "In this cultural gathering it is important that we remember late Garg and let his spirit be in our midst," Gosh added.

## Union minister Pabitra

(HEPC). The visit underscores India's commitment to strengthening trade and cultural ties with Russia, highlighting the growing role of Indian textiles and apparel in global markets. It is expected to bolster bilateral trade, encourage market diversification, and enhance people-to-people linkages between the two countries.

## India announces two

trade of Bhutan is done through Indian ports, therefore, it becomes very important to have a good seamless rail connectivity for the Bhutanese economy to grow, and for the people to have better ways of access to the global network," the minister said. "So that's why this entire project has been taken up. And Samtse and Gelephu, they have very important significance in the way the Bhutanese economic growth is being planned," he said.

Sharing details of the first 69-km-long line between Kokrajhar and Gelephu, Vaishnav said that there will be six stations between the two cities and the construction of the complete line will involve two important bridges, two viaducts, 29 major bridges, 65 minor bridges, two goodsheds, one road-over-bridge (ROB) and 39 road-under-bridges (RUBs). (PTI)

## Agnikul unveils plans

launch services, while keeping economic scalability at the core. "Our newly-planned strategy enables cost efficiencies at scale, allowing us to deliver launch services at globally-competitive prices for all small satellite missions," said Moyn SPM, co-founder and COO of Agnikul Cosmos. "Unless we embrace new technologies, small rockets cannot achieve the commercial viability our customers will need. This is why our test flight last year was not just a sounding rocket but an amalgamation of almost all the technologies required for controlled ascent," he said. These innovations are designed to maximise reusability and operational efficiency, reinforcing India's growing role in the global space economy while meeting international debris mitigation standards. (PTI)

## New BTC admin

decisive role in shaping the future political course of the region. BPF won 28 seats, the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) 7, and the BJP 5, in the 40-member BTC House. Hagrama Mohilary is scheduled to take oath as BTC chief on October 5 in a ceremony at Kokrajhar. Governor Laxman Prasad Acharya and chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma are likely to attend the swearing-in. On Sunday, Mohilary and his party's elected members met Governor Acharya to take claim to form the new BTC government following their resounding victory.

# 'Deliberate delay' in investigations into Zubeen's death, CM's role 'dubious', claims Gaurav Gogoi

'Are the two accused such big VIPs that the people of Assam will have to wait for them to arrive'

**GUWAHATI, Sept 29:** Assam Pradesh Congress President Gaurav Gogoi on Monday alleged that there has been a 'deliberate delay' in the probe into the death of singer Zubeen Garg, while the role of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in this connection is 'extremely dubious'.

It appears that there is an attempt to divert the investigations into a different direction, and the accused are being given time to remove pieces of evidence as they are "close to the BJP", the Congress leader claimed.

'People had high hopes from the chief minister in ensuring justice for the singer, but from his recent statements, it appears that he is trying to hide facts and protect the two main accused,' Gogoi said at a press conference here, referring to the North East India Festival organiser Shyamkanu Mahanta and Zubeen Garg's manager Siddharth Sharma.

Garg died on September 19 by drowning while swimming in the sea in Singapore where he had gone to perform in the festival.

Gogoi alleged that it seems that either the CM is not coming out with the facts, or he is 'incompetent and inefficient'.

Ten days have passed since Garg's death and 'we still don't know where Siddhartha Sharma and Shyamkanu Mahanta are,' he said. "It seems that there is an attempt to divert the investigations into a different direction and peo-



ple are asking why the CM is treating both Mahanta and Sharma like VIPs, when it is these two people who can give the details regarding Zubeen's death,' the state Congress president claimed.

'Are the two accused such big VIPs that the people of Assam will have to wait for them to arrive and give their statements till after Durga Puja festivities are over,' he said.

Sarma on September 27 said that 'lookout notices' through the Interpol have been issued against the two, asking them to come to Guwahati and make their statements on October 6, failing which the police would intensify a search operation for them.

The police have not been able to get a single statement from either Mahanta or Sharma, and Durga Puja cannot be an excuse for the

law enforcers, the Congress MP asserted.

Gogoi alleged that the CM, instead of asking the CID's Special Investigating Team (SIT) to conduct a speedy inquiry, is trying to slow it down.

'The reason for this can be the close proximity of the two accused to the BJP. It has already been reported in the media that Sharma is a member of the party's cultural cell,' he said.

It has been found that the festival organiser is closely associated with senior BJP leaders from Jorhat and 'a conspiracy was hatched long ago to use Zubeen for their political interests,' Gogoi alleged.

Mahanta also has 'very good relations' with NDA ministers at the Centre and various states, including chief ministers, and they fre-

quently attended the festivals organised by him in different parts of the country and abroad, the deputy leader of the opposition in Lok Sabha claimed.

The police have also failed to tell people about the whereabouts of the two accused and why they are being given so much time, he added.

'These two have the most intimate knowledge of what had happened during the last two hours before the death of Zubeen Garg. But they are being given time by the BJP government to wipe out evidence, contact lawyers and save themselves,' he alleged.

Gogoi said that the findings of the various SIT investigations ordered by the BJP government have never been made public and 'the people of Assam can be sure that till Himanta Biswa Sarma remains the chief minister in the state, there will be no justice for Zubeen Garg'.

Assam police, instead of conducting a proper inquiry, are 'beating up protestors who are demanding justice, interrogating other people and arresting supporters of the singer, but when it comes to the two accused, they are doing a cover-up job, Gogoi alleged.

The SIT has already issued notices to 10 people, including Shyamkanu Mahanta, Siddharth Sharma and members of the Singapore Assam Association, to appear before it and record their statements. (PTI)

# NPF and NDPP have been in talks for a merger Kharge to address mega Congress rally in Nagaland on October 7

**KOHIMA, Sept 29:** The Nagaland unit of the Congress on Monday said that it will organise a mega rally to be addressed by the AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge in the state capital Kohima on October 7.

Announcing this, state Congress chief S Supongmeren Jamir also sought to downplay the proposed merger of NPF and NDPP, claiming it would not have any significant impact on the state's politics.

Jamir said that the October 7 rally at the Naga Solidarity Park here would focus on "save democracy, save secularism and save Nagaland", while also highlighting key agendas such as youth employment, entrepreneurship, good governance, and improved connectivity.

Besides Kharge, it will also be addressed by senior leaders like AICC general secretary KC Venugopal and AICC secretary in-charge of Nagaland Saptagiri Sankar Ulaka.

The programme would be followed by closed-door meetings with the Political Affairs Committee, District Congress presidents, and other senior leaders to chalk out the party's strategy in the state and the Northeastern region for the 2028 elections.

Jamir, a Lok Sabha MP, expressed hope that more than 10,000 people would participate in the rally,



stressing the importance of converting issues into electoral strength.

He also said other political parties could join the rally since the themes of protecting democracy and secularism were of common concern.

The Congress leader also said if the NPF and the NDPP are merged, it will not have much impact on Nagaland.

The Naga People's Front (NPF) and the Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) have been in talks for a merger "to strengthen the regional force".

"It is simply regional parties putting all in one basket and would not have any effect," said Jamir. (PTI)

## Marathon run marks 33rd Zonal Karbi Youth Festival at Langpher

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, Sept 29:** As part of the ongoing 33rd Zonal Karbi Youth Festival (ZKYF) at Langpher Karbi Jutang Aklam, a marathon run was organised this morning by the Langpher Zonal Committee of the Karbi Cultural Society (KCS).

The run, which started from Langpher Karbi Jutang Aklam and concluded at Bakulia HS School playground, witnessed participation from 150 boys and girls. In the boys' category, Niki Bharti secured the first position, followed by Son Engti in second and Tikeswar Kurmi in third.

The other winners were Bijanta Kharia (4th), Arjun Chetri (5th), Sanjit Tisso (6th), Raju Narzary (7th), Simonta Bordoloi (8th), Surya Das (9th) and Rishikesh Bora (10th). In the girls' category, Sangmir Teronpi emerged first, with Serlibon Teron securing the second position and Kajir Millikpi finishing third. The other winners were Nilimai Enghipi (4th), Kajuli Kropi (5th), Hummili Millikpi (6th), Merina Hansepi (7th), Samika Ronghangpi (8th), Rya Keot (9th) and Roshmita Singnarpi (10th).

Prizes were distributed to the winners by Daniel Bey, KCS secretary in charge of literature and observer for Langpher Zonal Committee ZKYF, along with adviser Keshap Terang and other dignitaries.

## Durga Puja spirit soars on Maha Saptami in Hojai

**HT Correspondent**

**HOJAI, Sept 29:** Maha Saptami, the second day of Durga Puja, was celebrated with pomp and gaiety in Hojai on Monday as thousands of devotees thronged the streets and pandals in festive attire.

Since early morning, devotees visited the grand pandals across the district, where idols of Goddess Durga and her four children are being worshipped amid rituals and community festivities. More than 350 pandals have been erected across Hojai district, including 57 within the Hojai Municipal area. Theme-based pujas drew large crowds, with creativity and innovation grabbing attention. At Gandhi Maidan, the Adarsha Durga Puja Samity showcased "Operation Sindoore" through elaborate decorations and projector displays, while also paying tribute to Assam's heart-throb Zubeen Garg. The committee, known for its unique presentations for decades, has made this year's pandal a major attraction with its depiction of the singer's legacy alongside the eighteen-armed Goddess Durga. Durga Puja celebrations in Hojai also have a rich tradition, with the Hojai Durga Bari Puja being observed since 1935 with full Vedic rituals.

The Ramakrishna Mission, Satyanarayan Nepali Mandir, Manipuri Puja at New Market, Kedia Puram, Marwari Durgautsav Samity at Laxminarayan Mandir, Nabakalpa School, Durga Bari Samity, Bishnupally, Ramthakur Mandir and Govind Ashram are among the many venues where the festival is being celebrated with religious fervour.

## Tripura scholars attend Zonal Karbi Youth Festival at Langpher

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, Sept 29:** The second day of the Zonal Karbi Youth Festival (ZKYF) at Langpher Karbi Jutang Aklam, Bakulia, witnessed the participation of three special guests from Tripura, who arrived to experience the rich culture and traditions of the Karbi community.

The visitors included Bikashrai Debbarma, Executive Member of the North East Centre for Oral Literature (NECOL) under the Sahitya Akademi, former president of Kokborok Kokrobai Bosom (Kokborok Lament Anei), and a noted singer of Tripura.

He was accompanied by two research scholars, Suprachita Debbarma and Dhanuraj Noatia. Suprachita Debbarma, a research scholar in the Department of English at ICFAL University, Tripura, focuses her studies on the Tripuri community and Kokborok literature.

An executive member of the Kokborok Sahitya

Sabha, she has actively worked for the preservation of her indigenous language and culture. Her recent Kokborok poetry collection, Sampari Twisa Rukungo, published by the Kokborok Sahitya Sabha, highlights her literary and cultural engagement.

Dhanuraj Noatia, a 24-year-old Kokborok poet and recipient of the Best Young Poet Award, has gained recognition as one of the promising voices in Kokborok literature.

A faculty member at Mohanpur Government College, Tripura, he has published several research papers and actively contributes to the Kokborok Sahitya Sabha while continuing his literary pursuits.

On their arrival, KAAC Executive Member Madhuran Lekthe and Karbi Lament Anei adviser Joysing Tokbi welcomed the guests with traditional Karbi felicitation, presenting them with turbans, jackets and jamborangs.

## Bamboo-based fish trap wins UK patent, offers eco-friendly boost to hill stream fishing and rural livelihoods Nagaland University develops 'BR Fishing Trap' for sustainable hill stream fishing

**NEW DELHI, Sept 29:** Researchers from Nagaland University have designed and patented an innovative fish trap called "BR Fishing Trap" made entirely from locally-available bamboo and plastic threads, according to officials.

The ecofriendly, low-cost device is uniquely built to support fishing in hill streams and cage culture fish farms, offering a promising alternative to expensive, market-based gears, they said.

According to Pukhrambam Rajesh Singh, Assistant Professor, Department of Zoology, during the study, the team faced challenges as many fishing gears were either expensive or unavailable in local markets. This led the researchers to collaborate with local bamboo weavers, leading to the creation of the BR Fishing Trap.

For the innovation which has been patented in the United Kingdom, the researchers focused on



studying the diversities of Ichthyofauna and plankton in the Milak and Dikhu rivers of Mokokchung District, Nagaland.

"Fishing in our hill streams often depends on market-based gears which are costly and not always suitable. By designing this

trap with local bamboo weavers, we created a solution that is not only cost-effective and durable but also empowers local craftsmanship. We hope it inspires more community-driven innovations," he said. Singh explained that beyond its ecological advantages, the

BR Fishing Trap also holds strong socio-economic potential. By relying on locally available materials and skills of traditional bamboo artisans, it can encourage regional enterprise development, job creation, and livelihood security in fishing communities across Nagaland and beyond.

"Unlike most traps with one or two entry points, the BR Fishing Trap has four circular entrances (one on each side), making it highly efficient. These four entrances are 6 inches in diameter each, one on every side. Notably, one of these entrances is removable, making it easy to release fish and clean the trap.

"Measuring 22x8 inches, it is easy to install, transport and clean. Bamboo strips and plastic thread construction make it robust, long-lasting, and resistant to rot. It is effective in both rivers and cage culture fish farms," he said. (PTI)

## Boy found hanging at relief camp

**IMPHAL, Sept 29:** A 13-year-old boy was found hanging at Jiribam Higher Secondary School relief camp in Manipur on Sunday, raising concerns over the mental health of children displaced by the ongoing ethnic conflict in Manipur.

