

**6 NATION**

**7 NORTHEAST**

- Amit Shah turns 61; PM Modi, Nitish Kumar, Chandrababu Naidu laud 'hardworking' leader
- 'Shauq pal': Oppn slams Lokpal after it floats tender to buy 7 BMW cars
- NSCN(IM) says Naga flag, constitution non-negotiable, rejects other pacts
- Rijiju on 2-day visit to Mizoram for Dampa bypoll campaign

## ULFA (I) cadre neutralised in Arunachal; weapons recovered

Additional Army, Assam Rifles, Police, and CRPF personnel deployed to intensify search operation



**HT Bureau**

**NAMSAL, Oct 22:** In a significant success against insurgency, a joint counter-insurgency operation by the Indian Army and Assam Rifles neutralised a key cadre of the proscribed outfit ULFA (Independent) [ULFA (I)] in Namsal district of Arunachal Pradesh late on Tuesday night.

Based on a credible tip-off regarding the presence of six to seven ULFA (I) cadres in the 6 Mile Lekang Khampti area under Namsal Police Station, Assam Rifles personnel launched a targeted

operation in the MS-6 area during the night of October 21-22. On approach, the militants opened fire on the security forces, resulting in a fierce exchange. In the ensuing gun battle, one militant was killed while the rest reportedly managed to flee.

The deceased was later identified as self-styled Sergeant Major Iwon Axom, a key ULFA (I) cadre believed to be involved in recent militant activities, including the attack on the Kakopathar Army Company Operating Base (COB) in Assam's Tinsukia district.

Security forces recovered one HK-series automatic rifle, one RPG round, one grenade, and three rucksacks containing various materials, suggesting that the group was possibly preparing for further movements or attacks.

Lt Col Mahendra Rawat, Guwahati-based Defence PRO, said additional columns of the Army, Assam Rifles, Police, and CRPF have been deployed to intensify the search and neutralise any remaining insurgent elements. The operation is still ongoing, with aerial surveillance, drones, and tracker dogs being employed to secure the area.

A police official added that the joint action forms part of a coordinated effort to curb insurgent activities along the Assam-Arunachal border, where sporadic incidents have been reported in recent months.

This operation highlights the continued commitment of security forces to maintain law and order and ensure the safety of local communities. Authorities have cordoned off the area and launched (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## CM rules out politics over Zubeen's demise

'BJP is trying to unite all real followers of the cultural icon'



**NAGAON, Oct 22:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said a section of the people is trying to politicise Zubeen Garg's death and create tension in the state by impersonating as true followers of the singer.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of an official function here, Sarma also said that BJP is trying to unite all "real followers" of the cultural icon to protect the state from any disturbances by the "fake followers".

"Zubeen Garg's demise is the saddest news of Assamese society. But a section of the people has tried to transform it to a political weapon. Many of them never listened to a single song of Zubeen when he was alive, or their knowledge on Zubeen Garg is very limited," he said.

After Garg's death, those people are trying to project his ideology in a different trajectory, Sarma

claimed.

"I believe no politics will be played after Zubeen Garg's demise like nobody did politics after Bhupala Hazarika, Jyoti Prasad Agarwala and Bishnu Prasad Rava. All

political parties loved Zubeen Garg and there is no scope of doing any politics over his name," he added.

The CM further said that those who had severely criticised the singer-composer during his life-

time are trying to create tension in Assam by impersonating as "true Zubeen followers".

"BJP has hit the streets from today with the real Zubeen followers with an aim to protect Assam from any disturbances. Our aim is to unite the real Zubeen followers against the fake followers," he added.

The ruling BJP has launched a 'Nyay Yatra' seeking justice for Zubeen Garg through the judiciary. The move has attracted widespread criticism on social media as the state is ruled by the saffron party itself.

The celebrated singer died under mysterious circumstances in Singapore on September 19 while swimming in the sea. He had gone to the Southeast Asian nation to attend the 4th edition of the North East India Festival.

Seven people have been arrested in the case so far, and all are in jail. (PTI)

## Normalcy restored in Tapat village



**A Correspondent**

**BAITHALANGSO, Oct 22:** Normalcy returned to the inter-state bordering village of Tapat in Assam's West Karbi Anglong district after a fresh resolution was adopted on Wednesday, ending a standoff that lasted about two weeks.

The resolution was agreed upon between the Khasi Pnars of Lapangat village in East Jaintia Hills district, Meghalaya, and the Tapat villagers of West Karbi Anglong, Assam.

Tensions had escalated following the killing of Oriwel Timung on October 9, when Khasi Pnars from Lapangat entered Tapat to harvest their paddy.

In the meeting held at the border village, village headmen from both sides — Deimonmi Lyngdoh of Lapangat and Olingson Timung, Daniel Hanse, and Royal Teron of Tapat — unanimously adopted resolutions in the presence of officials and police from both Assam and Meghalaya.

The joint resolution stated that the person or persons involved in the killing of Oriwel Timung, son of Late Pang-ch Timung, will be arrested and the investigation will be fast-tracked, with a warning that failure to do so could make peace difficult to maintain during the next cultivation season.

It was also decided that the residents of Tapat and Lapangat would not (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Seed capital to over 26,500 SHG women under MMUA distributed in Nagaon

CM underscores significance of women empowerment

**HT Correspondent**  
**NAGAON, Oct 22:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma distributed seed capital of ₹ 10,000 each to 26,585 women beneficiaries under the Mukhymyatri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan at a grand programme held at the Nehrubli Field in Nagaon on Wednesday.

The event, organised by the State Rural Livelihood Mission in coordination with the Nagaon district administration, witnessed a massive turnout, reflecting the growing enthusiasm for women empowerment initiatives in the state.

Addressing the gathering, Sarma underscored the significance of empowering women and fostering self-reliance.

He highlighted the state govern-

ment's continuous efforts to uplift the socio-economic status of women, ensuring that schemes like Arunodaya and Mukhymyatri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan serve as role models for other states in India.

According to the chief minister, several states, including West Bengal, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, and Haryana, have expressed interest in adopting similar models for promoting women entrepreneurship.

While addressing the programme, Sarma also criticised the opposition Congress for allegedly opposing these schemes, claiming that its leaders fail to comprehend the needs of economically weaker sections.

He pointed out that Congress

leaders are largely unaware of the benefits of these initiatives and focus primarily on political rhetoric rather than the welfare of women and the poor.

Highlighting the success of the self-help group (SHG) movement in Assam, Sarma stated that over four lakh SHGs have been formed across the state, involving more than 40 lakh women.

He added that the state government has facilitated loans for women, with more than 99% of the loan amount already repaid, indicating the effectiveness and financial discipline of these groups.

Apart from the seed capital distribution, Sarma also inaugurated several development projects in Nagaon, including a multi-storied market (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## INS Sahyadri takes part in India-Japan maritime exercise

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**NEW DELHI, Oct 22:** India's indigenously built guided missile stealth frigate INS Sahyadri has participated in a joint maritime exercise with Japan, underscoring the "strong and burgeoning" navy-to-navy interactions with that country, officials said on Wednesday.

The multi-role stealth frigate participated in the sea phase of 'JAIMEX 25' — Japan India Maritime Exercise — from October 16-18, and made a port call at Yokosuka, Japan, on Tuesday for the harbour phase.

As part of the Indian Navy's ongoing deployment in the Indo-Pacific, the Shivalik-class guided missile stealth frigate of its Eastern Fleet participated in the bilateral exercise.

"The sea phase of #JAIMEX 25 from 16 to 18 Oct with participation of @JMSDF PAO ships Asahi, Oumi and Submarine Jinryu included multiple drills and exercises pertaining to Anti-Submarine Warfare, missile defence, flying operations and underway replenishment. India-Japan#BridgesofFriendship #EasternSword #SunriseFleet @jmsdf pao eng @IndianEmbTokyo," the Indian Navy posted on X.

In its post, the Navy also shared some photos and a video clip of the drills.

"The strategic partnership between India and Japan has been very robust for a long time with significant focus on defence and maritime (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Bills on 'love jihad', polygamy in coming Assembly session: CM

Bills on 'love jihad', polygamy in coming Assembly session: CM

**NAGAON, Oct 22:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said the state government will introduce several bills on issues like 'love jihad' and polygamy in the coming Assembly session, likely to take place next month.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of an official function here, Sarma said details will be shared once the draft bills are approved by the state cabinet.

"In the coming session of Assam Assembly, we will introduce some important and historic bills on issues like 'love jihad', polygamy, preservation of Satras (Vaishnavite monastery) and land rights to tea tribes," he (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Meeting between MHA representatives, Ladakh leaders begins weeks after deadly protests

Meeting between MHA representatives, Ladakh leaders begins weeks after deadly protests

**NEW DELHI, Oct 22:** In the first sign of a thaw, leaders of Ladakh, where four people died in police firing during the recent pro-statehood protests, met with Home Ministry representatives here on Wednesday for sub-committee level talks.

During the meeting, the Ladakh representatives demanded an immediate release of all arrested leaders, including climate activist Sonam Wangchuck, the widely recognised face of the agitation.

The Leh Apex Body (LAB) and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) said that the next of kin of those killed should be given adequate compensation.

Talks between the Centre, LAB and KDA had broken down after

four protesters were killed and several were injured during widespread violence in Leh on September 24. Both the Ladakh organisations stayed away from the dialogue with the high-powered committee of the MHA slated for October 6.

The invitation for the talks had been made by the Centre on September 20. The last round of talks between the two sides was held in May.

Lok Sabha MP from Ladakh Mohamad Haneefa, who took part in the meeting, said the Ladakh leaders participated in it with an open mind for a positive outcome of their demand for statehood to Ladakh. "This was our first meeting, and we (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Himanta wishes Amit Shah on birthday

Himanta wishes Amit Shah on birthday

**GUWAHATI, Oct 22:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday greeted Union Home Minister Amit Shah on his birthday, and lauded his efforts to "eliminate naxalism and ensure a safe and secure nation".

Sarma also said Shah's sharp organisational skills and eye for detail set him apart as one of India's tallest leaders.

"Heartiest birthday wishes to Adarniya Shri @AmitShah ji. He has been at the forefront of leading Bharat's efforts to eliminate naxalism and ensure a safe and secure nation," the CM said in a post on X.

"To my mentor and guide, to someone who has always led from the front and shown us the way in every situation—wishing a very Happy Birthday to Adarniya @AmitShah ji," Sarma said.

As Shah turns "another leaf in his glorious life", the chief minister prayed to (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## India rises to 9th spot globally in forest area

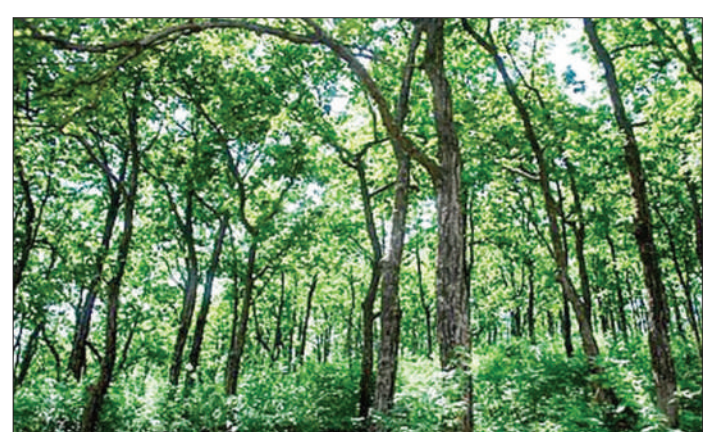
3rd position in forest gain: FAO report

**NEW DELHI, Oct 22:** India has climbed to the ninth spot globally in total forest area and retained its third rank in annual forest area gain, according to a new report released by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

The Environment Ministry said this reflects the success of India's large-scale afforestation and community-led forest protection efforts under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav said India's rise from the 10th to the ninth position marks a "major achievement" in sustainable forest management and ecological conservation.

The minister said that growing public participation in tree plantation campaigns, particularly under the 'Ek Ped Ma Ke Naam' initiative, and large-scale state govern-



ment drives have contributed to this progress.

"Here is a reason to rejoice for all Indians. We have achieved 9th rank in terms of forest area at the global level as compared to 10th spot in the previous assessment.

We have also maintained our 3rd position globally in terms of annual gain. Global Forest Resource Assessment (GFRA) 2025 has been launched by FAO in Bali," Yadav posted on X.

The FAO report said the world's

total forest area stands at 4.14 billion hectares, covering 32 per cent of the planet's land.

More than half (54 per cent) of this is concentrated in just five countries i.e. Russia, Brazil, Canada, the United States and China.

India follows Australia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Indonesia, placing it among the world's top 10 forest-rich nations.

China recorded the highest annual net gain in forest area between 2015 and 2025 at 1.69 million hectares per year, followed by the Russian Federation with 9,42,000 hectares and India with 1,91,000 hectares.

Other countries with significant forest expansion include Türkiye (1,18,000 ha), Australia (1,05,000 ha), (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## India-led solar project lights up 12 public buildings across 10 Pacific nations

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**UNITED NATIONS, Oct 22:** India, in collaboration with the United Nations, has extended green energy solutions to 10 Pacific island nations by providing solar power to 12 public buildings, the Indian mission to the UN has said.

The initiative was implemented under the USD 150 million India-UN Development Partnership Fund.

The Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations in a social media post on Tuesday said the Fund is "offering green solutions".

"Solar energy has been provided to 12 public buildings across 10 Pacific nations. 74 local technicians have been imparted training under the project," it said.

The United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UN-OSSC) in a social media post said the project has trained 74 local technicians, benefiting over 16,500 people and helping avoid nearly

9,600 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions over 25 years.

The UNOSSC on its website underlined that the Fund has played a pivotal role in supporting clean energy interventions across the developing world, particularly in countries with limited access to renewable energy resources.