The boy hailed from Lamtaikhounou under Borobekra sub-division in Jiribam district. His family has been staying in the relief camp since their house was burned during clashes between the Meitei and Kuki communities, officials said.

Police said the incident took place around 1:50 am when the boy was found hanging from a parking shed inside the camp. They received a call at 2:10 am and rushed to the spot. The body was taken to Jiribam Hospital and later sent to Silchar Medical College and Hospital for postmortem. A case has been registered at Jiribam Police Station under UD Case No. 06/JBM-PS/2025 U/S 194 BNS, 2023, police further said.

According to the boy's mother, her son had returned to the camp around 11 pm (Saturday) after attending a Lai Haraoba festival.

Families in the camp said they were shocked by the incident and voiced concern that children are under severe stress because of long-term displacement. Parents fear the trauma of violence and uncertainty is leaving deep emotional scars on their children.

Keisam Pradipkumar, Chairperson of the Manipur Commission for Protection of Child Rights (MPCPR), said he has taken the case seriously and submitted a report. He stressed the urgent need for regular monitoring of relief camps, counselling support for children, and immediate enforcement of the Manipur State Policy for Children, which was revised in April 2025 but remains pending. Pradipkumar also expressed concern over a rising number of child suicide cases in recent months. In July this year, too, another 13-year-old displaced boy died by committing suicide at a school hostel in Saiton. (NNN)

## Heroin worth ₹ 2.5 cr seized, 2 from Manipur arrested

**JOWAI/IMPHAL, Sept 29:** Two persons from Manipur were arrested and heroin worth Rs 2.5 crore was seized from their possession in Meghalaya's West Jaintia Hills district, police said on Monday.

Former chief minister of Manipur, N Biren Singh, said that the drug bust exposed serious issues that go beyond state borders and threaten national security.

Acting on a tip-off, a joint team of West Jaintia Hills Police and the state Anti-Narcotic Task Force intercepted a vehicle near Phramer Mer police traffic cell late on Sunday night, district Superintendent of Police Giri Prasad told PTI.

The Jowai-bound vehicle coming from Khliehriat was searched and 50 soap boxes containing heroin weighing 512.63 gm were seized, he said.

The two occupants -- identified as Chuchung Serto and Thanggin Towthang from Manipur's Kangpokpi and Churachandpur districts, respectively -- were arrested, he said.

The seized narcotics are worth Rs 2.5 crore in the international market, he added.

Indian currency notes worth Rs 6,775, besides foreign currency notes, including 3,000 Korean Won, 500 Kazakhstani Tenge and 10 Myanmar Kyat, and two mobile phones were also seized.

## 33rd Zonal Karbi Youth Festival underway at Borjan Zone

**HT Correspondent**

**BOKAJAN, Sept 29:** The Borjan Zone of the Karbi Cultural Society (KCS) is hosting the 33rd Zonal Karbi Youth Festival (ZKYF) at Rongkangthir playground.

The four-day festival, which began on September 28, will conclude on October 1.

The ZKYF, held annually, showcases the rich cultural heritage of the Karbi community through folk songs, dances, traditional games and cuisine.

Competitions are being organised in folk ballads, cradle songs, duets, love songs, epic poems from Karbi oral traditions, and indigenous sports. On the inaugural day, September 28, the reception committee registered the participating troupes and welcomed them.

In the evening, Borjan KCS president Janasing Teron inaugurated the festival gate, while other dignitaries inaugurated the stalls,



rest house, medical camp and dining hall.

A floral tribute was also offered to late singer Zubeen Garg with incense sticks and candles.

Monday's programme began with a colourful cultural procession featuring Karbi youths in tra-

ditional attire, carrying drums, shields and swords while dancing along the way to signify the formal opening of the festival.

On this occasion, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council Executive Member Surjya Rongphar released the souvenir Lo Kimo.

## ITW indefinite strike intensifies as families join protest in Itanagar

**HT Correspondent**

**ITANAGAR, Sept 29:** The indefinite strike by the Itanagar Traffic Wardens (ITW) entered a more intense phase on Monday as family members, including wives and young children, joined the dharna at the Tennis Court campus of IG Park, lending moral support to the protesters.

The ITWs, who have been on strike demanding job absorption, enrolment and service regularisation, alleged that despite repeated appeals to the state government, their grievances remain unaddressed.

"We have submitted several memoranda to the government, but no visible action has been taken. Due to the non-regularisation of our service, we are facing severe economic and family hardships," the ITWs said.

They further stated that their protest began prior to the visit of the Prime Minister, but permission was denied citing VIP security arrangements.

"After the PM's visit, permission was granted for a few days. However, our subsequent applications for extension were again denied. Finding no alternative, we have continued our dharna and will not withdraw until our issues are addressed by the government and the department concerned," the ITWs said. The protesting wardens reiterated their willingness to engage in dialogue but demanded concrete assurances.

"We have always responded to the government's call and are ready for talks, but it should be in the greater interest of the ITW community. We were assured several times that our services would be absorbed as Home Guards, but the delay remains unexplained."

A case was registered under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act and further investigation was underway to trace the supply chain and find out cross-border links, if any, he added.

The police appealed to the public to remain vigilant and report any suspicious activity to the law enforcement agencies.

Biren Singh, in an X post, said, "A major drug bust in Meghalaya has exposed serious issues that go beyond state borders and threaten national security. Two individuals from Manipur, Chuchung Serto (Kangpokpi) and Thanggin Towthang (Churachandpur), were arrested with over 512 grams of heroin worth Rs 2.5 crore. What's more alarming is the recovery of foreign currencies, including South Korean Won, Kazakhstan Tenge, and Burmese Kyat, suggesting possible international drug links."

"This is exactly the kind of concern I have been raising for a long time, and now it's in front of us. The presence of foreign money and the scale of trafficking point toward a larger network that must be investigated thoroughly. This is not just about Northeast India, this is a national issue that affects the safety and future of our youth. We must speak up, act now, and ensure justice is done," he added. (PTI)

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

The love of heaven makes one heavenly.  
- William Shakespeare

## Deadly brain infection in Kerala

Climate, culture and public health can sometimes collide in unexpected ways. Kerala's interaction with a deadly brain infection is a pointer to it. *Naegleria fowleri*, a microscopic organism thrives in warm, untreated freshwater. It can invade the human brain through the nose. A near fatal condition called primary amoebic meningoencephalitis follows. It destroys brain tissue within days. Climatic change deepens the challenge. Warmer air and water temperature extends the amoeba's breeding season and nourishes the bacteria it feeds on. Rise in temperature is crucial. Even a minor rise of one degree Celsius can increase risks. The mortality rate exceeds 90 per cent. In Kerala, this once rare threat is now a seasonal danger. Dozens of cases have been reported in a single year in Kerala. It is an extraordinary jump from the handful reported earlier. Kerala's vulnerability stems from more than biology. It is dotted with five million wells and thousands of ponds providing water to millions of households. These natural sources cannot be fully chlorinated without harming eco system or disrupting livelihoods. People bathe, swim and perform religious nasal rinses in these esters creating countless entry points for infection.

Recently, the Dalit woman, who earned her living bottling fruit juices in a village in Malappuram district, had complained of nothing more alarming than dizziness and high blood pressure. Doctors prescribed pills and sent her home. But her condition spiralled with terrifying speed: uneasiness gave way to fever, fever to violent shivers, and a few days later she was dead. Warning signboards and emergency chlorination drives help only at the margins. The most effective defence remains knowledge which would involve cleaning storage tanks, using nose plugs while swimming and avoiding stagnant or polluted water. Kerala's experience is therefore not a local anomaly. It is a preview of global trends. As temperature climbs, organisms once confined to tropical ponds may emerge in temperate lakes. And diseases once considered medical curiosities, may become public health crises. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions, strengthening sanitation and expanding research into rapid treatment are all part of the same fight. Kerala's health workers are attempting a delicate balance.

They are educating citizens without inducing panic. Precautions are being urged without demonising water use. But no state can tackle without climate-driven diseases alone. It's success in tackling this disease rests on community participation as well as medical breakthrough. Kerala's beautiful water bodies remind us that boundaries between environment and health are dissolving. Vigilance must flow as steadily as the water on which life depends.

## A Transformed India: A new chapter in Cricket and Self-Respect



By: Dr Priyanka Saurabh

The final match of the Asia Cup 2025 was not just a thrilling game of cricket. It became more than just a game, a diplomatic and cultural message. India not only defeated Pakistan on the field but also adopted a stance during the post-match formalities that captured global attention. The Indian players flatly refused to accept the trophy from the President of the Asian Cricket Council, who is from Pakistan. As a result, the prize distribution ceremony dragged on for hours and ultimately remained incomplete. This incident marks a turning point in the history of Indian cricket. The question is not just who held the trophy, but why India took this step and what its consequences are.

Cricket is often called "the gentleman's game," but in the context of India and Pakistan, it has never been just a game. It has become a symbol of political tension, cultural conflict, and national identity between the two countries. When Indian players refused to accept the trophy, it sent a clear message that India prioritized self-respect over victory on the field. In a way, it was "a reverse version of sport and diplomacy." While sports is often considered a tool to soften politics, India used the platform of sports to deliver a political message.

Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, it has been repeatedly claimed that India no longer bows down, but rather dictates its own terms. In this context, Team India's stance is being seen as an extension of that mindset. For India, receiving the trophy was merely a formality, but when the recipient is the same country with which terrorism, infiltration, and border tensions have persisted, the significance of that formality changes. This new India not only speaks in the language of economic and military power, but is also adept at conveying political messages on the sports stage. This incident also had a profound impact on domestic politics. Supporters are calling it a bold step of the Modi era, while the opposition considers it an attack on the spirit of sportsmanship. However, among the public, it was widely seen as a victory of self-respect.

Every bold move is accompanied by criticism. India's stance raised numerous questions. Critics argued that the fundamental purpose of cricket is to foster friendship and harmony between nations. Refusing to accept the trophy undermines the spirit of the game. The international media took a mixed view of the in-

cident. Some called it India's "dominant policy," while others labeled it "arrogance." The question is whether this will harm India's "soft power." A debate also raged over whether the players took this step voluntarily or under pressure from the board and the government. If players become mere pawns in political decisions, their independence and the sanctity of the game are bound to be questioned.

Controversy in Indian and Pakistani cricket is nothing new. In 1987, when the Pakistani President visited the Jaipur Test, it was called "cricket diplomacy." Pakistan's victory in the Chennai Test before the Kargil War in 1999 and the subsequent political turmoil are still remembered. Following the 2008 Mumbai attacks, India permanently suspended bilateral series with Pakistan. A venue dispute arose over the 2023 Asia Cup, where India refused to travel to Pakistan, ultimately resulting in the tournament being held "jointly." Against these backdrops, the 2025 incident is not an isolated incident but part of a long-standing pattern where cricket has always been played under the shadow of politics.

This incident could have far-reaching consequences. Although the Asian Cricket Council is headquartered in Dubai, Pakistan has long sought to increase its influence within the organization. India has made it clear that no structure can function without its consent. The International Cricket Council claims neutrality, but if one of the major teams, India, sends a political message by taking such steps, the Council will be forced to decide its stance. It remains to be seen where teams like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan will stand in this tussle. India's pressure will influence them, but in the long run, it could weaken regional cooperation.

This approach by India certainly symbolizes the "new India." It represents an India that prioritizes self-respect and defies formality or tradition. But it's also true that overly integrating the spirit of sports into politics can sometimes be detrimental. Did India do the right thing? For supporters, the answer is simple—yes, because it was a matter of self-respect. For critics, the answer is no, because a sporting platform should not be a political arena.

The real question is whether cricket will remain just cricket or will it always remain an extension of politics in the subcontinent. This incident at the Asia Cup 2025 makes this question even more acute. One thing is certain—this is a changed India, both on the field and on the stage.

## Hagrama Mohilary leads new BTC council

The political landscape of Assam witnessed a significant development as the Hagrama Mohilary-led Bodoland People's Front (BPF) emerged victorious in the recent elections to the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), securing a sweeping mandate. This victory has paved the way for the BPF to stake a claim to form the next council in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR). The party, under Mohilary's leadership, has already taken decisive steps toward establishing its governance, with plans for an oath-taking ceremony scheduled for October 3. The event marks a crucial moment for the region, as the newly elected representatives prepare to assume their roles and address the aspirations of the people they represent.

The BPF's success in the elections was resounding, with Mohilary and his team unanimously electing him to head the next council. Following this, Mohilary, accompanied by the newly elected BPF representatives, met Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya at the Raj Bhavan in Guwahati to formally extend an invitation to him. The governor has been asked to be the chief guest during the swearing-in ceremony on October 3. This gesture underscores the party's intent to ensure a smooth transition of power and to uphold the democratic process in the region. The governor has given verbal assurance of his participation, and the BPF is optimistic about receiving a formal letter from him soon, confirming his attendance at the event.

The timing of the oath-taking ceremony holds special significance, as it coincides with the governor's birthday. Mohilary expressed hope that the governor would attend the ceremony, turning it into a dual celebration of the new council's formation and a personal milestone for Acharya. This alignment of dates adds a layer of festivity to the political proceedings, potentially fostering a positive atmosphere for the council's inauguration. The BPF leadership views this as an opportunity to strengthen ties with the governor and ensure his support as they embark on their governance journey.

In addition to planning the ceremony, Mohilary addressed the media to outline the party's vision and strategy moving forward. He emphasized that the oath-taking event would also serve as a celebration of the governor's birthday, highlighting the BPF's intent to maintain cordial relations with the state's administrative leadership. More importantly, Mohilary reiterated the party's commitment to inclusivity, stating that the BPF would not reject any offers of support



DEGREE OF THOUGHT  
By: Satyabrata Borah

from other political parties. This open stance reflects a pragmatic approach, aiming to build a broad-based coalition to govern effectively.

The BPF leader also responded to recent statements made by Pradesh Bora, the Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's political advisor. Bora had suggested that the BPF might face challenges in forming the government due to potential support from other parties. However, Mohilary dismissed these concerns, asserting that the BPF had already decided its course of action. He clarified that if any party comes forward to extend support, there would be no question of rejecting it, provided the alliance aligns with the BPF's goals. This flexibility could prove crucial in navigating the complex political dynamics of the BTR, where multiple stakeholders often influence governance outcomes.

Mohilary's comments also shed light on the BPF's policy priorities. He assured the public that the party is determined to fulfill the promises made during the election campaign. This commitment is likely to focus on addressing key issues such as development, security, and the socio-economic upliftment of the Bodoland region. The BPF's manifesto, which resonated with voters during the elections, emphasized improving infrastructure, enhancing educational opportunities, and ensuring peace and stability in the area. With a clear mandate, the party now faces the challenge of translating these promises into tangible results, a task that will test its administrative capabilities.

The Bodoland Territorial Council plays a vital role in the governance of the BTR, an autonomous region within Assam established to address the demands of the Bodo people for self-governance. The council is responsible for managing local affairs, including education, health, agriculture, and public works, while operating under the oversight of the state government. The BPF's return to power after the elections reaffirms its historical dominance in the region, where it has been a key player since the council's inception. Mohilary, a veteran leader with decades of experience, is expected to leverage his political acumen to steer the council through its next term.

The election results have been a source of celebration for BPF supporters, who see the victory as a vindication of the party's long-standing efforts to represent the interests of the Bodo community. The sweeping win has bolstered Mohilary's position as a central figure in regional politics, reinforcing his leadership within the party and the constituency. However, the road ahead is not without challenges. The BPF will need to address internal party dynamics, manage expectations from diverse communities within the BTR, and navigate its relationship with the state government led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies.

The invitation extended to Governor Acharya is a strategic move by the BPF to ensure a smooth start to its tenure. The governor's presence at the swearing-in ceremony would lend official legitimacy to the new

council and signal a collaborative relationship between the state and the autonomous region. The BPF's decision to align the event with the governor's birthday further underscores its intent to build goodwill, which could be beneficial in securing administrative support and resources for the BTR.

As the October 3 ceremony approaches, preparations are underway to make it a memorable occasion. The event is expected to draw a large gathering of BPF leaders, elected representatives, and supporters, along with dignitaries from the state and possibly beyond. The swearing-in of the new council members will mark the formal beginning of the BPF's governance term, setting the stage for the implementation of its agenda. Mohilary and his team are likely to use the platform to outline their roadmap, addressing the audience with a mix of gratitude for the electoral support and a vision for the future.

The BPF's willingness to consider support from other parties suggests a pragmatic approach to governance, especially in a region where political alliances can shift rapidly. This openness could lead to negotiations with smaller parties or independent representatives, potentially expanding the council's base. However, it also raises questions about the BPF's ability to maintain its ideological coherence while accommodating diverse viewpoints. Mohilary's leadership will be critical in balancing these interests and ensuring that the council remains focused on its core objectives.

In the coming days, the BPF is expected to finalize its council composition and assign portfolios to its members. This process will be closely watched, as it will indicate the party's priorities and the individuals entrusted with key responsibilities. The council's performance in its initial months will set the tone for its term, influencing public perception and the political landscape of the BTR. With the oath-taking ceremony just days away, the BPF is gearing up to fulfill its mandate and address the hopes of the people who have placed their trust in the party.

As the region looks forward to this new chapter, the events of September 28 and the planned ceremony on October 3 represent a pivotal moment in the political history of Bodoland. The BPF's victory and its subsequent actions signal a period of transition and opportunity, with Mohilary at the helm steering the council toward its goals. The coming months will reveal how effectively the party can translate its electoral success into governance achievements, shaping the future of the BTR and its people.

## Maha Navami: The Flame of fulfilment

By: Dipak Kurmi

When the days of Durga Puja progress towards their crescendo, Maha Navami arrives like the final surge of a great symphony, carrying within it the echoes of devotion, triumph, and fulfillment. It is the ninth day of the Navratri cycle and the last day of worship before the goddess prepares to bid farewell on Dashami. If Maha Shashthi opens the doorway to devotion, Maha Saptami consecrates the forces of nature, and Maha Ashtami reveals the ferocity of the goddess, then Maha Navami represents the culmination, the moment when worship reaches its zenith, rituals find their grandest expression, and the devotee stands in awe before the full splendor of the divine. Maha Navami is inseparable from the sense of both climax and closure. It is the day when the goddess's triumph over evil becomes not just a remembered myth but a living experience for the devotee. The rituals are at their most elaborate, and the prayers carry with them the intensity of a spiritual yearning that has been building since the festival began. Central to this day is the Maha Arti and the sacred Homa, or fire ceremony, rituals that symbolize the offering of oneself to the goddess in body, mind, and spirit. They are prayers not only for individual well-being but also for universal peace, strength, and the sustenance of life itself.

The Maha Arti on Navami is no ordinary invocation; it is the festival's grandest spectacle of collective devotion. Hundreds, often thousands, gather before the radiant image of Maa Durga, her ten arms stretched wide, weapons glistening, her face both serene and powerful. The air thickens with incense and the rhythmic roll of the dhak. Priests lift flaming lamps and swing them in circular patterns before the goddess, their movements synchronized with the beats of the drum and the chants of mantras. The golden light of the flames reflects upon the idol's face, making her seem alive, her eyes shimmering with divine presence. The Maha Arti is more than ritual; it is theatre, music, dance, and devotion woven into one overwhelming act of surrender. For devotees, it is often the most emotionally moving moment of Durga Puja, a time when many break into tears, feeling that the goddess herself has descended to bless them.

The Homa, performed on Maha Navami, carries a symbolic and spiritual gravitas that reaches back into Vedic antiquity. The sacred fire, kindled with clarified butter, wood, and fragrant herbs, is seen as the very mouth of the divine. Into it are poured offerings—ghee, grains, sesame seeds, and flowers—accompanied by the chanting of hymns from the Devi Mahatmya and other scriptures. Each offering is believed to carry the devotee's intentions into the cosmic order, transforming human prayers into divine blessings. The flames rise and crackle, carrying with them the essence of surrender, sacrifice, and renewal. Fire in Hindu cosmology is both purifier and mediator, consuming what is gross and returning it as subtle energy to the universe. Thus, the Navami Homa is more than symbolic—it is the sacred channel through which humanity converses with the divine, a bridge of flame between earth and heaven.

What distinguishes Maha Navami from the other days of Durga Puja is this blending of



ferocity and serenity. The rituals continue to echo the intensity of Ashtami, particularly the memory of Sandhi Puja, yet Navami shifts the emphasis from destruction to fulfillment. The goddess has already slain the forces of arrogance, chaos, and tyranny. Now, she stands as the supreme mother, radiant and victorious, ready to bestow blessings upon her devotees. The prayers on this day seek not merely protection but peace, not merely victory but harmony, not merely survival but strength to flourish. It is this turning of energy—from battle to blessing—that defines the spiritual character of Navami.

Alongside the sacred rituals, Maha Navami is also a day of community celebration and cultural expression. Temples and pandals host elaborate programs that range from devotional music to classical dance, from theatrical renditions of the Devi Mahatmya to modern performances inspired by the spirit of the goddess. Artists, musicians, and performers view this day as the pinnacle of their offerings, their art becoming another form of worship. The night air hums with the sound of conch shells, bells, and drums, blending seamlessly with the laughter of families and the chatter of friends who gather to share the occasion. Food, too, becomes central to the spirit of Maha Navami. Grand feasts are organized in pandals, temples, and households, where devotees and visitors are offered bhog, the sacred food of the goddess, and then partake in community meals. The menu often includes khichuri, labra, fried vegetables, chutneys, payesh, and sweets—dishes that have become inseparable from the cultural fabric of the festival. The act of sharing food transforms the day into a celebration not just of devotion but of fellowship, reinforcing the idea that the goddess's blessings manifest in abundance and generosity. For many, the Navami feast is the highlight of Durga Puja, a cherished tradition that binds generations together around the same table.

Historically, Maha Navami also holds significance in royal and martial traditions. In ancient times, particularly among kings and warriors, Navami was associated with rituals of arms worship, known as Ayudha Puja. Weapons were cleaned, decorated, and placed before the goddess, symbolizing the belief that all power and skill belong to her. This tradition has survived in parts of India, particularly in the south, where Ayudha Puja remains a vital ritual on Navami. It reminds devotees that victory in battle, whether literal or

metaphorical, is only possible through the goddess's grace. In Bengal and eastern India, too, Navami has long been remembered as the day when Durga's triumph was assured, the day when humanity's gratitude for her intervention reached its fullest expression.

The philosophical essence of Maha Navami lies in the transition from struggle to completion. It marks the recognition that the fiercest battles of life are not ends in themselves but pathways to harmony and renewal. Just as the Homa transforms material offerings into subtle energy, so too does Navami transform the devotee's struggles into wisdom and blessings. It is a day that reaffirms faith in the possibility of peace after turmoil, in strength tempered by compassion, and in devotion as the highest form of victory.

As night deepens on Maha Navami, the realization dawns that Durga Puja is drawing towards its conclusion. The joyous immersion of Vijaydashami is only a day away, and the air is tinged with both celebration and melancholy. Devotees feel a mingling of emotions—gratitude for the goddess's presence, awe at the rituals, sorrow at her impending departure, and hope for the year ahead. In this emotional landscape, Maha Navami stands as the bridge between the ecstatic intensity of Ashtami and the bittersweet farewell of Dashami. The memory of Maha Navami lingers long after the goddess's idol is carried to the river for immersion. The sight of flames dancing in the sacred fire, the rhythmic motion of lamps in the Maha Arti, the taste of khichuri and sweets shared with loved ones, the sound of chants rising into the night—all of these weave themselves into the cultural memory of generations. Each year, devotees return to Navami not simply to perform rituals but to renew this memory, to feel once again the touch of the goddess's grace, and to carry it forward into their lives.

In the great cycle of Durga Puja, Maha Navami shines as the flame of fulfillment. It is the day when devotion reaches its summit, when rituals burn brightest, when communities gather with their deepest fervor, and when the goddess reveals herself not only as a warrior but as the eternal mother of peace and strength. To witness Maha Navami is to witness devotion at its peak, to stand in the glow of fire and faith, and to understand that the true victory of the goddess lies not just in the slaying of demons but in the transformation of human hearts. (The writer can be reached at [dipakurmigpltd@gmail.com](mailto:dipakurmigpltd@gmail.com))

# The Significance of Maha Ashtami

By: Satyabrata Borah

Maha Ashtami, one of the most revered days in the Hindu festival of Navratri, holds profound spiritual, cultural, and social significance. Celebrated on the eighth day of the waxing moon in the month of Ashwin (September-October), it marks a pivotal moment in the nine-day festival dedicated to Goddess Durga. Navratri, meaning "nine nights," is a time when devotees across India and beyond honor the divine feminine energy, Shakti, through worship, fasting, and vibrant celebrations. Maha Ashtami, also known as Durga Ashtami, stands out as a day of heightened devotion, symbolizing the triumph of good over evil, the power of righteousness, and the celebration of feminine strength. Its rituals, stories, and traditions weave together a rich tapestry of faith, mythology, and cultural heritage that resonates deeply with millions.

The essence of Maha Ashtami lies in its association with Goddess Durga, the warrior deity who embodies strength, courage, and compassion. According to Hindu mythology, Durga was created by the combined energies of the gods to defeat the buffalo demon Mahishasura, who had wreaked havoc in the heavens and on earth. Unable to be defeated by any male deity due to a boon he had received, Mahishasura grew arrogant and unstoppable until Durga, the embodiment of divine feminine power, confronted him. The battle between Durga and Mahishasura is said to have lasted nine days, with Maha Ashtami marking the climactic moment when the goddess gained the upper hand, ultimately slaying the demon on the tenth day, known as Vijaydashami. This victory is not merely a mythological event but a profound metaphor for the



triumph of virtue over vice, knowledge over ignorance, and light over darkness.

The spiritual significance of Maha Ashtami is deeply rooted in this narrative. Devotees believe that worshipping Goddess Durga on this day invokes her blessings for strength, protection, and spiritual liberation. The day is considered especially auspicious for performing rituals and offering prayers to the goddess in her fierce and benevolent forms. In many parts of India, Maha Ashtami is marked by elaborate pujas, or worship ceremonies, conducted in temples, homes, and community pandals (temporary structures built for the festival). These rituals often involve chanting sacred mantras, offering flowers, fruits, and sweets, and performing aarti, a ceremonial offering of light to the deity. The atmosphere is charged with devotion, as the rhythmic chants

and the fragrance of incense create a sense of divine connection.