Citing an example, it said the Fund has improved "access to water through the installation of solar pumping systems" in Haiti, which expanded access to solar energy in rural and underserved communities, "benefiting over 40,000 people".

The India-supported initiative, the website noted, has also helped Fiji to introduce solar energy to power its State House.

Established in 2017, the Fund is supported and led by the Government of India and implemented in collaboration with the United Nations. (PTI)

## Four suspected cybercriminals nabbed in Nagaon

Four suspected cybercriminals nabbed in Nagaon

**NAGAON, Oct 22:** Four miscreants involved in many financial and other crimes were arrested from Nagaon district of Assam, a police officer said on Wednesday.

The officer said the four criminals were nabbed from Kachua area of the district after getting a tip-off.

"These arrested criminals were involved in various cyber crime, extortion, snatching and attempted kidnapping. We were looking for them for some time," he added.

The accused were nabbed on Saturday from the Barghat bypass area, but the police informed the media on Wednesday.

Police seized many ATM cards from their possessions. (PTI)

# Asian shares slip on selling of tech stocks after lackluster day on Wall Street

**TOKYO, Oct 22:** Asian shares were mostly lower Wednesday on selling of technology shares following a lackluster day on Wall Street.

US futures edged higher, while crude oil prices rose about \$1 a barrel.

Chinese markets retreated after US President Donald Trump cast doubt on whether or not he will meet with Chinese leader Xi Jinping later this month.

"Maybe it won't happen, maybe it won't happen," he said while hosting a lunch for Republican Party senators at the White House.

However, Trump also said he was expecting "to do well" in negotiations with China.

"I'm going to see President Xi in two weeks... We're going to meet in South Korea," he said. "We're going to talk about a lot of things they want to discuss."

Trump is travelling in the next several days to Japan and South Korea, in part, to finalise the terms of investments from those countries as part of an agreement to minimise the tariff rates Trump is charging on foreign goods.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng dropped 1% to 25,769.83, while the Shanghai Composite index shed 0.3% to 3,903.01.

Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 wavered between slight gains and losses a day after its parliament chose Sanae Takaichi to be its first



female prime minister.

It had gained less than 0.1% by mid-afternoon, to 49,332.24, pulled lower by declines for tech companies like SoftBank Corp, whose shares fell 4.8%.

The government reported that Japan's exports grew 4.2% in September from a year earlier, boosted by robust shipments to Asia that offset a 13% decline in those destined for the US Auto shipments fell 24% as they were hit hard by Trump's tariff hikes.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 lost 0.9% to 9,012.30, while South Korea's Kospi rose 1% to 3,861.65.

Tuesday on Wall Street, the S&P 500 inched up a fraction of a point, leaving it just slightly below its all-time high set earlier this month, at 6,735.35.

the S&P 500. So was Broadcom's 2% fall.

The pressure is on companies to show that their profits are growing following a torrid rally of 35% for the S&P 500 from a low in April. It's one way they can justify their high stock prices amid criticism that they're too expensive.

Corporate earnings reports also can provide details on the strength of the US economy at a time when the US government's shutdown has delayed important economic updates. That's making the job of the Federal Reserve more difficult, as it tries to decide whether high inflation or the slowing job market is the bigger issue for the economy.

Despite the shutdown, the Commerce Department will release its consumer prices report on Friday, which could help guide the Fed's interest rate policy. It will be the government's first data release since the shutdown began on Oct 1.

In other dealings early Wednesday, the price of gold was up 1.1% at \$4,152.70 per ounce. It fell 5.7% from its latest record on Tuesday but is up more than 56.4% for the year. Benchmark US crude oil rose 98 cents to \$58.22 a barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, jumped \$1 to \$62.32 a barrel.

The US dollar fell to 151.75 Japanese yen from 151.93 yen. The euro cost \$1.1610, up from \$1.1600. (AP)

The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 0.5% to 46,924.74 and the Nasdaq composite slipped 0.2% to 22,953.67.

General Motors rallied 15.1% after reporting stronger quarterly results than analysts expected, while also raising its forecasts for some full-year financial targets.

Warner Bros. Discovery leaped 10.9% after the company said it's now considering other options besides its previously announced split of Discovery Global off Warner Bros, which could be more profitable for shareholders.

Keeping the market in check were drops for some Big Tech stocks, which lost momentum following their own rallies. A 2% drop for Google's parent company, Alphabet, from its all-time high was among the heaviest weights on

female prime minister.

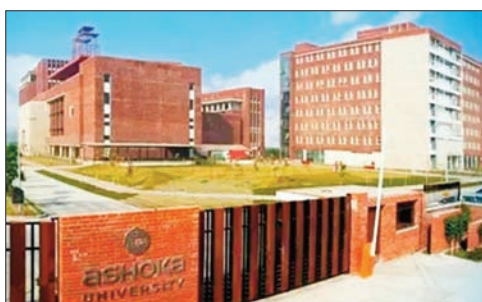
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## Ashoka University opens undergraduate applications for 2026



**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Oct 22:** Ashoka University, one of India's premier institutions for interdisciplinary studies in Computer Science, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and the Humanities, has officially opened its application window for the 2026 Undergraduate Programme intake. Applicants can explore a broad range of undergraduate offerings designed to combine academic rigor with experiential and interdisciplinary learning.

The 2026 admissions cycle introduces significant updates that reflect Ashoka's vision to broaden access to higher education while supporting high-achieving students across India.

Notably, the university has announced 500 merit and need-based scholarships across all programmes, including 200 newly introduced merit scholarships, marking a substantial effort to encourage academic excellence and inclusivity.

Under the merit-based category, Special Merit Scholarships will be awarded to 50 exceptional students who have excelled in national aptitude examinations such as JEE Mains, IISER Aptitude Test (IAT), CMI Entrance, and Indian National Olympiads (INO) in Mathematics, Science, Astronomy, Linguistics, and Informatics.

These scholarships cover 100% of tuition fees for qualifying candidates. Eligibility criteria include a minimum 98th percentile in JEE Mains, top

2000 rank in IISER IAT, top 100 in CMI Entrance, or qualification for the INO Training Camp stage.

In addition, Achievers' Merit Scholarships will provide up to 100% tuition fee waivers to 150 students based on their overall performance in Ashoka's holistic admissions process.

Strong academic performance in school board examinations (CBSE and ICSE/ISC) with 98% or above, along with outstanding performance in the university's admissions assessments, will be key qualifying factors.

Notably, awardees of both Special Merit and Achievers' Merit Scholarships remain eligible for additional need-based assistance, ensuring financial constraints do not hinder academic potential.

The Need-Based Scholarships will offer full tuition fee waivers or partial financial support for admitted students requiring financial assistance. Eligibility will be determined through a comprehensive assessment of the student's family resources, including income, savings, investments, and available education loans, to bridge the gap between program costs and their ability to pay.

Applications will be accepted across four rounds, starting October 13, 2025, and continuing until May 31, 2026, providing multiple opportunities for prospective students to apply.

Ashoka Admissions Assessments for Indian residents will be conducted at 37 centres nationwide, ensuring accessibility for applicants from diverse regions. Non-Resident Indian applicants will follow a separate online assessment process.

The university has also made provisions for applicants with physical disabilities, mobility impairments, or other special requirements.

With this initiative, Ashoka University continues its commitment to meritocracy, inclusivity, and excellence, aiming to attract the brightest minds while supporting students from varied socio-economic backgrounds to pursue world-class education in India.

## RBI's gold reserves cross 880 metric tonnes by Sept

**NEW DELHI, Oct 22:** The Reserve Bank's gold reserves crossed 880 metric tonnes in the first half of 2025-26 with the central bank adding 0.2 metric tonnes in the last week of September.

The total value of the gold was USD 95 billion as of September 26, 2025, according to the latest data from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

The demand for gold, considered a safe haven, has been on the rise in recent months amid escalating global uncertainties.

In the six months ended September, the RBI bought 0.6 metric tonnes (600 kilograms) of gold. A total of 0.2 metric tonnes (200 kg) and 0.4 metric tonnes (400 kg) of the yellow metal were bought in September and June, respectively, as per the latest RBI Bulletin.

The total gold reserve with the RBI increased to 880.18 metric tonnes at September-end from 879.58 metric tonnes at the end of 2024-25.

During 2024-25, the RBI had added 54.13 metric tonnes of gold.

Rise in international gold prices, driven by heightened global economic and geopolitical uncertainty that encouraged safe haven buying and sustained demand for gold as a financial asset by central banks and investors, drove domestic price increases, the bulletin said.

Globally, the bulletin also said central banks added 166 tonnes of gold to official reserves, further boosting its demand.

Gold prices remained elevated in the third quarter, surging to all-time high in September. (PTI)

## Revised IT rules to ensure senior-level authorisation for content takedown notices

**NEW DELHI, Oct 22:** The IT ministry has stipulated that intimation to social media platforms for removal of "unlawful information" can only be issued by senior officials and would require precise details and reasons to be specified, as it notified IT Rules amendment to streamline content takedown procedures and bring transparency, clarity and precision in actions.

Further, all intimations issued under Rule 3(1)(d) will be subject to a monthly review by an officer, not below the rank of secretary of the appropriate government, to ensure that such actions remain "necessary, proportionate, and consistent with law".

Under Rule 3(1)(d), intermediaries are required to remove unlawful information upon receiving actual knowledge either through a court order or notification from the appropriate government.

"On the Rule 3 (1) (d)...accountability of the Government increases with this change and we will be giving a reasoned intimation whenever any such order is passed. The orders will



be passed at a fairly senior level, joint secretary and above, DIG and above," IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnav told mediapersons.

The IT ministry, in a note, said that the government has notified amendments to Rule 3(1)(d) of the IT Rules, 2021 to enhance transparency, accountability and safeguards.

A review undertaken by the IT ministry had highlighted the need for additional safeguards and checks and balances to ensure senior-level accountability, precise specification of unlawful content, and periodic review of government directions at higher level.

Accordingly, "any intimation to intermediaries for removal of unlawful information can now only be issued by a senior officer not below the rank of Joint Secretary, or equivalent, or where such rank is not appointed, a Director or an officer equivalent in rank — and, where so authorised, acting through a single corresponding officer in its authorised agency, where such agency is so appointed". (PTI)

## E-WENT strengthens EV two-wheeler presence

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Oct 22:** E-WENT, the electric mobility venture of Saraogi E-Ventures, has significantly expanded its footprint in India's rapidly growing electric two-wheeler market, unveiling a diverse portfolio tailored for performance, reliability, and practicality across varied terrains.

The brand's focus on sustainable mobility and accessible innovation reflects a commitment to transforming daily commuting while promoting environmental responsibility.

The flagship model, Lightning, combines style, comfort, and dependable performance, appealing to riders seeking independence and effortless control.

Designed to navigate Assam's rolling hills, rural roads, and urban streets alike, the Lightning is equipped with a dual portable battery system, allowing users to charge conveniently at home, office, or shared accommodations, effectively addressing range anxiety.

The vehicle's advanced Maxx Power technology, coupled with an IP67-rated motor, delivers superior torque and traction, ensuring stability on steep gradients, uneven surfaces, and water-logged roads—common challenges in Assam's terrain.

Additionally, the Voltum Graphene battery technology enhances mileage, reduces charging time, and improves lifecycle durability, offering riders long-term value while supporting sustainability goals.

E-WENT's expansion underscores the growing importance of electric mobility solutions that blend performance, safety, and environmental consciousness.

By providing innovative, India-ready scooters, the company aims to empower riders, promote eco-friendly travel, and redefine mobility across the country's diverse landscapes. (PTI)

## Power consumption on Diwali defies trend this time

**NEW DELHI, Oct 22:** Peak power demand met in the country or the highest supply of electricity on the day of Diwali dropped slightly this time compared to last year, breaching the usual trend during the festival.

According to government data, the peak power demand declined to 180.14 GW on Monday from 182.87 GW on October 31, 2024, when the festival of light was celebrated last year.

Usually, consumption of electricity as well as demand increases on Diwali due to excessive use of lights and other appliances by domestic and commercial consumers as people decorate every corner of their homes, shops and offices.

This time the festivity was staggered across the country with people in northern region celebrating on Monday and those in western and other parts on Tuesday. On Monday, the country's overall power consumption declined to 3,965 million units as against 4,062 MUs recorded on the occasion a year ago, the power ministry data showed.

On Tuesday, the peak power demand met recorded at 176.50 GW, while the consumption stood at 3,862 MUs. For the peak summer season this year, the ministry had projected the highest demand to reach 277 GW, more than the all-time high of 250 GW recorded in May last year. (PTI)

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## ULFA (I) cadre neutralised

massive operations to prevent the escape of other ULFA (I) elements and disrupt potential militant networks in the region. Security agencies continue to investigate the activities of the group, and local residents have been urged to cooperate with the ongoing operations. (With inputs from PTI)

## EC top brass reviews

exercise has concluded in Bihar, where the final list with nearly 7.42 crore names was published on September 30. The CEC had earlier this month said work is in progress to launch the SIR of electoral rolls in all states, and a final decision on its rollout will be taken by the Election Commission.

Earlier, responding to a question at a press conference to announce the Bihar assembly polls, the CEC said that a pan-India SIR was announced on June 24, while a roll-out of the Bihar SIR was still underway.

The work is on, and the three commissioners will meet to decide on dates for the states to launch their SIRs, he said. According to officials, the EC last month asked the state chief electoral officers (CEOs) at a conference here to be ready for SIR rollout in the next 10 to 15 days. But for the sake of greater clarity, a September 30 deadline was set for the comprehensive cleanup exercise.

The CEOs have been told to keep ready the electoral rolls of their states published after the last SIR.

Several CEOs have already put the voter list published after their last SIR on their websites.

The website of the Delhi CEO has the voter list from 2008, when the last intensive revision took place in the national capital.