One of the most distinctive rituals of Maha Ashtami is the Kumari Puja, a tradition particularly prominent in West Bengal, Odisha, and Assam. In this ritual, young girls, typically between the ages of one and sixteen, are worshipped as living embodiments of Goddess Durga. These girls, referred to as kumaris, are believed to represent the pure and divine feminine energy of the goddess. They are adorned with traditional attire, offered gifts, and revered through special prayers. The Kumari Puja underscores the reverence for women and the recognition of the divine feminine in everyday life. It is a powerful reminder of the sacredness of femininity and the importance of honoring women as bearers of strength and grace.

Another significant ritual associated with Maha Ashtami is the

Sandhi Puja, which is performed at the juncture of the eighth and ninth days of Navratri. This moment is considered highly auspicious, as it symbolizes the transition from Ashtami to Navami, the ninth day. During Sandhi Puja, devotees offer prayers to Goddess Chamunda, a fierce form of Durga who is believed to have emerged during the battle with Mahishasura to slay his two generals, Chanda and Munda. The ritual is conducted with great precision, often involving the lighting of 108 lamps and the offering of 108 lotus flowers or other sacred items. The Sandhi Puja is a moment of intense spiritual energy, believed to amplify the efficacy of prayers and offerings made to the goddess.

Maha Ashtami holds immense cultural and social importance. In India, Navratri is celebrated with regional variations, and Maha

Ashtami is a day when these differences come alive with beautifully decorated pandals, each housing intricately crafted idols of Goddess Durga and her divine entourage. Devotees through these pandals, offering prayers and soaking in the festive spirit. The sound of dhak (traditional drums), the sight of women dressed in vibrant sarees, and the aroma of traditional Bengali sweets like sandesh and rasgulla create an unforgettable ambience. In northern India, Maha Ashtami is often associated with fasting and the performance of the Kanya Pujan, a ritual similar to Kumari Puja. Families invite young girls to their homes, treat them with respect, and offer them food, clothes, and gifts as a

mark of devotion to the goddess. This practice reinforces the values of compassion, generosity, and community bonding. In states like Gujarat, Maha Ashtami is celebrated with garba and dandiya, traditional folk dances that bring people together in joyous celebration. These dances, performed in circles to the rhythm of lively music, symbolize unity, harmony, and the cyclical nature of life.

The significance of Maha Ashtami also extends to its philosophical and moral teachings. The story of Durga's battle with Mahishasura is a timeless allegory for the inner struggles faced by individuals. The demon represents ego, anger, greed, and other negative tendencies that reside within the human mind, while Durga symbolizes the divine power of self-discipline, courage, and wisdom needed to overcome them. On Maha Ashtami, devotees are encouraged to reflect on their own lives, identify their inner demons, and seek the strength to conquer them. This introspective aspect of the festival makes it a time for personal growth and spiritual renewal.

Maha Ashtami fosters a sense of community and cultural pride. The festival brings people together, transcending barriers of caste, class, and region. Whether through grand public celebrations or intimate family rituals, Maha Ashtami creates opportunities for social bonding and the reaffirmation of shared values. It is a time when families reunite, neighbors come together, and communities celebrate their collective identity. The vibrant decorations, music, dance, and food that characterize the festival reflect the rich diversity of Indian culture while uniting people in a common purpose.

Maha Ashtami also serves as a reminder of the importance of feminine power in Hindu philosophy. Goddess Durga, with her

ten arms wielding various weapons, represents the multifaceted nature of women—nurturing yet fierce, compassionate yet powerful. Her worship on Maha Ashtami underscores the need to respect and honor women in society, recognizing their contributions and their strength. In a world where gender equality remains an ongoing struggle, the festival offers a powerful message about the inherent divinity and potential of women. The global celebration of Maha Ashtami reflects its universal appeal. Indian diaspora communities around the world, from the United States to the United Kingdom, Australia to Canada, mark the occasion with the same fervor as their counterparts in India. Temples in these countries organize special pujas, cultural programs, and community gatherings, ensuring that the spirit of Maha Ashtami transcends geographical boundaries. These celebrations also introduce non-Indians to the beauty of Hindu traditions, fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.

Maha Ashtami is a celebration of divine power, human resilience, and cultural unity. It is a day when devotees connect with the divine feminine, seeking her blessings for strength, prosperity, and wisdom. Through its rituals, stories, and traditions, Maha Ashtami inspires individuals to confront their challenges, embrace their inner strength, and contribute to a harmonious society. The festival's vibrant celebrations, from the rhythmic beats of the dhak to the graceful movements of garba, reflect the joy and devotion that define this sacred occasion. As millions come together to honor Goddess Durga, Maha Ashtami remains a powerful testament to the enduring relevance of faith, culture, and the eternal struggle for good over evil.

## Durga Puja and Jalebi

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Durga Puja is an indispensable festival for the Hindu community, creating a remarkable blend of religious devotion, cultural heritage, and social unity. During this festival, people from all walks of life come together to worship the divine power of Goddess Durga, seeking the profound philosophical significance of life through her veneration. Amidst this festival, the sweet delicacy known as jalebi holds a special place, its delightful taste and traditional preparation process further enriching the joy of the celebration.

The spiritual significance of Durga Puja is deeply profound and touching. The central narrative of this festival revolves around Goddess Durga's triumph over the demon Mahishasura. This mythological tale is not merely a fictional story but a symbol of the inner conflicts within human life. The ten arms of Goddess Durga, wielding various weapons, represent the strength to confront life's diverse challenges. During this festival, through the worship of the Goddess, people draw inspiration to battle their inner fears, doubts, and negative emotions. The chanting of mantras, the performance of homa (fire rituals), and various rituals create a sacred atmosphere, fostering peace and spiritual awakening in people's minds. During this time, individuals reflect on their life goals and moral values. Through the worship of Goddess Durga's power, people gain the courage and resilience to overcome their weaknesses. This spiritual awakening brings about a positive transformation in their lives, motivating them to progress toward their goals. The spiritual dimension of Durga Puja provides people with a new perspective on life, igniting hope, enthusiasm, and determination in their minds. During this period, individuals search for the meaning of their lives and, through this, rekindle their inner strength. The worship of the Goddess empowers people to face life's challenges with

courage, and this spiritual environment inspires them to be more committed to their life's objectives.

Durga Puja is not confined to religious rituals alone; it is also a vibrant expression of culture. Through traditional attire, ornaments, and handicrafts, this festival presents a rich tapestry of cultural heritage. During this time, artists get the opportunity to showcase their creativity, and people in society express their inner art forms. Various traditional foods are popular during Durga Puja, among which jalebi holds a special place. The sweet taste of jalebi and its traditional preparation process add a unique dimension to the festival's cultural ambience. During this time, people gather with their families to savor the taste of jalebi, strengthening social bonds. The presence of jalebi further enriches the cultural vibrancy of this festival, as it is not just a food item but also an integral part of tradition.

The preparation of jalebi is akin to an art form, requiring patience, skill, and cultural knowledge. The first step in making jalebi is preparing the batter, which is typically made from refined flour mixed with a small amount of rice flour. The consistency of the batter is crucial, as the texture and taste of the jalebi depend on it. The batter is carefully mixed with water to achieve a smooth consistency. A small amount of yogurt or yeast is then added to the batter, allowing it to ferment and rise over time. During this process, the temperature of the batter and the surrounding environment plays a significant role. In hot weather, the batter ferments faster, while in colder conditions, it requires more time. This step demands skill and patience, as the quality of the batter determines the final taste of the jalebi. Once the batter has fermented, it is poured into a special container with a small hole, through which it is carefully piped into hot oil in circular motions to form the jalebi's distinctive shape. The skill of the hand is critical in this process, as the

characteristic spiral shape of the jalebi is formed at this stage. The temperature of the oil must also be carefully controlled. If the oil is too hot, the outer layer of the jalebi may burn while the inside remains undercooked. Conversely, if the oil is too cold, the jalebi absorbs excess oil, ruining its crispy texture. The oil must be maintained at a moderate temperature to ensure even frying and a golden color. This step requires the precision of an artist, as the jalebi's appearance and taste take shape during this process. After frying, the jalebi is dipped in sugar syrup, which gives it its signature sweet taste. The syrup is prepared by heating a mixture of sugar and water, and its consistency is critical. If the syrup is too thin, the jalebi cannot absorb it properly; if too thick, the syrup does not penetrate the jalebi's interior. Aromatic ingredients are often added to the syrup, enhancing the jalebi's flavor with a distinctive touch. The jalebi is soaked in the syrup for a short period to allow the syrup to be fully absorbed, resulting in its delectable sweetness and soft texture.

During Durga Puja, people come together with family, friends, and the community to celebrate the festival. This period fosters a sense of unity among people from different social strata, creating a new dimension of social relationships. Various social activities are organized during the festival, promoting cooperation and empathy among individuals. The connection between Durga Puja and jalebi symbolizes a deep and multifaceted bond. Furthermore, the golden color and intricate shape of jalebi carry profound philosophical significance, representing the cycle of life and its continuous motion. This blend of life's complexity and beauty is beautifully expressed in the jalebi's form. During Durga Puja, the presence of jalebi deepens the festival's spiritual and philosophical significance.

In the festive atmosphere of Durga Puja, jalebi adds a special dimension. During this time, people gather with family and friends to enjoy the taste of jalebi, strengthening social bonds. The sweet flavor of jalebi brings joy to people's hearts, harmoniously blending with the spiritual and cultural significance of Durga Puja. During this festival, jalebi is not merely a food item but serves as a part of the cultural heritage. Its traditional preparation process and taste connect people to their legacy. Through the popularity of jalebi during Durga Puja, people recognize the importance of their traditions and foster a sense of social unity.



## Maha Ashtami: The sacred pinnacle of devotion

By: Dipak Kurmi

Among the many luminous days that shape the grandeur of Durga Puja, Maha Ashtami rises as the most sacred, revered, and emotionally charged. It is the day when devotion reaches its peak, rituals acquire their fiercest potency, and the goddess reveals herself in her most formidable yet compassionate form. While Maha Shashthi begins the invocation and Maha Saptami consecrates the forces of nature, it is Maha Ashtami that crystallizes the heart of Durga Puja, embodying both cosmic battle and human faith. In 2025, Maha Ashtami assumes a particular intensity, for it is not just a commemoration of the goddess's triumph over evil but also a symbolic enactment of humanity's eternal struggle with darkness, fear, and oppression.

The morning of Maha Ashtami begins with the recitation of hymns from the Devi Mahatmya, also known as the Chandi Path, which narrates the exploits of Durga against Mahishasura, the buffalo demon who embodies chaos, arrogance, and destructive power. Devotees, dressed in fresh traditional attire, gather at temples and pandals with flowers, incense, and offerings. The fragrance of shiuli blossoms mixes with the smoke of dhuno, while the deep, resonant sound of the dhak sets the rhythm of worship. The Ashtami anjali, perhaps the most significant offering of the festival, draws immense crowds who raise their folded hands in unison, placing flowers at the goddess's feet while chanting mantras that invoke her blessings. For countless families, offering anjali on Ashtami is a spiritual necessity, a way of aligning their lives with the protective grace of the mother goddess.

Yet the day does not culminate here; its spiritual intensity is preserved for the extraordinary ritual of Sandhi Puja, which takes place at the exact juncture of Ashtami and Navami. This ritual, unique in its timing and energy, is believed to be the most powerful invocation of Durga's fierce form, Chamunda, who emerges in the narrative of the Chandi to destroy the asura generals Chanda and Munda. According to the scriptures, the moment of Sandhi Puja represents the precise transition when Durga transforms from her benevolent aspect into her warrior avatar, wielding weapons, eyes blazing, and energy radiating in all directions. It is the instant when the universe trembles before the goddess's unleashed power, when time itself pauses to witness the slaying of demonic arrogance. In practice, the ritual involves the lighting of 108 lamps, the offering of 108 lotus flowers, and the rhythmic chanting of mantras that elevate the atmosphere into a crescendo of awe and reverence. The air grows charged, the dhak beats rise to a frenzy, and devotees feel the palpable presence of the goddess's power.

Sandhi Puja carries with it a story of cosmic ferocity. When Chanda and Munda unleashed their terror on the battlefield, Durga's face turned dark with rage, and from her forehead emerged a fierce goddess, radiant yet terrifying, who quickly decapitated the asura generals. She was named Chamunda, the slayer of Chanda and Munda, embodying the unbridled force of divine justice. To commemorate this moment, the ritual is performed with exact precision at the sandhi, the transitional period between Ashtami and Navami. For devotees, this is the climax of Durga Puja, when the goddess is not just a

mother to be adored but also a cosmic force who annihilates all obstacles and evil from the lives of her children. The timing is critical: a few minutes earlier or later is considered a loss of spiritual potency, underscoring the belief that divinity reveals itself most intensely in fleeting moments of alignment between the cosmic and the human.

While Sandhi Puja embodies the goddess's fierce power, another ritual of Maha Ashtami emphasizes her nurturing and humanizing presence: Kumari Puja. This tradition, celebrated in many regions of India but particularly significant during Durga Puja, involves the worship of a young girl as the living embodiment of the goddess. She is bathed, dressed in new clothes, adorned with flowers, and seated upon an altar where she is revered as Durga herself. Devotees offer her food, gifts, and prayers, bowing before her as if she were the goddess incarnate. The choice of a prepubescent girl signifies purity, innocence, and the unmanifest potential of the divine feminine. In her youthful form, the goddess is worshipped not as a warrior but as the very essence of creation, untainted by worldly influences. Kumari Puja thus reinforces the philosophical truth that divinity resides in every human being, that the goddess is not distant but present in the vitality and innocence of living forms.