In Uttarakhand, the last SIR took place in 2006, and that year's electoral roll is now on the state CEO website. The last SIR in states will serve as the cut-off date, just as the 2003 voter list of Bihar was used by the EC for intensive revision. Most states had the last SIR of the voter list between 2002 and 2004.

Most of the states have nearly completed mapping of current electors with the voters according to the last SIR in the state or Union Territory (UT).

The primary aim of the SIR is to weed out foreign illegal migrants by checking their place of birth.

The move assumes significance in the wake of a crackdown in several states on illegal foreign migrants, mainly from Bangladesh and Myanmar. (PTI)

## CM underscores significance

complex, a swimming pool, and a newly constructed office of the Joint Director, District Health Services. These initiatives, he said, reflect the state government's broader vision of holistic development alongside economic empowerment. The programme saw the participation of a large gathering of over 30,000 women, who sang Dr Bhupen Hazarika's iconic song "Manuhe Manuhar Babe" in unison.

Dignitaries present at the occasion included minister Keshab Mahanta; MLAs Rupak Sarma, Jitu Goswami, Dipranjan Sarma, and Shashi Kanta Das; district commissioner Debashish Sarma; and senior superintendent of police Swapnanil Deka, among other senior officials.

The chief minister's address and the seed capital distribution programme underscored the government's commitment to women empowerment, entrepreneurship, and inclusive growth, while setting a benchmark for other states to emulate in fostering socio-economic development through targeted welfare schemes.

## Normalcy restored in Tapat

discuss the territorial jurisdiction of the disputed land, which will be determined by the appropriate government authorities of both states. Community activities such as plantation, cattle rearing, and other agricultural-related work may continue with prior information and proper communication to avoid misunderstandings.

Furthermore, the harvesting of paddy will be allowed to be carried out peacefully starting October 22, 2025, and both villages are expected to amicably resolve routine disputes through mutual agreement and understanding in the future. The resolution was witnessed by senior officials including Deputy Commissioner of West Jaintia Hills, Abhinav Kr Singh; SP Jongpal Singh; SP of West Karbi Anglong, Indranil Baruah; Additional SP Faiz Ahmed Borbhuya; and Additional Deputy Commissioner Pradip K. Gupta.

## INS Sahyadri takes part

cooperation. The Indian Navy and JMSDF have been at the forefront of this growing partnership with a shared vision of a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region," it said.

Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) is the maritime warfare branch of the Japan Self-Defense Forces. The sea phase included advanced anti-submarine warfare and missile defence drills, enhancing interoperability by undertaking flying operations and underway replenishment, the officials said.

"The 'JAIMEX 25' underscores the strong and burgeoning navy-to-navy interactions that underpin the Special Strategic and Global Partnership established between India and Japan in 2014. This partnership is a crucial pillar for ensuring peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific maritime domain," an official said.

During its harbour phase at Yokosuka, the crews of INS Sahyadri and the participating JMSDF units will engage in a multitude of professional and cultural exchanges, the officials said.

The activities will include cross-deck visits, collaborative operational planning, sharing of best practices, and a combined yoga session to foster camaraderie and unity. The port call also serves as a key engagement during the ship's ongoing long range deployment to the Indo-Pacific region, they said.

Commissioned in 2012, INS Sahyadri is a testament to India's growing pursuit of indigenous defence technology and the nation's vision of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat'. The multi-role stealth frigate has participated in various operational deployments, bilateral and multilateral exercises. (PTI)

## Bills on 'love jihad',

added. "We will be able to tell you the details when the cabinet approves the same," Sarma said without sharing any further details. (PTI)

## Meeting between MHA

can't expect much from it. But we raised the issue of immediate release of all those who were arrested on or after September 24, including Sonam Wangchuck," he told reporters after the meeting here.

Wangchuck, arrested under the stringent National Security Act (NSA), is currently lodged in Jodhpur jail. The NSA empowers the Centre and states to detain individuals to prevent them from acting in a manner "prejudicial to the defence of India".

The maximum detention period under the NSA is 12 months, though it can be revoked earlier.

Sajad Kargil of the Kargil Democratic Alliance said the representatives of Ladakh sought the immediate release of all those who were arrested and compensation for those killed in police firing.

"We are hopeful that the government will respond positively to our demands," he said.

On October 17, the MHA announced a judicial inquiry commission headed by a retired Supreme Court judge into the violent clashes of September 24 in Leh.

According to a notification issued by the MHA, the judicial probe, to be headed by Justice B S Chauhan, a former judge of the Supreme Court, is mandated to investigate the "circumstances leading to the serious law and order situation, the police action and the resultant unfortunate deaths of four people".

Retired district and sessions judge Mohan Singh Parihar will function as judicial secretary, while IAS officer Tushar Anand will be the administrative secretary of the inquiry commission.

The September 24 clashes between security forces and protesters -- who were demanding statehood and Sixth Schedule status for the Union territory -- left four civilians dead and 90 injured, escalating a months-long agitation.

The appointment of a retired Supreme Court judge to head the inquiry directly addressed the demand by local groups for a high-level, impartial judicial investigation.

The announcement of the probe comes as an attempt to restore dialogue with the representatives of the on-going movement, the Leh Apex Body and the Kargil Democratic Alliance, which suspended talks with the home ministry's high-powered committee (HPC) following the violence.

The main issues that were on the agenda for discussions with the HPC remain the core demands of the LAB and KDA, seeking constitutional safeguards and greater political autonomy for the Union territory created in 2019. Their demands include full statehood with its own legislative assembly to ensure greater political representation and self-governance, to protect the unique culture, fragile ecosystem, and land rights of the predominantly tribal population by granting Autonomous District Councils, two Lok Sabha seats, and the formation of a dedicated recruitment body to tackle high unemployment among the local youth, and ensure job reservations for Ladakh residents. (PTI)

## Himanta wishes Amit

Maa Kamakhya and Srimanta Sankardev to "always bless him with good health and the energy to serve Maa Bharti". (PTI)

## 3rd position in forest

France (95,900 ha), Indonesia (94,100 ha), South Africa (87,600 ha), Canada (82,500 ha) and Vietnam (72,800 ha). The assessment showed that Asia is the only region to record an increase in forest area between 1990 and 2025, led by gains in China and India.

Globally, the annual rate of net forest loss has been cut by more than half, from 10.7 million hectares in the 1990s to 4.12 million hectares during 2015-2025.

The FAO said Asia's forest expansion played a key role in slowing global deforestation, which remains the highest in South America and Africa. According to the report, 20 per cent of the world's forests are now in legally established protected areas, while 55 per cent are managed under long-term plans. (PTI)

### NAME CHANGE

I have Changed my name from Md NUR UDDIN TO NUR UDDIN by swearing a notarial affidavit at Srimanta Sankardevnagar Hojai (Assam)

State government may be advised to withdraw its notification, says Saikia

## Assam LoP urges Gauhati HC for abolishing judicial commission on Zubeen Garg's death case



**GUWAHATI, Oct 22:** Leader of the Opposition in Assam Assembly Debabrata Saikia on Wednesday urged the Gauhati High Court to ask the state government to abolish the one-man judicial commission set up to probe the death of Zubeen Garg, as it contradicts several aspects of the ongoing probe by SIT.

In a letter to the Chief Justice of Gauhati High Court, the senior Congress leader also demanded the formation of a Special Bench to supervise and monitor the investigation being carried out by a nine-member SIT.

A Special Investigation Team (SIT) under the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of Assam Police is currently probing Garg's unnatural death case after more than 60 FIRs were lodged across the state.

Later, the Assam government set up a one-man judicial commission, headed by Justice Soumitra Saikia of the Gauhati High Court, to probe the mysterious death of the singer-lyricist-composer.

"That the state government may be advised to withdraw its notification...

...constituting the one-man commission of inquiry, as its continuance risks duplication, conflict, and over-complication with the ongoing SIT/CID investigations, potentially leading to evidentiary issues and delays," Saikia said.

As the SIT was formed with officers mostly from the CID wing, so they may be subsumed under a unified framework to eliminate overlaps with CID duties, he added.

"A Special Bench of the Hon'ble Gauhati High Court may be constituted to supervise and monitor the investigation that is being carried out by the SIT/CID, into the unfortunate demise of Zubeen Garg, in the interest of justice," the LoP said.

The special bench may be empowered to monitor the progress of investigations, issue suitable directions to ensure procedural fairness and compliance with BNSS provisions, coordinate international assistance and receive monthly progress reports to preserve public confidence and institutional integrity, he added.

"Such a model...would eliminate multiplicity, prevent duplicity, and safeguard against procedural impropriety, ensuring that no accused escapes accountability due to investigative lapses or bias.

"This judicially monitored oversight would reaffirm the constitutional guarantees under Articles 14 and 21, manifesting the collective resolve of judicial, executive, and legislative institutions to uphold the sanctity of the rule of law," Saikia stressed in his letter.

He urged the Chief Justice of GHC to review the matter and make recommendations to guide the Government of Assam towards ensuring a fair, credible and procedurally sound inquiry under judicial supervision.

The celebrated singer died under mysterious circumstances in Singapore on September 19 while swimming in the sea. He had gone to the Southeast Asian nation to attend the 4th edition of the North East India Festival.

Saikia in his letter also said that the legitimacy and powers of the one-man judicial commission must also be questioned as its terms of reference mirror the SIT's criminal probe, leading to inevitable conflicts and delays.

"As a single-member body, it lacks

the diverse expertise for a multifaceted international case and operates without inherent police powers, relying on advisory recommendations that cannot bind investigative agencies," he added.

Elaborating on the need to have a Special Bench, Saikia said the Supreme Court emphasised that judicially monitored investigations are indispensable where potential conflicts of interest arise due to executive control over investigating authorities.

"Respectfully adopting this principle, I submit that the nature of Late Zubeen Garg's case warrants robust judicial oversight to ensure transparency, impartiality, and independence. A free and fair investigation, adhering strictly to BNSS safeguards...is thus utmost necessary to prevent any miscarriage of justice," he added.

Saikia, in his letter also said that the SIT, led by CID Special DGP Munna Prasad Gupta, is empowered only for domestic investigations and lacks extra-territorial authority to conduct a probe

abroad, such as in Singapore without reliance on Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) or letters rogatory under BNSS Section 186.

"Indian police, including SITs, have no direct enforcement powers overseas. This jurisdictional void under the Assam Police Act renders the SIT powerless for core aspects of an international investigation, such as accessing Singaporean autopsy reports, hospital records or compelling foreign witnesses, necessitating coordination through central authorities like the Ministry of Home Affairs or CBI," he added.

The Congress leader also informed the high court that multiple and conflicting reports relating to the ongoing investigation have been selectively and improperly leaked to the media, including materials of a confidential and personal character.

"These leaks have undermined the confidentiality, fairness, and sanctity of the investigation into the unfortunate demise of Zubeen Garg," he added. (PTI)

## Acharya stresses public participation as key to achieving TB Mukht Bharat Ni-kshay Mitras playing vital role in supporting TB patients: Governor

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Oct 22:** In a significant step towards strengthening community participation in the fight against tuberculosis (TB), Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya on Wednesday adopted 100 TB patients from Kamrup Metro and Nagaon districts under the Ni-kshay Mitra initiative of the National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP) at a ceremony held at Raj Bhavan here.

During the programme, the Governor also distributed food baskets to five TB patients and felicitated five Ni-kshay Mitras and five TB Champions in recognition of their contribution to the fight against the disease. Highlighting the importance of community involvement in public health initiatives, Acharya said tuberculosis remains one of the most pressing health challenges in the country.

However, through collective efforts, compassion, and sustained community engagement, the goal of eliminating TB is within reach.

He described the adoption of 100 TB patients as both a personal responsibility and a commitment to holistic care, emphasising that TB elimination requires not only medical intervention but also social and emotional support.

Praising Prime Minister Naren-



dra Modi for transforming the national TB elimination campaign into a Jan Andolan, the Governor called for large-scale public participation to eradicate the disease.

He also lauded Assam's progress in TB control, noting that the state's testing rate has risen from 842 per lakh population in 2022 to 2,915 per lakh population, enabling early diagnosis and timely treatment.

With a 90 per cent treatment success rate, Assam is setting a benchmark in TB care and control, the Governor said.

He added that the integration of AI-based tools such as Prediction

of Adverse TB Outcomes (PATO) has enhanced early prediction of complications, improving patient outcomes.

Due to these concerted efforts, the state's TB mortality rate has dropped from 3.1 per cent to 2.4 per cent, he said.

The Governor also commended the ongoing '100-Day TB-Free India Campaign' and other initiatives led by Raj Bhavan and the State Health Department to raise awareness and provide direct support to patients.

Awareness drives are being held in educational institutions, while financial and nutritional support is

being extended to patients undergoing treatment.

Since the launch of the Ni-kshay Mitra initiative on September 9, 2022, Assam has registered over 21,600 Ni-kshay Mitras, who are playing a crucial role in providing holistic support to TB patients.

Acharya said such public participation is key to achieving a TB Mukht Bharat and appreciated the contributions of healthcare workers, government officials, and volunteers for their relentless service.

Reiterating his commitment to supporting TB patients and strengthening the state's response, the Governor said that while medical treatment is essential, compassion and community involvement are equally vital in restoring health and dignity to TB patients.

His adoption of 100 TB patients, he added, symbolises solidarity and social responsibility, inspiring others to join the mission for a healthier Assam and a TB-free India.

The event was attended by Commissioner and Secretary, Health and Family Welfare Dr P Ashok Babu; Commissioner and Secretary to the Governor SS Meenakshi Sundaram; senior officials from the Raj Bhavan, National Health Mission, and State TB Cell, NTEP Assam, along with other dignitaries.

## New employment initiative launched for youth in Karbi Anglong districts

HT Bureau

**DIPHU, Oct 22:** A new employment initiative has been launched to provide job opportunities and skill development support for educated unemployed youth in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong districts.

The programme aims to empower young people from rural and economically weaker backgrounds by connecting them with government and private sector employment.

The Employment Department, in coordination with local administrative bodies, will organise registration camps and awareness sessions to guide applicants on career options, interview preparation, and schemes under state and central government missions.

Priority will be given to candidates with technical or vocational education and those from backward areas seeking sustainable livelihoods.

Officials at the launch emphasised the importance of bridging the gap between youth talent and employment demand, ensuring that all eligible candidates have access to fair and transparent recruitment opportunities. The initiative reflects the government's ongoing commitment to reducing unemployment and promoting self-reliance among the region's youth.

## CM Sarma to visit Barak Valley to unveil key projects, boost grassroots empowerment

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Oct 22:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is scheduled to embark on a two-day visit to the Barak Valley, covering Cachar and Sribhumi districts, on October 24 and 25, 2025.

The visit will include a series of official and public engagements aimed at accelerating the State Government's development and welfare initiatives in southern Assam while strengthening its outreach at the grassroots level.

Sarma will begin his tour at RK Nagar in Sribhumi district, where he will attend a ceremonial cheque distribution programme at 11 AM under the Mukhyamantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan (MMUA) for the RK Nagar Legislative Assembly Constituency (LAC).

The event will underscore the Government's continued efforts to promote self-reliance and entrepreneurship, enabling thousands of beneficiaries to start new ventures and contribute to Assam's economy. Following the RK Nagar engagement, the chief minister will proceed to Silchar, where he will attend another MMUA cheque distribution programme for the Silchar LAC at 1 PM at the Police Parade Ground.

The event is expected to draw a large gathering of beneficiaries and community representatives, reflecting the Government's commitment to empowering women, youth, small traders, and self-help groups through sustainable livelihood support.

At 4:30 PM, Sarma will visit the Silchar Medical College and Hospital (SMCH) to attend the foundation

stone-laying ceremony of the proposed 200-bedded Super Speciality Hospital. The upcoming facility is expected to transform healthcare infrastructure in Barak Valley, providing advanced treatment and specialised services for people of southern Assam and adjoining states.

Later in the evening, at 5:15 PM, the chief minister will participate in a BJP Booth President and Shakti Kendra meeting for the Silchar Lok Sabha Constituency at the Grand Palace Hall, Silchar.

The interaction is expected to strengthen organisational coordination, enhance communication between leadership and local cadres, and reaffirm the party's commitment to inclusive governance and public service.

On October 25 (Saturday), Sarma will inaugurate the newly constructed Binnakandi Mandal BJP Office at 10:00 AM and the Lakhipur Mandal BJP Office at 10:40 AM.

These inaugurations will further consolidate the party's organisational base in rural Cachar, enhancing its connection with the people at the grassroots. Later, at 11:45 AM, the chief minister will attend a cheque distribution programme under MMUA for the Lakhipur LAC at Laboc Field, Cachar, bringing another group of beneficiaries under the flagship self-employment initiative aimed at fostering economic independence among rural citizens.

Sarma is scheduled to return to Guwahati later in the afternoon on October 25.

## Hotels, restaurants in Jorhat directed to conduct monthly drinking water quality tests

HT Correspondent

**JORHAT, Oct 22:** The Jorhat District Commissioner has directed all hotels, restaurants, guest houses, homestays, and similar establishments in the district to get their drinking water tested regularly to ensure safety and quality.

According to the order, all such establishments providing drinking water to guests or the public must conduct water quality tests from the District Level Laboratory (DLL) or the Sub-Division Level Laboratory at Titabar under the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED), or from any PHED-authorized or recognised laboratory.

The tests must be carried out every month, and the reports are to be submitted to the Additional District Commissioner (Health), Jorhat, by the seventh day of each month.

The testing shall include essential physical, chemical, and microbiological parameters as prescribed by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) for drinking water. The PHED, Jorhat, has been instructed to facilitate timely testing services and maintain a centralised record of all reports.

The order warned that non-compliance would attract action under the provisions of the Public Health Act, the Food Safety and Standards Act, and other applicable laws. It stated that the directive aims to safeguard public health and ensure access to safe and potable drinking water for all consumers in Jorhat district.

## Mid-Term CME on Anaesthesiology concludes successfully at Tinsukia

HT Correspondent

**TINSUKIA, Oct 22:** The Mid-Term Continuing Medical Education (CME) programme on Anaesthesiology concluded successfully at Tinsukia on October 20.

The two-day event, held on October 19 and 20, 2025, was organised by the Indian Society of Anaesthesiologists (ISA), Dibrugarh City Branch, under the aegis of the ISA Assam State Branch.

Organising Secretary and Professor & Head of the Department of Anaesthesiology, Tinsukia Medical College, Dr Dhruva Jyoti Borgohain, expressed heartfelt gratitude to everyone who contributed to making the event a grand success. He acknowledged the invaluable support of Prof Karuna K Das, Prof Anjana Hazarika, Prof Diganta Saikia, Dr Bijoy Ahir, Dr Irine Beypi, Dr Arindam Phukan, the postgraduate students of Anaesthesiology from AMCH, Dibrugarh, and the faculty members of Tinsukia Medical College, along with many others who worked tirelessly behind the scenes.

The presence of Prof R M A M Bora and Dr Beenapani Hazarika added immense academic and moral value to the CME.

Prof Sujata Ghosh, GC Member of ISA National, Kolkata, also attended the event, while Dr Deepankar Sarma, President of ISA Assam, extended unwavering support throughout.

## Fire breaks out in gas pipeline at Demow

HT Correspondent

**DEMOW, Oct 22:** A fire erupted in a gas pipeline at Demow Kaliapani in Lakhminagar on Tuesday night, creating panic among local residents.

According to reports, flames were observed coming from a section of the Assam Gas Company's pipeline, prompting immediate concern among the people living in the vicinity. Residents of the area promptly alerted the local fire brigade and Demow Police about the incident.

A combined team of fire brigade personnel and police officers quickly reached the site to assess the situation and take necessary action.

## NPS Teachers and Employees Unity Forum meeting held in Sivasagar

HT Correspondent

**SIVASAGAR, Oct 22:** The NPS Teachers and Employees Unity Forum, in a meeting held in Sivasagar on Wednesday and chaired by its president Dr Simanta Barua, renewed its demand for the reintroduction of the Old Pension Scheme (OPS) by the government.

The meeting began with a wreath-laying ceremony at the portrait of the recently deceased artist Zubeen Garg.

Speaking on behalf of the teachers of the undivided Sivasagar district, retired teacher Tarun Chandra Nath explained in detail how the government had deprived teachers of their rights after retirement and compelled them to depend on the New Pension Scheme (NPS).

The meeting was also attended by retired Headmaster Jagat Borthakur, who taught for 33 years without pay increments.

He said he had guided many students who went on to become doctors, engineers, and professors, yet could not provide higher education to his own children due to financial hardship.

The Forum urged the government to implement

OPS instead of NPS and UPS for government employees.

Teachers Dinmani Bhuyan and Prashant Bora highlighted the adverse impact of NPS on their mental health and family well-being.

Professor Dhruvajyoti Barthakur stressed that employees should pursue their demands through proper government channels and remain united until a positive outcome is achieved.

Members Manik Chetta and Nripendranath Sharma demanded that all teachers regularised between 2013 and 2021 be brought under the old pension policy.

The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks by Secretary Bandana Bora.

It was unanimously decided to submit a memorandum to the chief minister and education minister of Assam through the Sivasagar District Commissioner.

Dr Barua urged all NPS teachers and staff to write #JusticeForNPS on social media to strengthen the campaign.

The meeting was attended by hundreds of teachers, professors, and staff.

## Mega Health Camp held for Rangapara LAC under 'Susrusa Setu 2025'

HT Correspondent

**TEZPUR, Oct 22:** A LAC-wise Mega Health Camp for the Rangapara Legislative Assembly Constituency (LAC), organised under the "Susrusa Setu 2025" initiative of the Government of Assam, was held on Wednesday at Rangapara Higher Secondary School, Rangapara, Sonitpur.

The programme was launched during the "Seva Hi Samarpan: Seva Saptah" campaign.

The camp was inaugurated by Rangapara MLA Krishna Kamal Tanti in the presence of District Commissioner Ananda Kumar Das, Sonitpur; Co-District Commissioner of Rangapara Smti Kabita Kakati Konwar; ADC (Health) Twahir Alam; Rangapara Municipal Board Chairperson Hari Sadhan Das; Joint Director of Health Services (i/c) Dr Rupak Baruah; Inspector of Schools; District Programme Manager, NHM; the school principal; and other dignitaries and health officials.

The health camp recorded around 2,714 registrations by the time of reporting.

Facilities included 10 registration desks, two Mobile Medical Units, a General Laboratory, 10 Specialist OPDs, a General OPD, an AYUSH OPD, and a Cancer Screening Facility.

Over 200 health personnel, including doctors, lab technicians, ASHA and ANM workers, and officials from the Social Welfare Department (who also set up a stall on Nutrition and



POSHAN), provided services to beneficiaries.

Organised under the Department of Health & Family Welfare, the "Susrusa Setu 2025" health camps aim to provide comprehensive screening for children aged 0-18 years, covering around 59 diseases and health conditions,

including congenital heart diseases, neurological disorders, cleft lip and palate, congenital malformations, and endocrine and haematological disorders.

General health check-ups and wellness activities were also integral components of the camp.

## GM of NFR inspects Guwahati Rly Station ahead of festive rush

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Oct 22:** The General Manager of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR), Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, inspected Guwahati Railway Station on Wednesday to review preparedness for the anticipated increase in passenger footfall during the festive season.

The station handles around 48,970 passengers daily, with numbers expected to rise to 65,000 during peak travel.

Shrivastava reviewed crowd management arrangements, holding areas, passenger amenities including drinking water, toilets, and seating, as well as real-time monitoring through CCTV and control rooms. Additional RPF and GRP personnel have been deployed in shifts, and queue management with barricades and rope lines has been implemented.

Drones and Segway scooters are also being used for enhanced security.

To meet the heightened demand, NFR has introduced 620 special train trips, improving connectivity to major cities like Bengaluru, Delhi, and Kolkata.

Shrivastava emphasised continued vigilance and teamwork to ensure safe and comfortable travel for passengers during the festive period.

## KMSS, CMSS end 48-hour protest demanding justice for Zubeen

HT Correspondent

**SIVASAGAR, Oct 22:** The Krishak Mukti Sangram Samity (KMSS) and Chatra Mukti Sangram Samity (CMSS) on Wednesday concluded their 48-hour hunger strike in Sivasagar demanding early justice for Zubeen Garg and his bereaved family.

Addressing the gathering, Bidyut Saikia, Central Secretary of KMSS, criticised the BJP government for what he termed as its double standards in taking to the streets to demand justice for Zubeen. He said the government has failed to ensure an impartial investigation into the mysterious circumstances surrounding the artist's death.

Saikia also attacked Union Minister of State Pabitra Margherita, calling him a "dalal", and alleged that the minister had a role in organising the North East Festival but has remained silent on Zubeen's death case.

He further questioned the government funds granted to Festival Mahanta's North East Festival and the appointment of Siddharth Sarmah as the Cultural In-charge of BJP Yuva Morcha.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*There is nothing permanent except change. Heraclitus*

## Unemployment scenario

Unemployment rate in India worsened again in September 2025. Sharpest rise registered in youth unemployment which stood at 15 per cent in Current Weekly Status (CWS) for the age group 15-29 years, while it was 5.2 per cent for the age group 15 years and above, and for all ages it was 5.3 per cent. Periodic Labour Force Survey monthly bulletin for September 2025 shows that youth unemployment increased from 14.6 per cent in August, and 13.8 per cent in April. In the month of June youth unemployment rate was as high as 15.3 per cent. For all age group, unemployment rate increased to 5.3 per cent in September, from 5.1 per cent in August, and 5.2 per cent in July. For age group 15 years and above, unemployment rate increased to 5.2 per cent in September from 5.1 per cent in August. Female unemployment rate among youth remained at 17.8 per cent in September compared to August, which was 14.4 per cent in April. Unemployment rate among male youth stood at 13.9 per cent in September as against 13.5 per cent in August, and 13.6 per cent in April. Youth unemployment rate in urban areas was however as high as 18.5 per cent in September as against 18 per cent in August, and 17.2 per cent in April.

Unemployment rate in rural areas was however much less than urban areas, which stood at 4.6 per cent in September, 4.3 per cent for females, and 4.7 per cent for males. Nevertheless, unemployment rate among youth in the rural areas was as high as 13.3 per cent in September, 14.1 per cent among females and 13.0 per cent in males. Between April and September, there was sharp rise in female unemployment rate in the rural areas from 10.7 per cent to 14.1 per cent while for male it remained at 13 per cent. Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in CWS for persons of age 15 years and above in the country stood at 55.3% in September 2025. For persons of age 15 years and above in rural areas it was 57.4% and for urban areas it was 50.9%.

The data speaks for itself. There has been worsening scenario in the labour market, worse in urban areas than in rural areas, and worse for females for all age groups in both urban and rural areas compared to males. The data contradicts the Modi government's repeated claim that India's labour market is improving. Only a month ago Union Minister of Labour and Employment Dr Mansukh Mandaviya had claimed referring World Economic Forum that India's unemployment rate was 2 per cent which was lowest among G20 nations, but his government's own data for September 2025 falsify all such fake claims.