The cultural resonance of Kumari Puja extends far beyond its ritualistic dimension. It is a powerful assertion of the sanctity of the feminine, a reminder to society of the need to respect, protect, and honor women. In ancient traditions, the ritual may have had its roots in fertility cults and goddess worship, where the female body was revered as the source of life and continuity. In modern contexts, it acquires new relevance in a world where gender equality remains an ongoing struggle. By elevating a young girl to the status of a goddess, Kumari Puja becomes a symbolic protest against the devaluation of the feminine, a call to see in women the living embodiment of Shakti, the primordial energy of the universe.

The rituals of Maha Ashtami are not confined to temples alone; they spill into the collective life of the community. Pandals, already resplendent since Shashthi, now brim with an intensity that borders on ecstasy. The air is alive with chants, music, and the restless beat of drums. Cultural performances continue late into the night, from dramatic enactments of the Devi Mahatmya to modern artistic expressions inspired by Durga's power. Families come together for feasts, preparing delicacies that have become inseparable from the festival's memory—khichuri, labra, fried eggplant, and sweets that reflect the abundance of the season. The sharing of food, stories, and laughter adds a human warmth to the otherwise awe-inspiring rituals of the day.

Maha Ashtami also bears a deeper philosophical significance. If Durga Puja is a journey of invocation, consecration, and celebration, then Ashtami represents its inner peak—the moment when the devotee confronts the goddess not only as a maternal protector but also as the fierce energy of transformation. The Sandhi Puja reminds humanity that destruction is a necessary precursor to renewal, that the annihilation of darkness is essential for the flowering of light. The Kumari Puja, on the other hand, reminds devotees that the divine is ever-present in the innocence of life, waiting to be recognized and revered. Together, these two rituals



embody the duality of Durga herself: fierce and nurturing, terrifying and compassionate, destroyer and mother. This duality resonates with the human experience, where strength and tenderness, battle and care, coexist in the cycles of life. The enduring power of Maha Ashtami lies not only in its rituals but also in its ability to bridge the personal and the cosmic. For an individual devotee, offering anjali or witnessing Sandhi Puja may be a deeply emotional experience, a moment of surrender, awe, and inner cleansing. At the same time, it is also a collective experience, shared with thousands who gather under the same pandal lights, chant the same mantras, and feel the same shiver of transcendence. This fusion of individual devotion and communal celebration is what makes Durga Puja, and especially Maha Ashtami, unique among festivals. It is not only a religious occasion but also a cultural epic, a moment when the boundaries between the sacred and the secular dissolve.

As midnight passes and Sandhi Puja concludes, the festival enters Maha Navami, carrying forward the spiritual intensity of the night. Yet the memory of Ashtami lingers. The sight of the goddess, radiant under the glow of 108 lamps, the chants rising into the night sky, the presence of the Kumari girl seated in quiet dignity—these impressions remain etched in the hearts of devotees long after the pandals are dismantled. Maha Ashtami becomes not just a day of worship but a lived experience of encountering the goddess in her totality, fierce and gentle, cosmic and personal.

In the larger narrative of Durga Puja, Maha Ashtami stands as its sacred pinnacle. It is the day when rituals reach their most potent, when mythology comes alive in the rhythms of worship, and when human hearts align with cosmic energy. The Sandhi Puja reveals the goddess as the destroyer of darkness, while the Kumari Puja celebrates her as the eternal mother of creation. Together they weave a tapestry of devotion that transcends time, binding the past to the present, the human to the divine. In 2025, as devotees gather once again to celebrate Maha Ashtami, they will not merely be remembering a mythic battle but participating in a timeless dialogue with the goddess, one that affirms the power of faith, the sanctity of the feminine, and the eternal victory of light over darkness. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

# CONG SEEMS TO BE IN 'COMATOSE STATE' AFTER INDIA'S WIN AGAINST PAKISTAN IN ASIA CUP: BJP

**NEW DELHI, Sept 29:** The BJP on Monday took a swipe at the Congress and its leader Rahul Gandhi, saying the opposition party seems to have gone into a "comatose state" after India's stunning victory against Pakistan in the Asia Cup final.

The Congress leaders seem to be more pained by Pakistan's defeat, and it is just like Operation Sindoor when they "couldn't bring themselves to congratulate the Indian Army for its stupendous strikes", the ruling party said.

India defeated Pakistan by five wickets in the final on Sunday, clinching its record ninth Asia Cup title. "Not even a single social media post from the Congress congratulating our national team for thrashing Pakistan thrice in the tournament and bringing the Asia Cup home," BJP IT department head Amit Malviya posted on X.

It seems India's stunning win against Pakistan in the Asia Cup final has left Rahul Gandhi and the entire Congress in a comatose state,



he said. Malviya further alleged, "Just like after Operation Sindoor, when they couldn't bring themselves to congratulate the Indian Army for its stupendous strikes, they now appear to be waiting for permission from Mohsin Naqvi and their other handlers in Pakistan before joining the nation in celebrating the Indian cricket team's success."

"Once again, Pakistan, Rahul Gandhi, and Congress find themselves on the same side of the divide," he said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had congratulated the Indian cricket team on their win over Pakistan by drawing a symbolic parallel with "Operation Sindoor," the military campaign conducted earlier this year. In his post on X, Modi wrote, "#OperationSindoor on the games field. Outcome is the same — India wins!"

Maharashtra Congress chief Harshvardhan Sakpal, speaking in Nagpur, slammed the prime minister's remarks.

"It is not the first time India has won the Asia Cup. We are proud of our team's win, but the prime minister has a policy of polarising everything, whether it is air, water, or even sport."

He alleged that the prime minister "does not maintain the dignity of the nation", which "one can make out from his statements on such celebratory occasions."

Echoing this criticism, senior Congress leader Naseem Khan accused the BJP of politicising every issue and said India should not have played against Pakistan.

"The way the neighbouring country treated our citizens in recent days, they have wiped off our women's 'sindoor', at least we should not have played with them..." The Indian team has always performed with dedication and brought honour to the country... Not everything should be politicised; the BJP has this habit of politicising every issue," Khan said. (PTI)

## 19-year-old arrested in Delhi hit-and-run case; motorcycle seized

**NEW DELHI, Sept 29:** A 19-year-old man has been arrested for allegedly mowing down a pedestrian in a hit-and-run case at central Delhi's Paharganj, an official said on Monday.

The incident occurred on Sadar Thana Road on September 25, when accused Vishnu, a resident of Nabi Karim, hit a pedestrian while riding a motorcycle, he added.

The injured was rushed to the Lady Hardinge Hospital in a serious condition, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Central) Nidhin Valsan said.

"No eyewitness was found at the spot or in the hospital, following which a case was registered under sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita at the Paharganj police station," the officer said.

A team was formed and CCTV footage scanned. Secret inputs led police to an abandoned motorcycle at Nabi Karim, which was identified as the offending vehicle.

"The owner of the bike said it was being used by Vishnu, who was apprehended. During interrogation, he told police that the victim suddenly came in front of his vehicle, following which he lost control and hit him. Out of fear, he fled the spot," the DCP said. Police have seized the motorcycle. (PTI)

## Sahara firm seeks SC nod for sale of group's assets to Adani properties

**NEW DELHI, Sept 29:** The Sahara India Commercial Corporation Ltd (SICCL) has moved the Supreme Court seeking its permission to sell various properties, including Amby Valley in Maharashtra and Shahara Saher in Lucknow, to Adani Properties Private Limited.

The plea, which was mentioned for hearing recently, would likely come up on October 14. Seeking the permission, the plea filed through advocate Gautam Awasthi, said, "...to outright sell various properties belonging to the Sahara Group to Adani Properties Private Limited, for the consideration and on the terms and conditions as set out in the term sheet dated September 6, 2025."

The interlocutory application, filed in the pending matters related to Sahara group, said pursuant to various orders passed by this court, from time to time, and after taking the permission of this court through various orders, the SICCL and the Sahara Group were, with great difficulty, able to liquidate certain movable and immovable assets of theirs, the proceeds of which were deposited into the SEBI - Sahara Refund Account. "Out of a total principal amount of Rs 24,030 crore, the Sahara Group, by way of sale/liquidation of their movable and immovable assets have realised an amount of approximately Rs 16,000 crore and deposited the same in the SEBI - Sahara Refund Account," it said. Pointing to the inability of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to liquidate or sell Sahara Group assets. (PTI)

## CM Siddaramaiah defends socio-economic survey, slams BJP for boycott call



**BENGALURU, Sept 29:** Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday defended the ongoing social, economic and educational survey in the state, while lashing out at BJP leaders for calling for a boycott.

In a statement, Siddaramaiah said, "Our government began the survey to ensure equality. The moment we started, those shouting 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' have revealed their true colours."

He said the state BJP leaders, one after another, are urging people to boycott the survey, exposing themselves before the public.

The CM clarified that the survey being carried out by the Karnataka State Commission for Backward Classes was not restricted to any one community.

"This is a survey of the seven crore people of the state. It is not against anyone; it is in favour of everyone. The main objective is to achieve social, economic and educational equality and to ensure fair share and fair opportunities for all," he said.

Taking on the BJP, Siddaramaiah said, "The 'Manusmriti' mindset wants that wealth, opportunity, representation must remain frozen, the poor must remain poor, the backward must remain backward, women must be deprived, and inequality between castes and classes must continue. This is the inner thinking of BJP leaders."

He asserted that the survey would not only bring out the realities of Dalits, backward classes and minorities, but also reveal the

condition of the poor and deprived within the so-called forward castes.

"This reality is what the BJP does not want people to see. Their opposition is rooted in the intent that wealth, opportunities and representation must remain concentrated only in the hands of the privileged within every caste and religion," he said.

Drawing comparisons, Siddaramaiah pointed out that caste-based social, economic and educational surveys had already been conducted in Bihar and Telangana, where BJP leaders had remained silent.

"More than that, now the BJP government at the Centre itself has decided to conduct a caste census. So, the BJP leaders who are opposing the Karnataka survey, will you also oppose the caste census of the Union Government? If so, then say it aloud right now. Do you even have the courage to raise your voice before the Prime Minister?"

Accusing the BJP of "double standards", the Chief Minister asked, "Why are you making foolish statements and becoming a laughing stock before the aware citizens of the state?" Siddaramaiah appealed to people to understand the "self-deceptive behaviour of BJP leaders" and said their politically motivated statements must be thrown into the household dustbin. He called on everyone to participate and extend full cooperation to the survey, which is underway. (PTI)

## Threat to Rahul reveals BJP's dangerous mindset: Ashok Gehlot

**JAIPUR, Sept 29:** Former Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot on Monday condemned a BJP spokesperson's alleged threat that Rahul Gandhi will be "shot" as a dangerous reflection of the mindset of the ruling party.

In a video message, Gehlot said, "The country has seen that Mahatma Gandhi and former prime minister Indira Gandhi were shot dead. They were committed to keep the nation united. Now a BJP spokesperson has commented about Rahul Gandhi that he will be shot in the chest."

Gehlot expressed his concern over the silence of BJP national president J P Nadda on the issue.

"If a spokesperson can openly say this in a TV debate and the party president does not react, it raises serious questions. The country should be worried," he said.

He also questioned the security implications of Rahul Gandhi's



public travel information being shared in the media.

"When Rahul Gandhi travels across India and abroad, even his location is made public. Is that not a breach of security?" Gehlot asked.

The Congress demanded the BJP apologise to the nation and hold accountable the Kerala BJP

spokesperson who allegedly made the remark.

"Rahul Gandhi talks about inflation, unemployment and vote chori. He is making it an issue in the country. The BJP president should apologise to the nation. He should assure the public that the matter has come to his attention and the perpetrators will be ex-

pelled from the party and that the Home Ministry will take action," he said.

"I condemn this entire incident. This is the kind of thinking that those in power have. They have no faith in democracy. The nation will give them an answer at the right time," he added.

Police on Monday registered a case against BJP leader Printu Mahadevan for his alleged remark during a television debate that Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi will be shot, officials said.

The case was filed by the Perambalam police based on a complaint from Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) secretary Sreekumar C C.

Mahadevan, a former ABVP leader, made the remarks, while discussing protests in Bangladesh and Nepal, during a debate on a Malayalam news channel on September 26. (PTI)

## KDA demands unconditional release of Wangchuk, says Centre 'alienating' people of Ladakh

**NEW DELHI, Sept 29:** The Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) on Monday demanded the immediate and unconditional release of activist Sonam Wangchuk and others detained after September 24 violence in Leh, warning the Centre that its failure to meet Ladakh statehood and other core demands is "alienating" the people in the Himalayan region.

The KDA, which along with the Leh Apex Body is spearheading the agitation for statehood to Ladakh and other constitutional protections, held the Union Territory administration directly responsible for the violence in Leh that left four people dead and dozens of others, including security personnel, injured.

Addressing a press conference here, KDA member Sajjad Kargili called for the unconditional release of Wangchuk, who was taken in custody under the stringent National Security Act (NSA) and lodged in a Jodhpur jail, and other youth leaders

detained in Leh. He stressed that the demands for statehood and constitutional safeguards under the Sixth Schedule are "not negotiable."

"At a time when the nation is facing multiple challenges, such treatment of people of Ladakh, a sensitive region, will increase the sense of alienation and insecurity among the people," Kargili said, adding the government should "use wisdom and deal with people sensibly". "The way bullets were fired, and many were injured, there should be some accountability... This is a big example of why we need democracy," Kargili said.