## Economic crisis and the arduous struggle of middle-class life

When a country's economic foundation weakens, it impacts every stratum of society, but the deepest wounds are typically borne by the middle class. The middle class, who sustain their lives through hard work and limited resources, find themselves trapped in a peculiar predicament during such crises. Unlike the wealthy, who are cushioned by abundant resources, or the poor, who may access various government schemes, the middle class often lacks such safety nets. Their lives seem to rest on a delicate balance, where even a slight external economic disturbance can upend their entire existence. In such circumstances, it is imperative to deeply reflect on the intensity of the middle class's struggle and the uncertainties they face.

The root causes of an economic crisis are typically embedded in a complex interplay of multiple factors. These include political instability, flawed economic policy planning, barriers to international trade, and excessive dependence on a single resource or industry. When a nation's economy relies heavily on one resource, even minor market fluctuations can disrupt its economic equilibrium. This leads to a devaluation of the country's currency, causing the prices of daily essentials to rise at an alarming rate. For ordinary people, the cost of living becomes unbearable. The middle class bears the brunt of this situation, as their income is limited, yet they must maintain a certain standard of living. For them, rising prices mean cutting back on every aspect of life. From food to education, healthcare, and other essential expenses, they face increasing struggles. This struggle creates a sense of instability in their lives, where they remain perpetually anxious about meeting their family's basic needs. This economic instability disrupts the natural flow of their lives, forcing them to live with an uncertain fear about their future.

A defining characteristic of middle-class life is their continuous effort to maintain a balanced existence with limited resources. Typically, these individuals earn their livelihood through hard work, relying on jobs, small businesses, or independent professions. While these income

sources are generally stable, they become vulnerable during economic crises. As the prices of goods soar, sustaining life with this limited income becomes increasingly difficult. Middle-class families meticulously plan their monthly budgets, but rising prices disrupt this balance. For an average middle-class family, an increase in the price of an essential item affects their entire monthly expenditure. They may have to cut back on their children's education or compromise on healthcare. Such sacrifices gradually erode their quality of life, leading to heightened mental stress. This stress strips away the simple joys of daily life, forcing them to constantly struggle to meet their family's basic needs. This struggle fosters a sense of helplessness, where they live with a persistent, uncertain apprehension about their future.

The role of the government becomes crucial in such times, though its policies often focus more on the poor than the middle class. The poor benefit from various free schemes, ration systems, and other forms of assistance, which are undoubtedly essential for that segment of society. However, the middle class is typically excluded from such aid. Their income level disqualifies them from government schemes, yet they lack the means to meet all their needs independently. This leaves the middle class caught between the rich and the poor. For the wealthy, price increases have negligible impact, as their vast resources allow them to maintain their standard of living in any situation. But for the middle class, the effect of rising prices is palpable in their daily lives. They must meticulously account for every expense, and each price hike directly impacts their life's balance. This situation creates a sense of instability, where they must constantly struggle to meet their family's basic needs.

Inflation is one of the most significant consequences of an economic crisis. When a government prints excessive currency, its value depreciates, and the prices of goods rise abnormally. In such conditions, even if people have money, its purchasing power diminishes, making it difficult to afford essentials. For the middle class, the impact of inflation is par-



ticularly devastating. Their income generally remains fixed, while their expenses continue to rise. This disparity forces them to sacrifice their quality of life. If a significant portion of their monthly income is spent on food, saving for education or healthcare becomes nearly impossible. This situation increases mental stress within the family, and life's simple pleasures become increasingly unattainable. They may have to compromise on their children's education or skimp on healthcare for family members. This creates a sense of frustration, where they grapple with guilt over failing to fulfill their family's responsibilities.

When a country's economy weak-

ens, business and trade decline, leading to fewer employment opportunities. Many middle-class individuals rely on jobs or small businesses for their livelihood. When these sectors face crises, their income sources shrink. The fear of unemployment further impacts their mental health. In such situations, they may have to take up jobs mismatched with their skills or work for meager wages. This affects their self-esteem and social standing, creating a kind of existential crisis. This crisis also impacts their families, as they struggle harder to meet basic needs.

Moreover, governments often announce numerous free schemes or financial aid for political gains or popularity, distributing benefits to a

large number of recipients. This depletes the nation's economic reserves, increasing national debt and deepening the economic crisis. The middle class bears the heaviest burden of such policies, as they are excluded from these benefits but must endure the resulting inflation and price hikes. Their lives become trapped in a relentless cycle of struggle. They work harder to meet their family's needs, but their efforts often fall short. This creates a sense of frustration, where their hard work does not yield the expected results. Additionally, the middle class bears the responsibility of regular expenses for their children's education, parents' healthcare, and other family needs. During an economic crisis, fulfilling these obligations becomes increasingly difficult. They may have to lower the quality of their children's education or skimp on medical expenses for their parents. This situation profoundly affects their mental health, with guilt over failing to meet family responsibilities adding to their stress. They are unable to save for their children's future or plan for their own retirement, creating a pervasive sense of uncertainty.

During an economic crisis, the middle class adopts various strategies to maintain their quality of life. Some seek additional work, others try to reduce expenses, and some rely on savings. However, these strategies are not always effective. Extra work takes a toll on their physical and mental health, and limited savings cannot be relied upon long-term. Consequently, a shadow of un-

certainty looms over their lives. They constantly fear what the next month will bring or whether their income sources will remain stable. This fear creates a sense of instability, forcing them to perpetually struggle to meet their family's basic needs. Additionally, they participate in social activities, but during economic crises, such engagements diminish. They may be unable to attend cultural events or provide their children with higher education opportunities. This affects their social standing, leading to feelings of isolation, which further impacts their mental health.

The economic crisis leaves them unable to save for their children's future or plan for their old age, fostering a sense of fear. They constantly worry about what lies ahead or whether their income sources will remain stable. This anxiety affects their mental health, leaving them feeling lonely and helpless. This situation creates a sense of despair, where their hard work fails to yield the desired outcomes.

To address the middle class's struggles during an economic crisis, practical steps are necessary. First, the government must pay greater attention to the needs of the middle class, introducing specific schemes such as low-interest loans, educational assistance, or healthcare benefits. Second, the middle class must become more prudent in financial planning, controlling expenses and prioritizing savings. Third, they should unite with other societal groups to advocate for their rights, raising their concerns with the government and participating in economic policy decision-making. These steps could bring stability to their lives and alleviate the intensity of their struggles.

The struggle of the middle class during an economic crisis is a universal issue. This class forms the backbone of society, contributing to its progress through hard work and responsibility. However, when their lives are constrained by economic crises, the entire society feels the impact. Therefore, addressing the needs of the middle class and taking steps to resolve their struggles is critical. Ensuring stability in their lives will pave the way for the overall progress and prosperity of society.

## DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

## Teenagers should not be able to see objectionable content on Instagram

By: Dr Satyavan Saurabh

In this digital age, social media has become an integral part of life. Children and adults alike spend a significant portion of their daily lives on Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and other platforms. However, as the appeal of this virtual world has increased, so too have its associated dangers. Teenagers, whose thinking, attitudes, and behaviors are still developing, are the most affected. For teenagers lost in the glare of social media, this platform sometimes serves as a learning medium, but it also often causes mental, emotional, and social imbalance. Addressing these concerns, Instagram's parent company, Meta, has taken a significant step. The company has announced that teenagers under the age of 18 will no longer be able to view objectionable or inappropriate content on their Instagram accounts.

This decision is extremely important not only from a technical perspective but also from a social perspective. Adolescence is a time when a person's mind is most sensitive. What is seen, heard, and felt at this age determines the direction of their future lives. Easy access to violent, sexually suggestive, or depressing content on social media unwittingly leads children down a path from which it becomes difficult to return. Mental problems such as suicidal tendencies, depression, insecurity, and low self-esteem are deeply linked to the unrestrained world of social media. In such a situation, this decision by META is certainly a responsible initiative.

Meta's policy comes at a time when there's a serious debate worldwide about the safety of children on social media platforms. Parliaments and courts in several countries have questioned social media companies about their actions to protect the mental well-being of minors. Instagram has previously faced questions about teen online safety, with committees ranging from the US Congress to the British Parliament. Former Meta employees have also revealed that Instagram's algorithm deliberately suggests potentially mentally destabilizing content to keep teenagers engaged. Following criticism, the company introduced parental supervision tools, but they were limited. Now, the company has decided to take this step further by implementing a PG-13-based content filtering system.

Under this new system, parents will have the right to monitor their children's activities. Users under the age of 18 will not automatically see content on Instagram that is violent, sexual or suicidal. This system will work through a filter which will be similar to the PG-13 rating system of Hollywood films. Just as a film is given this rating when it is considered suitable for children above 13 years of age, similarly, the suitability of content on

Instagram will now be decided by the same standard. The company claims that this feature will be implemented first in America, Britain, Canada and Australia and will be implemented worldwide including India by the end of the year.

This step is significant because India ranks among the world's top social media users. Millions of teenagers are active on Instagram daily. School-age children are so engrossed in posting selfies, creating Reels, and garnering likes that real-life sensibilities and priorities are being left behind. Teens' self-worth is now determined by the number of followers they have and the number of likes their posts receive. This is a new and dangerous form of social acceptance. When a post doesn't receive the desired response, teens begin to sink into guilt and depression. Sometimes, this despair leads them to suicidal thoughts. If Instagram can keep teens away from objectionable content, it will be extremely beneficial for their mental balance and emotional development.

Parents will also feel relieved by this move. They will no longer fear that their children are accidentally led astray or exposed to pornographic content. Through "restricted content settings," they will be able to determine what their children should and should not see. This will also improve family communication, as parents will now be able to provide both monitoring and guidance. Children will also realize that social media is not just a medium for entertainment, but a platform to be used responsibly.

However, this policy will only succeed if social awareness is increased along with technological security. Simply installing filters will not completely solve the problem. Children are always one step ahead of technology. They find ways to circumvent restrictions. Therefore, it is essential to promote digital literacy in schools, families, and society. Children should be taught what is right, what is wrong, and why certain things are being restricted. Unless they understand the reasons, they will view restrictions not as control but as resistance. It's also worth considering that the definition of "objectionable content" can vary across societies and cultures. What's considered inappropriate in one country may be normal in another. Therefore, such regulations, which are enforceable globally, must take into account cultural diversity and local sentiments. Meta will need to ensure that its algorithms understand local languages and social sensitivities. This will be a major challenge in a multilingual country like India.

Another important aspect is that social media companies often prioritize profits, not ethics. More users mean more advertising and more revenue. Therefore, keeping teenagers off the platform or limiting their content could go against the company's economic interests. Therefore, it

will be interesting to see how seriously Meta implements this new policy. If it turns out to be merely a cosmetic measure, its purpose will be defeated.

This global initiative to regulate social media also serves as a signal to governments. The digital world has become so influential that mere moral appeals will no longer suffice. Just as there is a system of censorship for films, advertisements, and TV programs, balanced and independent monitoring institutions are essential for social media. Governments should ensure that companies not only declare policies but also create transparent mechanisms for their compliance. Parents should also be empowered to monitor their children's digital habits.

Teens need to understand that their true identity isn't determined by the number of likes or followers on Instagram. Self-respect, self-confidence, and social support are the true values of life. The digital world cannot replace the real world. If children understand that social media is a means, not an end, its positive potential is immense.

Meta's decision points to a human-centered approach, not just a technological fix. At a time when teens in many parts of the world are facing suicide, cyberbullying, and online abuse, such initiatives offer a ray of hope. However, it's also crucial that social media companies maintain transparency. Parents receive regular reports, children evaluate their own digital behavior, and educational institutions incorporate this topic into their curriculum.

Numerous studies have shown that excessive social media use contributes to anxiety, sleep deprivation, and a decline in self-satisfaction among adolescents. The tendency to constantly compare themselves to others leads them to develop an inferiority complex. In their pursuit of the "perfect body," "glamorous lifestyle," and "world of filters," they become increasingly disconnected from reality. If Meta can mitigate these risks through its new system, it will be a significant achievement for society.

However, this shouldn't be limited to teenagers. Adults also need to regulate social media. Fake news, hate speech, and misinformation have become a challenge to democracy. Therefore, Meta's initiative in this direction can serve as an example for other platforms.

Ultimately, this decision represents a highly commendable step toward the safety, mental health, and moral development of adolescents. Technology is meaningful only when it serves the common good. Meta's initiative is an extension of this spirit. If this policy is implemented with complete seriousness and transparency in the future, it will prove to be a significant step toward a healthy digital culture, not only for adolescents but for every segment of society.

## Assam's festivals without Zubeen's voice

*The festival of lights, has always been a time of joy and togetherness in Assam, as it is across India. Zubeen's songs, with their infectious energy and emotional resonance, were a staple of these celebrations*

By: Satyabrata Borah

The absence of Zubeen Garg has cast a profound shadow over Assam's festivals and cultural landscape. His voice, a cornerstone of Assamese music, has long been synonymous with the state's identity, resonating through its celebrations and weaving itself into the fabric of its traditions. This year, the first Kati Bihu without Zubeen's melodies felt incomplete, as did the Diwali festivities that followed. As the new year approaches, the thought of another celebration without his soulful voice fills the hearts of Assamese people with a sense of loss. The vibrancy that once defined these occasions seems to have dimmed, and a quiet sorrow lingers where joy once flourished. This article explores the impact of Zubeen Garg's absence on Assam's cultural ethos and reflects on his enduring legacy.

Zubeen Garg was more than a singer; he was a cultural icon whose voice breathed life into Assam's traditions. His songs transcended mere entertainment, becoming anthems that captured the essence of Assamese life. From the serene spirituality of Kati Bihu to the exuberance of Diwali and the hope of a new year, Zubeen's music infused every moment with depth and emotion. His voice carried the stories of Assam's villages, its rivers, and its people, blending modernity with tradition in a way that resonated with all generations. Whether it was the soulful strains of a Bihu song or the heartfelt lyrics of a romantic ballad, Zubeen's music spoke to the heart of every Assamese, creating a shared sense of identity and pride.