He questioned the government's stance, remarking, "What was wrong in Ladakh demanding democracy when Prime Minister Narendra Modi talks about democracy being in the 'DNA' of Indians?"

Kargili asserted that the UT administration's handling of the situation was a failure, as he particularly

pointed out the "lack of preparedness and the decision to open fire".

"The CRPF has failed us. Twenty of our soldiers were martyred on the China border, but the government did not give permission to open fire on the Chinese army. What kind of government is this, which has given the order to open fire on the protesters?" he said.

The KDA leader demanded an impartial judicial probe into the violence and accountability from the administration, especially given that it had claimed to have prior intelligence of potential unrest.

"When you have information... Why didn't you take preventive measures? Why did you have to fire?" he asked, comparing the response to the 2019 abrogation of Article 370 in Kashmir, where a complete shutdown was enforced.

"Those who were protesting at the site of the fast were peaceful until the last. This happened outside. We are demanding an impartial ju-

dicial probe," he said.

Kargili acknowledged that Wangchuk's arrest has amplified the region's issues nationally. "Very few people knew about the struggles of Ladakh, but after the arrest of Sonam Wangchuk, this issue and the demands of Ladakh have reached every home in the country," he said. He predicted a surge in nationwide protests, noting, "Earlier, the protest was only in Ladakh; now you will see protests in different parts of the country."

He reiterated that dialogue had only occurred following protests, noting that the date for an upcoming meeting with Union Government representatives, likely to take place on Tuesday, was set only after Wangchuk's recent fast began.

"A sense of alienation, betrayal, is increasing among the people of Ladakh," Kargili said, adding, "The people of Ladakh are the strength of this country. They should not be pushed to the wall." (PTI)

## Bihar deputy CM lied before SC to escape trial in murder case, alleges Prashant Kishor

**PATNA, Sept 29:** Jan Suraj Party founder Prashant Kishor on Monday alleged that Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary had escaped trial in a decades-old murder case by "falsely" claiming to be a minor before the Supreme Court. Addressing a press conference here, Kishor said Choudhary's affidavit, filed in 2020 at the time of getting elected to the state legislative council, flew in the face of his earlier claim before the apex court, and demanded his "immediate dismissal".

Choudhary, a former state BJP president who holds crucial portfolios like finance in the Nitish Kumar government, was not available for comments immediately.

Kishor said, "We will seek an appointment with the governor tomorrow to press for Choudhary's sacking. We also urge Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and his ally BJP to act now, else they shall stand exposed before the people."

He also alleged that Choudhary

had "faced trial in a case involving the murder of six people in his native Tarapur, in Munger district, way back in 1995".

"Choudhary moved the Supreme Court, claiming that he was only 14 years of age when the mass murder took place. He was let off since juveniles could not be put on trial," the Jan Suraj Party founder claimed.

"If we look at Choudhary's affidavit of 2020, he states his age at the time to be 51 years. Taking that into account, he would have been in his 20s in 1995. These facts make him liable for prosecution," Kishor alleged.

These are serious charges, he said. "My previous charges, against the deputy CM, of getting a D.Litt degree without having cleared Class X exams, were less grave. I also challenge Choudhary to come clean on his role in the Shilpi-Gautam murder case, which many remember only for Sadhu Yadav," said Kishor. Shilpi Jain



and Gautam Singh were found dead, in 1999, inside a car in a semi-nude state, triggering shock waves across Patna. The vehicle was parked close to the house of Sadhu Yadav, a brother of Rabri Devi, the then Chief Minister of the state.

Following an outcry, the case

was handed over to the CBI, which filed a closure report a few years later, declaring the deaths to be a case of suicide.

Choudhary was then a minister in the state, his cabinet berth seen as a "reward" for his father Shakuni Choudhary switching allegiance from the Samata Party to

the RJD.

Kishor also demanded a "public withdrawal" of the defamation notice by Ashok Choudhary, a state minister and a national general secretary of the JD(U) headed by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

"If Ashok Choudhary fails to do so, I will make public more of his financial irregularities, worth Rs 500 crore", said the Jan Suraj Party founder.

Choudhary slapped a legal notice on Jan Suraj Party founder Prashant Kishor, asking him to tender an "unconditional apology" for defamatory remarks or face a civil suit seeking Rs 100 crore in damages. Kishor had accused Choudhary of being involved in an irregular land deal worth Rs 200 crore. The Jan Suraj Party founder also claimed that a trust, which had among its members the mother-in-law of Choudhary's daughter Shambhavi, a Lok Sabha MP herself, had received a donation of Rs 100 crore. (PTI)

## NIT Rourkela develops AI model to enhance road safety through car-to-car interaction

**NEW DELHI, Sept 29:** National Institute of Technology (NIT) researchers have developed an AI model that aims to improve how vehicles communicate with each other in vehicular ad-hoc networks (VANETs), according to officials.

The patented model, called 'Adaptive Contention Window Optimisation in VANETs using Multi-Agent Deep Reinforcement Learning for Enhanced Performance Model', focuses on addressing a key challenge in vehicular communication systems.

According to officials, the concept behind VANETs is that vehicles which are in proximity to each other will in the future be able to communicate directly with each other. Consider a car warning other vehicles about precipitous braking or a sudden obstacle on the road. Such communication aids driving, automated traffic systems and even provides assistance to emergency services.

However, when multiple vehicles are contemporaneously sending out messages, the system is

bound to face vehicle overcrowding. This congestion leads to delays or lost messages, which directly compromise the viable functionality of such systems.

"We have suggested a solution to this issue involving the use of artificial intelligence. Their model utilises a system known as multi-agent deep reinforcement learning. In layman's terms, it enables each vehicle to stagger the time of its messages depending on the actions of other vehicles. Instead of communications competing, the vehicle's system learns to sequence and give priority to messages that are time sensitive," said Arun Kumar, Assistant Professor, NIT Rourkela.

This adaptive adjustment reduces the chances of delay and helps ensure that important alerts are transmitted reliably.

"In 2023, India reported around 4,80,000 road accidents and around 1,72,000 deaths, many of which could be prevented using modern technologies. Our work is a step towards building safer roads and smarter cities. (PTI)

# Not the British, but Indian soldiers liberated us from Ottomans: Mayor of Israel's Haifa city

**HAIFA, Sept 29:** The Israeli city of Haifa on Monday paid tributes to fallen Indian soldiers, with the Mayor noting that the city's school history books are being changed to correct that it was Indian troops and not the British who liberated the city from Ottoman rule.

"I was born in this city and graduated from here. Constantly we were told that this city was freed by the British till somebody from the Historical Society knocked at my door one day and said that they have done a thorough research and found that it wasn't the British but the Indians who freed this city (from the Ottomans)," said Mayor of Haifa, Yona Yahav.

He made the remarks while addressing a gathering at the Indian cemetery of fallen soldiers during a ceremony to pay tributes to their bravery.

"In every school, we are changing the texts and saying that it wasn't the British but the Indians who liberated us," Yahav said.

During World War I, Indian cavalry regiments armed with spears and swords cleared the Ottoman forces from the rocky slopes of Mt Carmel

under all odds to liberate the city, in what most war historians consider "the last great cavalry campaign in history". Mayor Yahav had, during the first ceremony at the same venue in 2009, said that the northern coastal city's history textbooks will include the story of its liberation by Indian soldiers, and it is today a well-known fact among youngsters in the city.

The Indian Army commemorates September 23 every year as Haifa Day to pay its respects to the three brave Indian Cavalry Regiments - Mysore, Hyderabad and Jodhpur Lancers - that helped liberate Haifa following a dashing cavalry action by the 15th Imperial Service Cavalry Brigade on that date in 1918. An event to pay tributes to the brave Indian soldiers is also organised every year at the Indian soldiers' cemetery here by the Indian mission and the Haifa municipality. Captain Aman Singh Bahadur and Dafadar Jor Singh were awarded the Indian Order of Merit (IOM), and Captain Anop Singh and 2nd Lt Sagat Singh were awarded the Military Cross (MC) in recognition of their bravery in this battle. Major Dalpat Singh,



widely popular as the Hero of Haifa, was awarded a military cross for his bravery.

The Jodhpur Lancers lost eight men and had 34 wounded in the battle. But they also captured over 700 prisoners, 17 field guns and 11 machine guns.

The battle was described as "almost the only occasion when a fortified town was captured by cavalry on the gallop," India's Ambassador to Israel

JP Singh said during his address at the event.

Indian troops played a crucial role in the campaign, resulting in the defeat of the Ottoman forces in the region. More than 74,000 Indian troops laid down their lives during World War I, including over 4,000 in West Asia, Singh asserted.

"It was one of the last classical cavalry actions in an era that saw large-scale mechanisation of war," the Indian Ambassador said. "These fallen soldiers represented all major faiths and regions of our country. And this tribute shows that their courage and sacrifice will never be forgotten," he added.

In Israel, memorials to Indian soldiers exist at Haifa, Jerusalem and Ramle, including some Indian soldiers who were of Jewish descent.

About 900 Indian soldiers are interred in cemeteries in these cities of Israel. As a tribute to the bravery of these soldiers, the Embassy of India, with the help of Israeli authorities, is setting up "The India Trail" in the Holy Land.

History textbooks in Haifa teach about the story of the liberation of Haifa by Indian soldiers from classes 3 to 5. The Haifa Historical Society has

also been going around to schools in the city telling the story to youngsters over the last decade.

In a symbolic gesture of friendship with Israel, India renamed the iconic Teen Murti Chowk, a memorial erected in 1922 in New Delhi to commemorate this historic deed, as "Teen Murti Haifa Chowk" during Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to Delhi in January 2018.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the Indian cemetery in Haifa during his visit to Israel in July 2017 and unveiled a plaque commemorating Major Dalpat Singh for his critical role in the liberation of the city. "I am deeply honoured to stand here today to salute the valiant Indian soldiers, who laid down their lives for the liberation of Haifa during the WW I," Modi had written in the guest book. The 61st cavalry, the name given to the unit created after the merger of the three cavalry units after independence, sent a contingent to Israel in 2018 to participate in the centenary celebrations. The Israel Post had issued a commemorative stamp in 2018 in appreciation of the Indian soldiers' role in liberating the city. (PTI)

'North Korea willing to closely cooperate with China in multilateral affairs, jointly resist unilateralism'

## Top diplomats of North Korea, China agree to deepen ties, resist hegemonism

**SEOUL, Sept 29:** The foreign ministers of North Korea and China agreed to deepen bilateral ties and resist hegemonism or unilateralism, a likely reference to their pushbacks against the United States.

Their meeting in Beijing on Sunday came about three weeks after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and Chinese President Xi Jinping held their first summit in more than six years and pledged mutual support and enhanced cooperation. Kim and Xi earlier attended a massive Beijing military parade marking the end of the World War II, with other world leaders including Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The joint appearance of Kim, Xi and Putin, the first of its kind, displayed a potential three-way unity against the United States, though it's unclear how far China would go in such an anti-US partnership.

In a meeting with her Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui cited Kim as saying that further bolstering ties with China is North Korea's unwavering position. Choe expressed an intent to



deepen and develop friendly ties with China in line with the spirits of Kim-Xi summit, the North's Korean Central News Agency reported Monday. Wang said China maintains a firm position that it intends to solidify bilateral ties, saying it's necessary to boost strategic communications and exchanges, KCNA said.

China's Xinhua News Agency cited Wang as saying China opposes "all forms of hegemonism" and stands ready to strengthen co-

operation with North Korea in international and regional affairs. It quoted Choe as saying that North Korea "is willing to closely cooperate with China in multilateral affairs, jointly resist unilateralism and power politics and promote a fairer and more just world order."

The comments likely referred to their countries' separate confrontations with the United States — China over strategic competitions with the US and North Korea over its nuclear weapons programme.

KCNA said Choe and Wang exchanged views on regional and international affairs reached a complete consensus on the issues, but didn't elaborate.

Kim's attendance at the Beijing military parade was his first attendance at a major multilateral event during his 14-year rule.

In recent years, North Korea has been focusing on expanding cooperation with Russia by supplying combat troops and ammunitions to support its war against Ukraine.

But experts say Kim now feels the need to improve ties with China, North Korea's biggest trading partner and aid benefactor, as he has to brace for the war's end. They say China, for its part, would want to maintain influence over North Korea, as bilateral ties reportedly cooled in the past few years.

Attention has turned to the makeup of the delegation China might send to North Korea when it commemorates the 80th founding anniversary of its ruling Workers' Party next month. North Korea is expected to mark the anniversary with its own military parade to display new weapons targeting the US and its allies. (AP)

## Nepal PM Karki says govt committed to timely election

**KATHMANDU, Sept 29:** Nepal's newly-appointed Prime Minister Sushila Karki on Monday said her interim government is committed to holding the general elections on the scheduled time.

Karki, 73, became prime minister on September 12, ending days of political uncertainty after the ouster of Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli following violent protests by a youth-led Gen Z group against his government over corruption and a ban on social media.

In a message on the occasion of Bada Dashain, Karki on Monday assured that the elections for the House of Representatives will be held on time, according to the Himalayan Times newspaper.

Bada Dashain, also known as 'Vijaya Dashami, is one of Nepal's most widely-celebrated Hindu festivals. Extending her greetings on the occasion, Prime Minister Karki wished peace, happiness, and prosperity to all Nepali brothers and sisters at home and abroad.

In his message, President Ramchandra Paudel appealed for holding the elections on the scheduled date. Paudel called on citizens to maintain calm and support the continuity of both the government and parliament.

"Let the scheduled election be held on time, and let everyone remain calm and extend the necessary support and cooperation to ensure the continuity of a parliament and government chosen by the people, to resolve all types of problems facing the nation, to achieve quick relief from the current situation, and to work for the welfare of the entire nation. May Goddess Durga provide strength for this," the president said.

President Paudel also wished for peace, stability, good governance, and prosperity for the country.

On September 23, Prime Minister Karki met President Paudel to discuss matters relating to the timely conduct of the general elections. Soon after the meeting, Paudel issued an ordinance related to an amendment to the voter registration act, paving the way for the names of new voters to be registered ahead of the March 2026 general election.

President Paudel dissolved the House of Representatives at Karki's recommendation and announced March 5 as the date for conducting fresh elections. (PTI)

## China's Communist Party conclave in Oct to discuss new 5-year plan, Trump's tariffs

**BEIJING, Sept 29:** China's ruling Communist Party will hold its annual leadership conclave in October to discuss the new five-year plan, challenges posed by US President Donald Trump's tariff war, his attempts to seize control of TikTok and ensuing strains on the Chinese economy.

Besides the prevailing economic situation, the 370-member body of senior party leaders from across the country is expected to discuss the outcome of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit, attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, among others. The plenary session will be held in Beijing from October 20-23, an official statement, issued after the influential Political Bureau meeting presided over by Chinese President Xi Jinping, said on Monday.

The meeting discussed major issues related to the formulation of the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) for national economic and social development.

Discussions on the new five-year plan were expected to factor in the continued slowdown of the world's second-largest economy, with stagnated domestic consumption, the excess capacity of new productive forces, especially the E-Vehicles produced in

large volumes by provinces, and the impact of Trump's tariffs and export curbs on them.

The unemployment rate is stated to be around 20 per cent, causing concern to the CPC leadership.

In his recent speeches, Xi has been asking the party to take a "forward-looking approach" and consider the impact of the changing international landscape on China. After the endorsement by the plenary meeting, the draft will be submitted to the National People's Congress (NPC), the parliament, in March next year.

The October plenary session will be held a week before Xi participates in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in South Korea, where he is expected to meet Trump on the sidelines. The two leaders spoke over the phone recently, and Trump claimed Xi approved a proposal for the US to acquire a major share of popular Chinese media app TikTok, which Beijing views as an asset. The two countries are holding talks to reach a new trade deal over Trump's tariffs. The meeting is also expected to discuss the eventful past few weeks during which China held the SCO summit in Tianjin on Aug 31-Sept 1, in which PM Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin took part. (PTI)

## Iran hangs man as Tehran continues wave of executions

**DUBAI, Sept 29:** Iran said Monday it hanged a man accused of spying for Israel, the latest as Tehran carries out its largest wave of executions in decades.

Iran identified the executed man as Bahman Choobiasl, whose case wasn't immediately known in Iranian media reports or to activists monitoring the death penalty in the Islamic Republic.

However, the execution came after Iran vowed to confront its enemies after the United Nations reimposed sanctions on Tehran over its nuclear programme this weekend.

Iran accused Choobiasl of meeting with officials from the Israeli spy agency Mossad. Iran's Mizan news agency, which is the judiciary's official mouthpiece, said Choobiasl worked on "sensitive telecommunications projects" and reported about the "paths of importing electronic devices."

Iran is known to have hanged nine people for espionage since its June war with Israel. Israel waged an air war with Iran, killing some 1,100 people, including many military commanders. Iran launched missile barrages targeting Israel in response.

Earlier this month, Iran executed Babak Shahbazi, who it alleged spied for Israel. Activists disputed that, saying Shahbazi was tortured into a false confession after writing



a letter to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy offering to fight for Kyiv.

Iran has faced multiple nationwide protests in recent years, fuelled by anger over the economy, demands for women's rights and calls for the country's theocracy to change.

In response to those protests and the June war, Iran has been putting prisoners to death at a pace unseen since 1988, when it executed thousands at the end of the Iran-Iraq war.

The Oslo-based group Iran Human Rights and the Washington-based Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran put the number of people executed in 2025 at over 1,000, noting the number could be higher as Iran does not report on each execution. (AP)

## Typhoon Bualoi becomes tropical storm that rips through Vietnam, killing at least 9 people

'Global warming making storms like July storm Wipha stronger and wetter'

**HANOI, Sept 29:** Heavy rain and strong winds from the former Typhoon Bualoi flooded roads, knocked off roofs and caused at least nine deaths in central Vietnam before it weakened to a storm that moved Monday into Laos, state media reported.

The storm tore through communities, damaging houses, schools and power poles, sweeping away temporary bridges and flooding roads and low-water crossings across several provinces. Flooding in cities submerged vehicles, and many highland communities were cut off.

State media said rescue teams were searching for 17 missing fishermen. Forecasters in Vietnam said that at 10 am Monday, the storm's centre was over land near the border of Nghe An province and Laos, with winds of 74 kph. They said it would push deep into central Laos.

Vietnamese authorities grounded fishing boats and suspended operations at four coastal airports. Six of the deaths occurred in the scenic province of Ninh Binh, where strong winds collapsed houses.

A local official in Thanh Hoa



province, Nguyen Ngoc Hung, died when a tree fell on him as he returned home after a night of storm preparations, reports said. One person was killed after being swept away by floodwaters in Hue city. Another fatality was reported in Danang.

In Quang Tri province, strong winds broke the ropes anchoring a fishing boat taking shelter, sending nine crew members and the vessel adrift. Four managed to swim ashore. In Gia Lai province, families reported losing contact

with eight fishermen on a fishing trip. State media said more than 347,000 households lost power before the typhoon made landfall just after midnight on Sunday. Strong gusts ripped corrugated iron roofs from homes along highways and toppled concrete pillars.

In Phong Nha, known for some of the world's largest caves, residents described "terrible gusts" of wind and pounding rain.

"No one dares to go out," said Le Hang, a local resident, to state media VNEExpress.



**WASHINGTON, Sept 29:** Democratic and Republican congressional leaders are heading to the White House for a meeting with President Donald Trump on Monday in a late effort to avoid a government shutdown, but both sides have shown hardly any willingness to budge from their entrenched positions.

If government funding legislation is not passed by Congress and signed by Trump on Tuesday night, many government offices across the nation will be temporarily shuttered and non-exempt federal employees will be furloughed, adding to the strain on workers and the nation's economy.

Republicans are daring Democrats to vote against legislation that would keep government funding mostly at current levels, but Democrats so far have held firm. They are using one of their few points of leverage to demand that Congress take up legislation to extend health care benefits.

"The meeting is a first step, but only a first step. We need a serious negotiation," Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said in an interview Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press."

Trump has shown little interest in entertaining Democrats' demands on health care, even as he agreed to hold a sit-down meeting Monday afternoon with Schumer, along with Senate Majority Leader John Thune, House Speaker Mike Johnson and House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries. The Republican president has said repeatedly that he fully expects the government to enter a shutdown this week.

"If it has to shut down, it'll have to shut down," Trump said Friday. "But they're the ones that are shutting down government."

The Trump administration has tried to pressure Democratic lawmakers into backing away from their demands, warning that federal employees could be permanently laid off in the midst of a funding lapse. "Chuck Schumer said a few months ago that a government shutdown would be chaotic, harmful and painful. He's right, and that's why we shouldn't do it," Thune, a South Dakota Republican, said Sunday on "Meet the Press."

Still, Democrats argued that

Trump's agreement to hold a meeting shows that he is feeling the pressure to negotiate. They say that because Republicans control the White House and Congress, Americans will mostly blame them for any shutdown.

But to hold on to their negotiating leverage, Senate Democrats will likely have to vote against a bill to temporarily extend government funding on Tuesday, just hours before a shutdown — an uncomfortable position for a party that has long denounced shutdowns as pointless and destructive.

The bill has already passed the Republican-controlled House and would keep the government funded for seven more weeks while Congress works on annual spending legislation.

Any legislation to fund the government will need support from at least 60 senators. That means that at least eight Democrats would have to vote for the short-term funding bill, because Republican Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky is expected to vote against it.

During the last potential government shutdown in March, Schumer and nine other Democrats voted to break a filibuster and allow a Republican-led funding bill to advance to a final vote. The New York Democrat faced fierce backlash from many in his own party for that decision, with some even calling for him to step down as Democratic leader. This time, Schumer appears resolute.

"We're hearing from the American people that they need help on health care and as for these massive layoffs, guess what? Simple

one-sentence answer: They're doing it anyway," he said.

Democrats are pushing for an extension to Affordable Care Act tax credits that have subsidised health insurance for millions of people since the COVID-19 pandemic. The credits, which are designed to expand coverage for low- and middle-income people, are set to expire at the end of the year.

Some Republicans are open to extending the tax credits, but want changes. Thune said Sunday that the programme is "desperately in need of reform" and Republicans want to address "waste, fraud and abuse." He has pressed Democrats to vote for the funding bill and take up the debate on tax credits at a later date.

It remains to be seen whether the White House meeting will help or hurt the chances for a resolution. Negotiations between Trump and Democratic congressional leaders have rarely gone well, and Trump has had little contact with the opposing party during his second term.

The most recent negotiation in August between Schumer and the president to speed the pace of Senate confirmation votes for administration officials ended with Trump telling Schumer to "go to hell" in a social media post.

Trump also abruptly cancelled a meeting that was planned with congressional leaders last week, calling Democrats' demands "unserious and ridiculous."

Schumer argued that the White House coming back to reschedule a meeting for Monday showed that "they felt the heat." (AP)

Vietnam evacuated thousands from central and northern provinces as the storm approached faster than expected. It came ashore in the northern coastal province of Ha Tinh around 12:30 am, bringing winds of up to 133 kph, storm surges of more than a metre and heavy rain. Bualoi had already caused at least 20 deaths in the Philippines since Friday, mainly from drownings and falling trees, and knocked out power in several towns and cities, officials said. It forced about 23,000 families to evacuate to more than 1,400 emergency shelters.

This was the second major storm to threaten Asia in a week. Typhoon Ragasa, one of the strongest to hit in years, left at least 28 deaths in the northern Philippines and Taiwan before making landfall in China and dissipating Thursday over Vietnam.

Global warming is making storms like the July storm Wipha stronger and wetter, according to experts, since warmer oceans provide tropical storms with more fuel, driving more intense winds, heavier rainfall and shifting precipitation patterns across East Asia. (AP)

# Asia Cup 2025: The tale of a denied trophy, endless politics and some cricket

**DUBAI, Sept 29:** The winner's trophy was yet to reach the winners even as politics became the sole talking point a day after one of the most acrimonious Asia Cup finales which was all about off-field hostilities between India and Pakistan, reducing cricket and its famed spirit of the game to a sidelight. Suryakumar Yadav and his men held their nerves to win the nail-biting final by five wickets to complete a ninth title-winning campaign,

remaining unbeaten through the past fortnight. But that wasn't the accomplishment which dictated the discourse although it fetched them a handsome Rs 21 crore prize fund from the BCCI.

The point of discussion, however, was the politics of it all as Asian Cricket Council (ACC) chief Mohsin Naqvi, also the Pakistan Cricket Board boss and the Interior Minister of his country, walked away with the winner's trophy after the Indians

refused to accept it from him.

The reason? His well-documented anti-India comments and the heightening political tensions between the two countries after 26 Indians were gunned down by Pakistan-backed terrorists in Pahalgam earlier this year.

India had retaliated with 'Operation Sindoor' and Naqvi was among the Pakistanis who mocked that action after the Indian team followed a 'No Handshake Policy' towards them

during the entire tournament.

"I think this is one thing which I have never seen since I started playing and following cricket that a champion team is denied a trophy. I mean that too a hard-earned one. It's not like it happened easily. It was a hard-earned tournament win," said Suryakumar, reflecting on how it felt being denied the biggest prize after winning seven consecutive games at the continental showpiece. Suryakumar couldn't

be faulted for being at a loss of words. He had been at the centre of about 90 minutes of pure drama at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium.

His wife Devisha, head coach Gautam Gambhir's wife and daughters were all on the ground after the triumph to celebrate with the trophy. The team, however, was unwilling to head to the dais to collect it from Naqvi, who was waiting to exercise his right to hand over the winner's

trophy as ACC chair. He waited and so did the Indians, about 25 yards from him. It is learnt that the BCCI had informed their ACC points-person that the team won't take the award from Naqvi, who had posted cryptic videos of Cristiano Ronaldo's plane crash goal celebration alluding to the Pakistani claims that six Indian jets were downed during 'Operation Sindoor'. "No one told us to do this," said Suryakumar, insisting later that

the call to boycott Naqvi was taken at the ground.

"India cannot take the trophy from the person who is waging a war against our country," declared BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia in Mumbai. As Naqvi got down from the podium due to India's refusal and strode towards the exit gate, the ACC event staff, to everyone's surprise, followed him with the trophy leaving the Indian camp flummoxed. (PTI)

## At home and confident, India Women eye title breakthrough at ICC ODI World Cup



**GUWAHATI, Sept 29:** With home advantage and current form on its side, the Indian women's cricket team will look to end a 47-year wait for its maiden ICC title when it takes the field at the ODI World Cup starting with a clash against Sri Lanka here on Tuesday.

Ranked world No.3, the Harmanpreet Kaur-led India will look to make the most of their familiarity with conditions in the 13th edition of the tournament, that is returning to India after 12 years.