Kati Bihu, with its quiet reverence and connection to nature, has always been a time for reflection and gratitude. The flickering lamps in the fields and the soft glow of the moonlit nights were once accompanied by Zubeen's melodies, which added a layer of spiritual depth to the festival. His songs, often rooted in the simplicity of rural life, captured the essence of Assam's agricultural heritage. This year, however, the absence of his voice left the festival feeling hollow. The fields, though still bathed in the glow of lamps, seemed quieter, as if mourning the loss of a familiar melody. The absence of his music was not just a silence in sound but a silence in spirit, leaving many to wonder if Kati Bihu could ever feel the same again.

Diwali, the festival of lights, has always been a time of joy and togetherness in Assam, as it is across India.

Zubeen's songs, with their infectious energy and emotional resonance, were a staple of these celebrations. His music had the power to amplify the festive spirit, turning gatherings into moments of collective euphoria. Whether played at community events or in the intimacy of homes, his songs brought people together, creating memories that lingered long after the last firecracker faded. This Diwali, however, the lights seemed to burn less brightly. The absence of Zubeen's voice left a void that no amount of festivity could fill. The songs that once echoed through the streets were replaced by a quiet longing, a reminder of the irreplaceable role he played in Assam's cultural life.

As the new year approaches, the prospect of celebrating without Zubeen's music feels daunting. The new year in Assam is a time of hope, renewal, and optimism, often marked by music that uplifts and inspires. Zubeen's songs were the soundtrack to these moments, their lyrics weaving dreams of a brighter future. His absence casts a shadow over the anticipation of the new year, raising questions about how Assam will find its rhythm without him. The thought of welcoming another year without his voice feels like a departure from tradition, a break in the continuity of Assam's cultural narrative. For many, the new year will be a time to reflect not just on what lies ahead but on what has been lost.

Zubeen Garg's contribution to Assamese culture cannot be overstated. His music was a bridge between generations, connecting the old with the new. His ability to blend traditional Assamese folk with contemporary sounds made his songs timeless, appealing to both the young and the old. He sang of love, loss, struggle, and joy, capturing the myriad emotions that define the human experience. His songs were not just melodies; they were stories that reflected the lives of ordinary Assamese people. From the paddy fields of the Brahmaputra Valley to the bustling streets of Guwahati, his music was a constant presence, a reminder of the beauty and resilience of Assam's culture.

Beyond Assam, Zubeen's music carried the state's identity to the world. His songs, whether in Assamese or Hindi, introduced audiences far and wide to the richness of Assamese culture. He was an ambassador of Assam, his voice a testament to the state's vibrant heritage. Through his music, the world came to know the stories of Assam's rivers, its festivals, and its people. His songs were a celebration of Assamese identity, a

source of pride for those who called the state home. In his absence, there is a fear that this global connection may weaken, that the world may forget the unique beauty of Assam's cultural tapestry.

The void left by Zubeen's absence is not just a matter of missing his music; it is a loss of cultural continuity. His songs were a thread that wove together Assam's festivals, its traditions, and its people. They were a reminder of shared values, shared struggles, and shared joys. Without his voice, the festivals that once united communities feel fragmented. The sense of togetherness that his music fostered seems harder to sustain. For many, his absence feels like the loss of a part of Assam's soul, a piece of its identity that cannot be easily replaced.

Yet, Assam's cultural spirit is resilient. The state has a rich tradition of music and art, nurtured by generations of artists who have kept its heritage alive. While Zubeen's absence is deeply felt, it also opens the door for new voices to emerge. The challenge lies in finding artists who can carry forward the legacy he left behind, who can capture the essence of Assam's culture with the same passion and authenticity. The state's music scene is vibrant, with young talents waiting to make their mark. But Zubeen's voice was unique, a once-in-a-generation gift that set a high standard for those who follow.

The pain of Zubeen's absence will linger, but his legacy endures. His songs remain etched in the hearts of Assamese people, a reminder of the joy and pride he brought to their lives. They will continue to be played in homes, at festivals, and in moments of quiet reflection. His music will live on, a testament to his love for Assam and its people. The festivals may feel different without him, but they will carry forward, sustained by the memories of his voice and the spirit of a culture that refuses to fade.

In time, Assam will find ways to fill the silence left by Zubeen's absence. New artists will rise, new songs will be sung, and new traditions will take shape. But the echo of Zubeen Garg's voice will never truly fade. It will linger in the fields of Kati Bihu, in the lights of Diwali, and in the hope of every new year. His music was more than sound; it was the heartbeat of Assam, a rhythm that will continue to inspire and unite. As the state moves forward, it does so with the memory of a voice that defined an era, a voice that will forever be a part of Assam's soul.

# 4 years after Sri Lanka's worst Environmental disaster, South Asia's coasts reel from a new Spill

By: Nicholas Muller

For the past four years, Asunta, Malkanti, and Chamari Randika have come each day to clean beaches in Sarakkuwa, a coastal village near the southern end of the Negombo Lagoon in Sri Lanka.

Using rectangular metal sieves, they collect lentil-sized plastic pellets – known as nurdles – that still remain embedded in the sand. This painstaking work now relies on about 30 local women, each earning roughly 4,000 rupees (around \$13) per day in exhausting, hot conditions.

In May 2021, the cargo ship X-Press Pearl caught fire and sank, releasing 1,680 metric tons of plastic nurdles and 9,700 metric tons of polymer resins, along with numerous hazardous substances such as sodium methoxide, sodium hydroxide, nitric acid, and lithium-ion batteries.

Days after, between May 29 and July 11, billions of burnt and unburnt nurdles washed ashore. The mess centered on Pamunugama Beach in Sri Lanka, prompting a massive cleanup involving 19,000 workers. Initial contamination enveloped an 80-kilometer stretch of Sri Lanka's western coast before spreading along a vast area 750 kilometers from Negombo to the north in Mannar.

According to a United Nations report, it was the largest plastic spill ever recorded, involving an estimated 70 to 75 billion nurdles, which resist natural degradation and take hundreds of years to break down.

The 2021 spill dwarfed previous nurdle accidents, such as the 150-ton nurdle disaster in Hong Kong in 2012 and New Zealand in 2011, and spills along the coasts of Norway, France, and South Africa. Four of the largest nurdle disasters have happened in the Asia-Pacific.

Once released into the sea, nurdles rapidly disperse across wide areas driven by currents, waves, and wind, making containment close to impossible. Since 2021, nurdles have permeated Sri Lanka's beaches, coastal habitats, mangroves, and estuaries, "suffocating" local ecosystems.

Used as raw materials in plastic manufacturing, the pellets are often mistaken for food and ingested by marine life because they resemble eggs. At least 470 turtles, 46 dolphins, and eight whales have washed ashore with nurdles found inside their bodies, and others have suffered severe burns likely caused by chemicals from the ship.

Sri Lankan marine biologist Dr. Asha de Vos, executive director of Oceanswell, has helped map confirmed nurdle sightings through the Nurdle Tracker crowdsourcing project, which shows the presence of nurdles far from the spill site – even on Sri Lanka's east coast and remote Maldivian islands.

Currents will continue to carry nurdles ashore for years, both locally and further afield, polluting vital ecosystems like the Negombo Lagoon. Scientists also predict monsoon shifts will trap pellets within the Indian Ocean for decades, with nurdles expected to reach countries' shores ranging from Indonesia to Somalia.

The environmental menace wrought by nurdles is part of a larger surge in plastic production and trade. Nearly half of the global plastic pellet trade now occurs in the Asia-Pacific, heightening the risk of spills along some of the world's busiest shipping lanes where vulnerable island nations like Sri Lanka sit.

Plastic nurdles rank as the world's second-largest source of primary microplastic pollution, behind only tire dust, according to Scottish charity Fidra. Over 4.5 million tons of nurdles are es-

timated to have entered the environment directly from the plastic supply chain, enough to blanket a city the size of Bangkok.

Annually, an estimated 11.5 trillion nurdles enter the ocean, adding to the already existing total of 57 trillion microplastic particles in marine environments.

Recent research from Manchester Metropolitan University reveals these pellets increasingly act as "chemical sponges," absorbing dangerous pollutants from the ocean. The toxic burden of nurdles is especially severe for those scorched in the ship's fire, which contain hazardous metals such as arsenic, lead, cadmium, and carcinogens like bisphenol A and polyaromatic hydrocarbons.

"The key thing is that the X-Press Pearl disaster was particularly complicated due to the fire burning the nurdles. That creates complex compounds," explains de Vos.

Her July 2023 study confirmed that burnt plastic (pyroplastic) from the incident contains chemicals disrupting hormone, metabolism, and stress-related genes in humans and fish. The toxic effects from burnt plastic are stronger and longer-lasting than unburnt plastics, vary across species, and raise serious ecological and health concerns. Researchers recommend treating pyroplastic as a hazardous form of pollution in environmental risk assessments and cleanup strategies.

After the disaster, the Sri Lankan government convened a 40-member expert panel co-chaired by Professor Prasanthi Gunawardena of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura to evaluate the disaster's environmental and economic damage. Total losses are estimated around \$6 billion, including over \$1 billion in damage to the fishing industry. However, shipowners have tried to discredit these findings.

In 2024, the newly elected Sri Lankan government pledged to secure adequate compensation for victims. But shipowners and insurers claim they have paid sufficient sums in compensation and place responsibility for the accident on the Colombo Port. Fishermen in Negombo report only modest one-time payments that failed to cover their losses.

Many women still cleaning beaches are married to fishermen whose livelihoods collapsed after the spill struck at peak fishing season. In Negombo, a major fishing hub, nurdle pollution triggered months-long fishing bans devastating household incomes and forcing an estimated 20,000 families to abandon the industry, which accounts for roughly 2 percent of Sri Lanka's GDP.

Hemantha Withanage, chairperson of the Center for Environmental Justice in Colombo, warns that pollutants enter the local food chain via fish, crabs, and shrimp, posing unresearched long-term health risks to both communities and seafood consumers.

Persistent contamination fears have eroded consumer confidence in seafood, compounding economic and psychological stress of fishermen.

"We are still paying off the massive debts from when fishing halted," says Malkanti, whose husband developed a serious heart condition and depression after the disaster.

## Asia's Plastic Boom Amplifies Risks

According to a 2023 OECD report, international trade and transboundary plastic waste movements contribute up to 65 percent of plastic found in coastal and island nations, most imported from external sources.

U.N. experts warn that without urgent agreements to curb plastic production, projected to rise 70 percent by 2040, global plastic waste could become unmanageable within a decade.

In mid-August 2025, U.N. negotiations for a



global plastics treaty collapsed after delegates failed to agree on specifically binding measures addressing marine waste and plastic pellets.

Sri Lanka joined over 100 nations advocating production limits and binding nurdle regulations, while India sided with oil-producing countries like Saudi Arabia and Russia, emphasizing recycling and waste management instead. Ultimately, no binding international framework governs the full plastic supply chain.

Sri Lanka has urged the International Maritime Organization to classify nurdles as hazardous under the Dangerous Goods Code since the X-Press Pearl spill. This classification would mandate strict transport protocols and emergency response measures similar to those for explosives and flammable substances.

India opposes binding nurdles regulations, viewing them as raw materials rather than waste. Instead, India supports only voluntary measures, a stance criticized by environmentalists for downplaying risks to marine ecosystems and pushed at the Geneva talks to remove treaty provisions on "releases and leakages."

X-Press Feeders Executive Chairman Tim Hartnoll admitted the leak was caused by poor packaging identified by the crew while sailing through the Arabian Sea.

"Most nurdles were poorly packaged in 25-kg polybags that easily broke, dispersing contents across the ocean," says Withanage. "Ships carrying large nurdle volumes must face stricter packaging and load regulations."

## A New Unfolding Nurdle Disaster: Kerala's MSC Elsa 3

Anto Elias of the Kerala Independent Fish Workers Federation has long fought to protect traditional fishers, particularly since the MSC Elsa 3 sank off Kerala's coast on May 24, 2025. The ship spilled millions of plastic pellets in a wide area from Kochi to Tamil Nadu's Dhanushkodi, which are now showing up on Sri Lankan shores as well.

The vessel carried over 600 containers of hazardous materials including hydrazine and calcium carbide, and released oil, toxic chemicals, and nurdles into fishing grounds, damaging marine biodiversity and local trust in seafood safety. Subsequent fishing bans and equipment losses deepened the economic insecurity of people in

affected panchayats (villages).

Kerala's densely populated coastline is suffering from pollution and toxic discharges, which have further weakened already fragile fish stocks. As seen in Sri Lanka after the X-Press Pearl disaster, a fishing ban has been imposed, cutting off income for many fishing families. Women fish vendors, in particular, have lost access to markets, causing severe hardship by drastically reducing their household earnings.

"The major issue with the sinking of the ship was that very little transparency was exercised by the government in telling the people what the cargo was," Verghese adds.

Traditional fishers relying on small-scale nets also suffered gear losses worth up to 300,000 Indian rupees per net as debris and submerged containers entangled equipment. Elias explains, "Fishing is impossible now with containers in the sea. They have lost their livelihoods."

"Despite the disaster's scale, neither MSC (Elsa), Adani Port, nor the government authorities have taken meaningful steps to remove submerged containers or disclose their contents," says Elias. Elias's union has sought corporate accountability, immediate funding for cleanup efforts, and fair compensation for the affected fishermen.

Fishermen's incomes fell from roughly 14,000–15,000 rupees to about 5,000 after the collapse, prompting many to stop visiting markets within the banned fishing zone. Women's fish-related earnings declined by an estimated 62 percent.

"What the Kerala government offered was a thousand rupees compensation, which was quite inadequate. We also looked into whether women were receiving it, since men do the fishing and women handle the marketing. The impact of fish scarcity hurt both," he notes.