The global showpiece will feature eight top ranked teams - Australia, England, India, New Zealand, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan - competing in 28 league matches in a round-robin format across four venues in India and one in Colombo for a record prize money of USD 13.88 million.

The prize pool is also nearly four times higher than 2022 and surpasses the men's 2023 edition (USD 10 million) to be in line with the ICC's push for pay parity and growth of women's cricket.

The Sri Lankan capital will host 11 round-robin matches, in-

cluding Pakistan's seven league stage games and the marquee clash against India on October 5.

One semifinal and the final are also scheduled there, should Pakistan go all the way.

On current form, India arrive with confidence, having recently beaten England in both ODI and T20I series.

They also ended a worrying losing streak against Australia in a recent tournament build-up series. The Indians nearly chased down 413 in the final ODI in New Delhi against the team which is chasing a record-extending eighth title.

Indian vice-captain Smriti Mandhana remains the fulcrum of the batting unit, enjoying the form of her life at the top of order.

The left-hander has already struck four ODI centuries, including two back-to-back against Australia, this year. She averages 66.28 with a strike rate of 115.85.

Her partnerships with young opener Pratika Rawal, who has provided solidity at the top, give India the cushion to post or chase big totals in the absence of an out of favour Shafali Varma.

Playing her fifth World Cup,

Harmanpreet, who reserves her best for big tournaments, carries a tournament average of over 50. She smashed a century against England recently and followed it up with a fifty against Australia.

Jemimah Rodrigues, back from injury, scored a composed 66 in the warm-up against England and adds stability in the middle order.

Richa Ghosh, Harleen Deol and Deepti Sharma add further depth, while Amanjot Kaur offers a seam-bowling all-round option.

Return of Renuka Singh from an injury would bolster the pace attack as she would spearhead the bowling on flatbeds across the venues.

Twenty-two-year old Kranti Goud, with only six caps to her name, has shown promise with her pace and variations including a searing yorker.

During her country's tour of England this summer, she joined Jasprit Bumrah and Kuldeep Yadav as the only players to ever take six wickets for India in ODIs in the country, with 6/52 at Chester-le-Street.

However, India's pace department remains thin on experience. (PTI)

## Champions League sends Real Madrid, Bayern to new places and returns Mourinho to old home Chelsea

**GENEVA, Sept 29:** The Champions League sends its top-ranked teams to new places this week and revisits the Barcelona-Paris Saint-Germain rivalry that is among the more storied in its modern era.

José Mourinho also returns to Stamford Bridge, his home in two spells coaching Chelsea, for his first Champions League game coaching Benfica.

In 71 seasons of the European Cup and Champions League, record 15-time title winner Real Madrid never went to Kazakhstan where it plays Kairat Almaty on Tuesday. That's a meeting of No. 151 vs. No. 1 in the UEFA club rankings on the same day No. 2 Bayern Munich has a rare trip to Cyprus to face No. 91 Pafos, another competition newcomer.

Tottenham already went inside the Arctic Circle to face Bodo/Glimt — winning in the Europa League semifinals in May — and returns for the Norwegian champion's first home game in the main stage of the Champions League. The standout game Wednesday is Barcelona hosting PSG in a matchup immortalized by "La Remontada" in 2017.

Barcelona superstar Lamine Yamal seems fit after a groin injury to start his first game since placing second in the Ballon d'Or voting to Ousmane Dembélé, who is still out for PSG after being injured on France duty this month. While Dembélé skips this reunion in the city where he spent six years before coming to Paris, PSG coach Luis Enrique goes back to the club he led to his first Champions League title, in 2015.

A heavyweight clash that will always conjure memories of Barcelona's epic 6-1 win in March 2017, to overturn a 4-0 first-leg loss in Paris and advance to the quarterfinals.

That was the last season of the stellar Barcelona forward line of Lionel Messi, Luis Suarez and Neymar, who after that season would join PSG for a world record transfer fee — money Barcelona invested in buying Dembélé from Borussia Dortmund. Less well remembered is that PSG has since been back twice for knockout rounds games — and won 4-1 each time after

trailing to eliminate Barcelona. In 2021, Kylian Mbappe scored a hat trick in a Round of 16 game week and revisits the Barcelona-Paris Saint-Germain rivalry that is among the more storied in its modern era.

A game to watch should be Atletico Madrid hosting Eintracht Frankfurt judging by their free-wheeling wins in domestic league games Saturday.

Atletico humbled Real Madrid 5-2 in the city derby after trailing 2-1 in the first half.

Eintracht led 5-0 at half time at Borussia Mönchengladbach, and quickly added a sixth for what looked a cruise to the finish. Gladbach started its fightback in the 72nd and kept adding goals into stoppage time of what ended as a wild 6-4 win for the visitors.

The fourth newcomer in this season's edition, Belgian champion Union Saint-Gilloise, impressed in a 3-1 opening win at PSV Eindhoven.

That's how it has been for Belgium this season. Club Brugge won four straight games in the qualifying rounds than started the league phase easing past Monaco 4-1.

Union hosts Newcastle in an early kickoff Wednesday in what should be a special game for its captain Christian Burgess, now in his sixth season with the unheralded club from Brussels.

In his home country England, Burgess played all but one game in his career with teams in the third and fourth tiers. That one game in the second-tier Championship was with Middlesbrough, a rival of Newcastle in the northeast. Barcelona, Pafos, Qarabag and Union Saint-Gilloise all host games away from their usual stadiums. For Barcelona fans, hosting PSG in the city's Olympic Stadium means finally going in big numbers to see their team play its highest-profile home game in the first half of the season. The long-running, \$1.75-billion Camp Nou renovation is still not resolved, so Barcelona played its first two La Liga home games in front of a combined attendance of fewer than 12,000 at the club's training ground. (AP)

## They were saying lot of things, just wanted my bat to respond: Tilak Varma

**DUBAI, Sept 29:** Pakistan players had "a lot to say" to Tilak Varma when he walked to the crease during the Asia Cup final which fired up the Indian batter to play one of the most defining innings of his career thus far.

Having lost early wickets, India were in a precarious situation when Tilak came out to bat. Considering the hostilities between the two teams, there was plenty said to Tilak as well but he kept his composure to produce a batting masterpiece in a high-pressure scenario.

"I wanted my bat to do the talking. They were saying a lot of things I just wanted to respond with my bat. Now they are not visible on the ground," said Tilak in a chat with teammate Shivam Dube on BCCI.TV.

The 60-run stand between Dube and Tilak helped India win the Asia Cup with two balls to spare. Tilak remained unbeaten on 69 off 53 balls.

"I think my bat did the talking as well, they did not have much to say to me," said Dube in a light-hearted conversation.

Tilak added that the atmosphere in the stadium fuelled him to excel in a high stakes contest.

"The chants of Vande Matram in the stands gave me goosebumps. I just want to say Bharat mata ki jai," added Tilak.

Besides the crucial 33 in the middle-order, Dube was handed a stiff challenge of bowling the first over of the game in the absence of injured Hardik Pandya. There were serious question marks over his bowling not so long ago but Dube passed the bowling test as well with flying colours.

"There is a lot of hard work behind (my bowling) and prayers of Indian team supporters. Lot of support and confidence has been given by the management. It was crucial game, I got a big opportunity. It was fun," concluded Dube. (PTI)

## Don't want to be harsh but Suryakumar disrespected cricket: Salman Agha

**DUBAI, Sept 29:** Salman Ali Agha feels that Indian team's 'No Handshake' policy while playing Pakistan in the Asia Cup was "disrespectful" to the game and not the best example of sportsmanship for the young fans who look up to cricketers as role models. India beat arch-rivals Pakistan by five wickets in a highly volatile Asia Cup final here on Sunday to win their second tournament title in the T20 format.

"What India have done this tournament is very disappointing. They are not disrespecting us by not shaking hands, they are disrespecting cricket. Good teams don't do what they did," the Pakistan skipper said at the post-match press conference.

For Salman, fulfilling obligations is a part of playing the sport.

"We went to pose with the trophy (photo shoot) on our own because we wanted to fulfil our obligations. We stood there and took our medals. I don't want to use harsh words but they've been very disrespectful." Salman claimed that Suryakumar has been a different person in public when it came to exchanging courtesy compared to how he behaved in private. "He shook hands with me in private at the start of the tournament, both at the pre-tournament press conference, and when we met in the referee's meeting. But when they're out in the world in front of the cameras, they don't shake our hands."

"I'm sure he's following the instructions he's been given, but if it was up to him, he'd shake hands with me." Salman tried to justify Asian Cricket Council (ACC) chief Mohsin Naqvi's decision to stand on the presentation dais before walking away with the trophy. He said India were not awarded the trophy as they didn't want to collect it from the PCB chief.

"Everything that happened today was a consequence of all that happened (before). Of course, the ACC president will give the trophy to the winners. If you won't take the trophy from him, how will you get it?" he countered.

He felt that at some point this kind of things needs to stop. "This is the first time I've ever seen this happen. Whatever happened in this tournament was very bad, and I hope it stops at some stage because it's bad for cricket."

The Pakistan captain said these kind of incidents will set a wrong example for budding cricketers.

"I'm not just a Pakistan captain, I'm a cricket fan. If a kid is watching in India or Pakistan, we're not sending them a good message." Why it unfolded the way it did is a question only India should answer, Salman said. "People think of us as role models, but if we're behaving like this, we're not inspiring them. What happened shouldn't have happened, but you should ask the people (of India) responsible for this rather than me." While concluding his press conference, Salman, apparently in an afterthought, claimed that the match fees of the entire Pakistan team will be donated to the families of those who died during the 'Operation Sindoor'. (PTI)

## Exiled Afghan women cricketers arrive to watch World Cup on learning tour

**GUWAHATI, Sept 29:** There is no Afghanistan team in the ICC Women's World Cup starting on Tuesday, but a group of 16 cricketers from that country now living in exile in Australia has arrived here to watch the showpiece on a special learning tour.

The group, currently refugees in Australia after being forced to flee their homeland when the Taliban took control in 2021, has been invited to watch the World Cup matches to help them in both their "cricketing and personal development journeys".

The move is aimed at ensuring that the Afghan women cricketers can continue their

careers in exile and keep the sport alive for future generations. The players were escorted to a city hotel under high security cover as soon as they landed at the airport.

"They will watch the matches and are also likely to interact with Indian and Sri Lankan cricketers to help them raise the standard of their game," an Assam Cricket Association official told PTI. "It's a unique opportunity for them, and we are providing all the support here."

Co-hosts India and Sri Lanka face each other in the opening match of the tournament here on Tuesday. The full schedule of their

visit is not yet known, but the Afghan players are also expected to play matches against Indian domestic sides during the course of the World Cup.

Women in Afghanistan have been banned from sports since 2021 in Melbourne, turning out for a Cricket Without Borders XI.

In May, the ICC had announced an initiative to support displaced Afghan women cricketers, forming a dedicated task force in partnership with the BCCI, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) and Cricket Australia. As part of the programme, the ICC announced to set up a fund to provide direct monetary assistance, along with a high-performance package that includes advanced coaching, world-class facilities and personalised mentorship.

"This initiative reflects our steadfast dedication to cricket's global growth and its power to inspire unity, resilience, and hope," ICC chair Jay Shah had said while launching the scheme after a Board meeting of the world governing body. (PTI)

## Mbappe was meant to succeed Messi and Ronaldo, but Ballon d'Or rankings say he's going backward

**MANCHESTER, Sept 29:** By the age of 19 Kylian Mbappe had won the World Cup, become one of the most expensive soccer players ever and was labeled the heir-apparent to Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo.

Seven years later, and with Messi and Ronaldo long past their peak, Mbappe is still to be officially recognized as the best player in the world.

If anything, he is going backward. By the most recent measure he was ranked seventh. That's where he placed in this year's voting for the Ballon d'Or — the sport's biggest individual prize — which, last week, was won by Mbappe's France teammate Ousmane Dembele.

"You deserve it x1000," Mbappe graciously posted on social media.

In second place was teenage sensation Lamine Yamal — a player of such prodigious talent that he is now the one predicted to dominate the Ballon d'Or. A new generation is threatening to usurp Mbappe before he's even established himself at the top.

"The challenges do seem to be getting bigger for him to go to the top," author Luca Caioli told The Associated Press. Caioli co-wrote the book "Mbappe" chronicling his rise from prodigy to superstar. He said the emergence of the 18-year-old Yamal places doubts over

whether Mbappe would become a multiple Ballon d'Or winner.

"Now it could be very complicated because of the fascination of this young player of 18 years that broke all the records for (someone his) age," said Caioli. "Also the age starts to be interesting for Mbappe. He's not 19 years old like when he won the World Cup. It's changed."

Yamal, who has already led Spain to a European Championship and Barcelona to the Spanish title in his nascent career, won the Kopa trophy for the best under-21 player for the second year running. But there were claims he deserved the top prize, which would have made him the youngest ever recipient of the Ballon d'Or — overtaking Brazil striker Ronaldo, who won it aged 21.

La Liga president Javier Tebas said the forward was only overlooked because of his age. Yamal's father said his son was the "best player in the world by far."

There was no such outrage in response to Mbappe missing out. Not even from his club, Real Madrid, which last year boycotted the ceremony when Vinicius Junior was beaten to the prize by Manchester City midfielder Rodri.

Frankly, Mbappe was barely part of the conversation this year despite winning the Golden Shoe as the top scorer in Europe.