Activists say there is an ongoing battle against the Adani port in Trivandrum, with fishermen blaming the port for significant land erosion and displacement for coastal villages.

"Particularly the coastal villages in Trivandrum, which are highly dense, have been losing homes and land because of erosion linked to this port. The fishermen here have generally been on a warpath against the port," says Maju Verghese of Friends of the Earth India.

Kerala's coastline has already been under severe climate induced stress and human activity. The National Center for Sustainable Coastal Management's shoreline change assessment reports that 63 percent of the state's coastline is experiencing erosion, most severely near Thiruvananthapuram.

According to a September Greenpeace report, the MSC Elsa has refused to accept responsibility or pay the \$1.1 billion compensation demanded by the Kerala government.

## A Complicated Transboundary Crisis

Environmental groups including the Pearl Protectors and Greenpeace report heavy nurdle pollution caused by the MSC Elsa has now shown up along Sri Lanka's north and west coasts – in Jaffna, Mannar, Kalpitiya, Negombo, Colombo, Wadduwa, and Bentota – demonstrating how offshore spills create transboundary marine damages and wreaking havoc on ecosystems across national borders.

"Nurdles from the MSC Elsa are reaching Sri Lankan shores, spreading contamination beyond the original spill," says Withanage.

Women collecting nurdles in Sarakkuwa note the whiteness and freshness of new pellets washing up since May, distinct from the older, brownish ones.

Anita Perera of Greenpeace says, "The impacts on fishers, environment, and corporate accountability show similar patterns between the X-Press Pearl and MSC Elsa cases. Legal and corporate frameworks have hindered community recovery."

## A Vulnerable Future

In July 2025, Sri Lanka's Supreme Court ordered Singapore-based X-Press Feeders to pay \$1 billion in compensation for the 2021 disaster, with \$250 million due by September 23, which the company refused to pay.

CEO Shmuel Yoskowitz argued the judgment threatens established liability frameworks critical to maritime trade. Sri Lanka plans legal action after missed payments by X-Press, consulting the attorney general on next steps including potential contempt proceedings.

The U.N. office in Colombo told AFP that the "polluter pays" principle is embedded in international accords, such as the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea.

To the frustration of Sri Lanka, to this day, plastic nurdles are still not classified as hazardous by the International Maritime Organization.

"These plastic pellets will remain for over 100 years—they neither dissolve at sea nor on land," says Elias.

Greenpeace's Perera stresses the urgent need for robust safety mechanisms and regulations to prevent fragile pellet packaging from breaking and spreading pollution in the future.

"These plastic bags around the pellets are fragile. When containers fall out, they easily break and spread. Rules and regulations need to ensure proper mechanisms and safety nets. The Sri Lankan government has requested that plastic pellets be identified as a hazardous material," she says.

The twin maritime tragedies in Sri Lanka and Kerala, separated by four years, are now connected by a transboundary crisis and regulatory failures at the international level will continue to pose a great risk to coastal communities and ecosystems in both countries.

"Insufficient regulation on nurdle and plastic transport has left marine ecosystems highly vulnerable, and promised protective frameworks have not materialized," Elias says. "The ocean becomes a kind of dumping ground." (Courtesy: *The Diplomat*)

# India's climate transparency Gap: Why delay undermines credibility

By: Diva Shah

Nothing exposes a credibility gap faster than missed deadlines. In this case, it is India's failure to deliver its first Biennial Transparency Report (BTR) just as the world ushers in a "New Era of Climate Transparency". This delay is more than procedural; it reflects deeper structural challenges and raises critical questions about India's readiness to meet rising international expectations. These steps toward enhanced transparency are not only critical for fulfilling international reporting obligations but are equally vital for India's domestic climate strategy. In fact, current timelines suggest that reporting requirements may remain unmet until 2026. As the country expands carbon markets and performance-linked incentive schemes, credibility depends on accurate, verifiable, and publicly accessible data. Without it, risks of double-counting, weak price discovery, and malpractice in offset projects threaten active emission reduction goals. Transparency is equally vital for aligning climate finance with national priorities, revealing where interventions succeed, where gaps persist, and where funds can be most effective. Yet India's latest submissions to the UNFCCC point in the opposite direction, exposing the very weaknesses that undermine both its market ambitions and its climate credibility.

Transparency is equally vital for aligning climate finance with na-

tional priorities, revealing where interventions succeed, where gaps persist, and where funds can be most effective.

## The Current State of Transparency in India

While considering India's latest submission, the fourth Biennial Update Report (BUR), several key shortfalls can highlight India's misalignment with the new standards required under the Enhanced Transparency Framework. Under this regime, Parties (except SIDS and LDCs) are now required to submit Biennial Transparency Reports (BTRs), which demand far greater rigour than BURs. Provisions once "encouraged" are now mandatory, with expanded coverage across timeseries, projections, pollutants, and topics. Beyond the GHG inventory (now mandated to follow 2006 IPCC standards), BTRs must also include a National Inventory Report with National Inventory Document (NID) and Common Reporting Tables, reports on climate impacts, progress on NDCs, capacity, financial and technological needs, uncertainty and completeness assessments, and data quality assurance plans. These additions transform BTRs from procedural submissions into substantive accountability tools. Against this backdrop, India's continued reliance on BURs underscores capacity gaps and limited transparency.

The lack of transparency and avenues for independent verification reflects a systemic disconnect between India's domestic reporting

processes and the enhanced requirements of the global regime.

The deficiencies are evident in the data itself. In sectors such as Energy, Waste, Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry, and Agriculture, India has not provided sector-level estimates for four of the six mandated gases. Where data is available, gaps remain, with several subsectors marked as "not occurring," pointing to absent measurement or inability to estimate emissions. The BUR relies on inputs from 30 government agencies, 25 organisations, and 21 research institutes, yet their outputs are rarely accessible in analysis-friendly formats, even at a granular level. Details on collection, collation, and methodologies are often missing, undermining accountability. Most critically, institutional fragmentation results in non-standardised and disjointed data systems. Even where granular data exists (e.g., petroleum use data or coal statistics), it is not integrated into a unified, publicly accessible platform. The lack of transparency and avenues for independent verification reflects a systemic disconnect between India's domestic reporting processes and the enhanced requirements of the global regime. These disconnects, their causes and their consequences exist in plain sight.

## India's Efforts towards Raising Domestic Standards of Transparency

At their core, the capacity constraints emerge from deficiencies that exist in the system particularly



in funding, digital infrastructure, human capital, and standardisation of processes. These gaps fuel institutional fragmentation and procedural delays, undermining coordination, comparability, and efficiency. The problem is compounded by the absence of standardised aggregation practices. Where a multitude of agencies produce granular and unregulated data, the systemic machinery is bound to stagger. While long-term solutions lie in securing funding, skilled personnel, and centralised systems, the immediate priority is access and aggregation. This demands a fundamental rewiring: building stronger pathways for in-

stitutional coordination, standardising reporting norms for data collection and submission, and ensuring that raw, source, and processed data are publicly accessible.

The next steps are clear. India's limited alignment with the world's new transparency era has prompted a closer scrutiny of the underlying structural constraints. To address these gaps, it has launched major capacity-building initiatives with external support. The project "Capacity-building for Establishing an Integrated and Enhanced Transparency Framework for Climate Actions and Support Measures", led by the Global En-

vironment Facility (GEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is expected to conclude in 2026. In parallel, the same institutions are backing the preparation of India's first Biennial Transparency Report (BTR), also projected for 2026. Together, these initiatives have secured US\$ 3.8 million and US\$ 2.1 million in funding, partly drawn from the Paris Agreement's Capacity Building Initiative for Transparency (CBIT). They propose institutional mechanisms such as strengthened Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) systems, a National Climate Registry, and two digital platforms: the National Institutional Coordination System (NICS) and the National Inventory Management System (NIMS), both formally announced in India's Fourth Biennial Update Report.

India's limited alignment with the world's new transparency era has prompted a closer scrutiny of the underlying structural constraints.

NIMS, in particular, is envisioned as a centralised digital inventory supporting reporting under the Enhanced Transparency Framework, with trackable, verifiable data on greenhouse gas emissions to improve accuracy and consistency. On the other hand, the NICS initiative is meant to be an imperative system to ensure timely, accurate and verifiable data collation. Details on the designs, integration, real-time capacity, and public accessibility remain limited. For NIMS to be more than a pas-

sive repository, it must deliver granular, sector-wise data on emissions, mitigation methods, and timelines. This is critical for tracking progress toward India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). NICS is placed to address the problems caused by the current disaggregated approach that fuels roadblocks like red tape, bureaucracy and data errors. For India to be equipped with a national aggregated digital repository of information, smooth communication and coordination is paramount in ensuring complete transparency, i.e., transparency, not simply in data, but also in source.

If effectively implemented, these systems could transform India's transparency architecture from a compliance tool into a strategic asset. Establishing such a robust framework is not merely procedural; it is essential for India's participation in global carbon markets, for attracting climate finance at scale, and for ensuring that domestic climate action is both measurable and meaningful. In fact, transparency frameworks influence India's larger position in global climate discourse. Placed in the largely multilateral scenario of climate discourse, transparent data reporting fuels global cooperation and trust. Considering this, India's position as a leader in climate action within the Global South must establish transparency in climate reporting as a non-negotiable part of its climate journey. (Courtesy: *ORF*)

# Amit Shah turns 61; PM Modi, Nitish Kumar, Chandrababu Naidu laud 'hardworking' leader

**NEW DELHI, Oct 22:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah turned 61 on Wednesday, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and several other prominent leaders, including Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, greeting him on his birthday.

In a message, Modi said Shah has made commendable efforts to strengthen India's internal security apparatus and ensure every Indian leads a life of safety and dignity. "Birthday greetings to Home Minister Shri Amit Shah Ji. He is widely admired for his dedication to public service and hardworking nature... Praying for his long and healthy life," Modi wrote on X.

Shah has been a trusted ally of the prime minister for about four decades.

Extending his greetings, Union Health Minister and BJP president Jagat Prakash Nadda said Shah's

public life is an unparalleled example of dedication and organisational skills.

Due to the home minister's unwavering resolve to eradicate Naxalism, Nadda said, the battle to make the country Naxal-free is reaching a decisive turning point.

"From the expansion of the (BJP) organisation to the empowerment of ideology, you have provided new heights. I pray to God for your excellent health, long and glorious life," he wrote on X with the tagline #HappyBDayAmitShah.

Shah was the BJP president before Nadda.

In his message, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh described Shah as extremely hardworking and endowed with strong determination.

Singh said Shah is working with complete zeal to strengthen India's internal security and ensure peace and stability in the country.



"I pray to God for his long life, excellent health and continued success in the service of the nation," the defence minister said on X in Hindi.

NDA ally JD(U)'s supreme and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar also conveyed his greetings to the home minister.

"Heartfelt birthday greetings and

best wishes to the Honourable Union Home and Cooperation Minister Shri Amit Shah Ji. I wish for his healthy and long life," he said on X.

TDP chief and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu said, "Wishing Hon'ble Union Home Minister Shri Amit Shah Ji a very happy birthday. I pray for his good health and long life in the service of our great nation."

Widely known as an astute politician and master strategist, Shah was born in an affluent Gujarati family in 1964 in Mumbai.

He became a minister in Gujarat for the first time in 2002 when Modi was the chief minister. At that time, he was the youngest minister in the state government.

At one time, he held 12 portfolios -- home, law and justice, prison, border security, civil defence, excise, transport and prohi-

bitation, among others. During Modi's tenure as the Gujarat chief minister, Shah emerged as one of the most powerful leaders in the state.

Before the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, Shah was appointed as the BJP general secretary and given the charge of Uttar Pradesh, the most politically significant state.

Under Shah's stewardship, the BJP won 73 of the 80 Lok Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh.

In July 2014, Shah was appointed as the BJP president. During his tenure, the BJP expanded its organisational base in northeast, east and parts of southern India.

Shah is considered instrumental in the BJP's growth and crafting its electoral strategy, which has paid the party rich dividends since 2014.

He joined the second Modi government as Union home minister in 2019. (PTI)

## US President Trump dials Modi; extends Diwali greetings



**NEW DELHI, Oct 22:** US President Donald Trump extended Diwali greetings in a phone call to Prime Minister Narendra Modi who expected both India and the US to continue to "illuminate" the world with hope and stand united against terrorism in all its forms.

The phone conversation, initiated by the US president, came days after he claimed that PM Modi told him that India will stop buying Russian crude oil. Following Trump's comments, India suggested that there was no such conversation.

"Thank you, President Trump, for your phone call and warm Diwali greetings. On this festival of lights, may our two great democracies continue to illuminate the world with hope and stand united against terrorism in all its forms," Modi said on X. Official sources said Pakistan was not discussed during the phone conversation.

It was the third publicly known phone call between Modi and Trump since September 16 that came amid continuing strains in India-US relations over Washington slapping 50 per cent tariffs on Indian goods, including a 25 per cent levies for New Delhi's procurement of Russian oil.

On Tuesday night, Trump hosted a Diwali celebration that was attended by Indian ambassador to US Vinay Kwatra and several prominent Indian-origin business leaders.

In his remarks at the ceremony, Trump repeated his claim that India will not buy crude oil from Russia.

The US president also described PM Modi as a "great leader" and a "friend" besides referring to his trade-focused diplomacy to de-escalate tensions between India and Pakistan. The relations between New Delhi and Washington have been reeling under severe stress after Trump imposed 50 per cent tariffs on India.

India described the US action as "unfair, unjustified and unreasonable" Two weeks back, US Ambassador-designate Sergio Gort met PM Modi in New Delhi. (PTI)

## Prez Murmu's helicopter wheels sink into newly concreted landing pad

**PATHANAMTHITA (KERALA), Oct 22:** The wheels of the helicopter which carried President Droupadi Murmu for her Sabarimala visit got stuck in a depression in the newly concreted helipad at the Rajiv Gandhi Indoor Stadium at Pramadam here when it landed on Wednesday morning.

After the President left for Pamba by road, visuals on TV channels showed several policemen and fire force personnel pushing the helicopter's wheels out of the small depressions created when it landed on the concrete.

A senior police officer of the district said that the stadium was fixed as the location for landing the helicopter at the last moment and therefore, the helipad was created there late on Tuesday.

The landing was originally planned at Nilackal near Pamba, but it was changed to Pramadam due to inclement weather. (PTI)

## While Modi conceals, Trump reveals: Cong after US Prez repeats Russian oil claims



**NEW DELHI, Oct 22:** The Congress on Wednesday took a swipe at the government after US President Donald Trump repeated his claim that India is "not going to buy much oil from Russia" and said this is the fourth time in six days that the American leader has announced India's policy.

The opposition party also took a dig at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying what he conceals, "Trump reveals". The attack came after Trump spoke with Modi and greeted him on Diwali.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said, "The PM has finally acknowledged publicly that President Trump called him up and that the two spoke to each other. But all that the PM has said is that the US President extended Diwali greetings. But while Mr. Modi conceals, Mr. Trump reveals."

"On his part, the US President has said that in addition to extending Diwali greetings, he spoke of India's oil imports from Russia and that he had been assured that these imports will be stopped. This is the 4th time in 6 days that the US President has announced India's policy," Ramesh said on X.

Earlier, President Trump had first announced the stoppage of Operation Sindoor on the evening of May 10 before Prime Minister Modi did, the Congress leader said.

In a post on X on Wednesday morning, Modi said, "Thank you, President Trump, for your phone call and warm Diwali greetings."

"On this festival of lights, may our two great democracies continue to illuminate the world with hope and stand united against terrorism in all its forms," the prime minister said.

Earlier, Trump in his remarks at the White House said, "I love the people of India. We're working on some great deals between our countries. I spoke to Prime Minister Modi today and we just have a very good relationship. He's not going to buy much oil from Russia. He wants to see that war end as much as I do. He wants to see the war between Russia and Ukraine to end."

"They're not going to be buying too much oil. So they've cut it way back, and they're continuing to cut it way back," Trump said.

Taking a swipe at the government, the Congress on Tuesday had said the matter of India's imports of oil from Russia has been raised by Trump thrice in the past five days, and he has "brushed aside" the MEA's attempts at denial of any conversation in which Prime Minister Modi promised stopping Russian oil imports. The opposition party's assertion had come after Trump said India is going to pay massive tariffs if it continues to buy oil from Russia, while reiterating that he got assurance from Prime Minister Modi that New Delhi is going to halt its oil purchases from Moscow.

The Congress has also said the PM suddenly becomes a "mauni baba" whenever Trump states that he stopped Operation Sindoor or that India will reduce its oil imports from Russia. (PTI)

## 'Shauq pal': Oppn slams Lokpal after it floats tender to buy 7 BMW cars

**NEW DELHI, Oct 22:** Top anti-corruption ombudsman Lokpal drew sharp criticism from the opposition on Wednesday after floating a tender to procure seven luxurious BMW cars, with leaders accusing the "guardians of integrity" of "chasing luxury over legitimacy".

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh took a sharp dig at the Lokpal, saying the institution is now a "Shauq pal", a play on the Urdu word that loosely translates to pursuing personal interests or indulgences.

Ramesh also questioned the Lokpal's investigative track record, asking what significant arrests or probes it has accomplished.

Speaking with PTI, the Congress leader said a false narrative was created against the Manmohan Singh government with Anna Hazare, Arvind Kejriwal, "India Against Corruption" and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) indulging in propaganda, and adding that now, the reality of the Lokpal is before the people of the country.

It needs to be asked what investigations has the Lokpal carried out and whose arrests it has succeeded



in, Ramesh said.

He said the Lokpal is now more of a "shock pal", "shok (mourn) pal" and "shauq (indulgence) pal".

Senior Congress leader and former home minister P Chidambaram wondered that when Supreme Court judges are given modest sedans, why do the chairman and six members of the Lokpal require BMW cars.

"Why spend public money to acquire these cars? I hope that at least one or two members of the Lokpal have refused, or will refuse, to accept these cars," Chidambaram said in a post on X.

Senior Congress leader Abhishek

Manu Singhvi also criticised the move and took a swipe at the Lokpal.

"I chaired the Parliamentary Committee on Lokpal. Dr L M Singhvi first conceived idea of Lokpal in the early 1960s. To see this anti-corruption body now ordering BMWs for its members is tragic irony, the guardians of integrity chasing luxury over legitimacy," Singhvi said in a post on X.

In another post, he said, "8,703 complaints. Only 24 probes. 6 prosecution sanctions. And now, BMWs worth ₹ 70 lakh each. If this is our anti-corruption watchdog, it's more poodle than panther!"

## Contractual workers in Bihar govt to be made permanent if INDIA bloc comes to power: Tejashwi

**PATNA, Oct 22:** Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Tejashwi Yadav on Wednesday announced that all contractual workers engaged in various Bihar government departments and around 2 lakh 'community mobilisers' among 'Jeevika Didis' will be made permanent if the INDIA bloc comes to power in the state.

Yadav also promised that these 'community mobilisers' will be given a monthly salary of Rs 30,000 if the opposition alliance forms a government in the state after the ensuing assembly polls. Talking to reporters here, the RJD leader said that interest on loans which 'Jeevika Didis' have taken will be waived if the INDIA bloc comes to power in Bihar.

The state government is spearheading the World Bank-aided Bihar Rural Livelihoods Project (BRLP), locally known as 'Jeevika', with the objective of social and economic empowerment of the rural poor. Women associated with the project are called 'Jeevika Didis'.

A 'community mobiliser' acts as a facilitator for self-help groups (SHGs). Their main responsibility is to facilitate SHG meetings, prepare books of records, and they are also responsible for the overall nurturing of such groups.

"All the contractual workers engaged in the government departments will be made permanent. The NDA government is not bothered about the welfare of 'Jeevika Didis' in the state...They are suffering like anything. I announce that if we are voted to power, we will make around 2 lakh 'community mobilisers' among 'Jeevika Didis' permanent government employees and will give them a salary of ₹ 30,000 per month," Tejashwi said.

The former deputy CM also said the "interest on the existing loans of 'Jeevika Didis' would be waived, and the interest-free credit would be provided for the next two years", if the opposition bloc comes to power.

"Our government will also provide ₹ 5 lakh health insurance cover to all 'Jeevika Didis' in the state. They will also be given an additional ₹ 2000 as an allowance per month if they are engaged in other government activities," he promised ahead of the assembly polls.

According to estimates, more than 1.45 crore 'Jeevika Didis' are working in the state.

The RJD leader had earlier promised a government job for every household in the state "within 20 months of assuming power

in the state".

He had announced that a "new law guaranteeing employment would be introduced within 20 days of forming the government", and the scheme would be "fully implemented across the state within 20 months of taking charge of the office".

"Nomination filing for the polls is over... now full-fledged campaigning has started. This time, the people of Bihar have made up their minds for change. The people are fed up with this 'double-engine' NDA government. In this 'double-engine' government, corruption and crime have increased. People are frustrated with unemployment and migration", Yadav alleged.

The term "double engine" is used by BJP leaders to refer to the party being in power at the Centre as well as in a state.

Reacting to Yadav's announcements, Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary said, "The RJD leader is making false promises, and will never fulfil these. RJD leaders are least bothered about the people of the state. Why is he making such promises ahead of polls? He knows that people will not vote for them in the assembly elections." (PTI)

## Widespread rain batters TN, water to be released from Chennai dams

**CHENNAI, Oct 22:** Widespread rain continued to batter Tamil Nadu inundating many parts and submerging paddy crop in some of the districts.

Commuters were stranded at the Villupuram bus stand after a massive inundation.

A well marked low pressure over southeast Arabian Sea concentrated into a depression and was likely to move slowly nearly north-northwestwards during the next 24 hours, it said.

Another well marked low pressure over Southwest Bay of Bengal off Tamil Nadu coast moving northwestwards, is likely to intensify into a depression during the next 12 hours, and fetch more rains.

In Chennai, the Water Resources Department announced releasing surplus water from three reservoirs as the water level rapidly increased towards the full reservoir capacity.

"The public have been advised not to panic as water is being released in advance from Chembarambakkam, Puzhal, and Poondi reservoirs, to be let out into the sea," an official said.

Even if there is a very heavy rain, the amount of water released will be limited and it will reach the sea safely, he added.

In Chennai, the 35 feet capacity Poondi reservoir has attained 78.49 per cent water storage, while Cholavaram with a full level capacity of 18.86 feet has 42.37 per cent water. The Red Hills (Puzhal lake) of 21.2 feet capacity is brimming with 83.18 per cent water and the 24 feet high Chembarambakkam dam has 77.23 per cent water. The water level in Veeranam and Theruvoy Kandigai account for 77.23 per cent and 86 per cent against their full level capacities of 24 feet and 36.6 feet, respectively.

The heavy downpour caused a sharp rise in the storage levels in the reservoirs including Mettur Dam, the largest in the state, which attained its full level capacity. According to a source in the Water Resources Department, the Mettur dam (Stanley reservoir) in Salem district reached its full water level capacity of 120 feet, and it continued to receive a huge inflow of 36,484 cusecs. About 35,741 cusecs of water is being discharged



from the dam. It received a rainfall of 10.6 mm.

The sharp showers led to waterlogging at the Villupuram bus stand, leaving the passengers stranded. As a result, the government buses had to operate from the entrance where the passengers waded through water.

Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin inspected the Integrated Command and Control Center at the Ripon Building, here, and directed the officials to act swiftly on the complaints from the public regarding the rain.

Also, he visited many rain-hit

areas in the city along with senior officials from the Greater Chennai Corporation.

Following instruction from Chief Minister M K Stalin, the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) organised 106 kitchens to prepare and serve food to 1.46 lakh people affected by rain in the city. "Vegetable biryani and sambar were cooked and served as lunch," Chennai Mayor R Priya said in a post on the social media platform "X".

AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami visited Thanjavur, among the Cauvery

Delta districts where paddy crop was submerged, and also the paddy storage centres, and interacted with the farmers.

Later, speaking to reporters he said the farmers were in tears as the crop has been submerged. He wondered if the state government would procure the rain-soaked paddy.

"This was a tearful Diwali for the paddy farmers who lost their grains," the Leader of Opposition said.

The crop raised in about 50,000 acres was submerged due to heavy rains in Mayiladuthurai district, too.

The IMD has forecast heavy to very heavy rain likely over Chennai, Tiruvallur, Kancheepuram, Ranipet, Tiruvannamalai, Kallakurichi, Ariyalur, Perambalur, Thanjavur, Tiruvuru, Nagapattinam districts and Karaikal area.

The widespread rain forced the administration in several districts to declare a holiday for schools and colleges on Wednesday. The intermittent rain in Chennai apart, widespread showers thrashed the coastal districts. (PTI)

## Cong leaders question about RSS not being registered organisation

**BENGALURU, Oct 22:** Karnataka Minister Priyank Kharage and senior Congress leader B K Hariprasad on Wednesday raised questions about the RSS not being a registered organisation and about its funding.

They also alleged that the RSS did not register itself as an organisation so it could evade itself from complying with the government's laws and regulations.

"...throw the RSS registration on my face saying that RSS is a registered organisation. There ends the matter," Kharage, who has been constantly targeting the RSS by writing to the chief minister seeking restriction of activities in public places and disciplinary action against government employees associated with it, said in response to a question.

Speaking to reporters here, he said, "...where is the money coming from for this unregistered organisation? To stitch the clothes, to conduct marches, to purchase the drums and trumpets, to build the buildings, where is the money coming from? If you (RSS) are unregistered, how are you getting the money?"

Stating that RSS is unregistered, to ensure that they don't come under the ambit of law, the minister said, "If you are registered you will have to pay the taxes, ensure compliance under the Registrar of Companies, Society Registration Act, NGO Act. They will have to share information about foreign and private donations, and domestic funding. So they are not getting registered."

Speaking to reporters in Delhi, Hariprasad, too, raised questions about RSS not getting registered and about its funding.

"...to demand information about the funding, they should be a registered organisation. The Congress party, as well as the BJP is registered with the Election Commission of India. Where is the RSS registered?" he said.

Claiming that RSS' fund collection mode is such that, during Vijaydashami, money is given to the organisation by those donating in a cover as "Guru Dakshina", Hariprasad, an MLC, asked, have they given the account of such money collected in hundred years. (PTI)

## VS Atem thanks God for allowing the NSCN(IM) leader to return to his birthplace NSCN(IM) says Naga flag, constitution non-negotiable, rejects other pacts

**UKHRUL (MANIPUR), Oct 22:** Naga national flag and its constitution are non-negotiable and any agreement signed by the central government with Naga factions other than NSCN (IM) is not recognised, the separatist group said on Wednesday.

The statement was made by veteran NSCN(IM) leader VS Atem during a programme in Manipur's Ukhrul to welcome the outfit's general secretary, Thuingaleng Muivah, to his home district.

When contacted, there was no immediate reaction from central government officials.

Reading out a message from Muivah, who was too frail to speak, Atem said, "It is a moment of great joy for me to be with you today. My revolutionary journey began six decades ago here in 1964..

On Muivah's behalf, Atem thanked God for allowing the NSCN(IM) leader to return to his birthplace, Sordal, saying, "Many people who I knew and loved me are missing."



He also thanked "the government of India, along with the Nagaland and Manipur governments, for facilitating the itinerary to my birthplace."

Recalling the outfit's history, Atem said, "Significantly, after the formation of the NSCN, the Indo-Naga ceasefire and political peace process began on August 1, 1997. Thereafter, significant political milestones were achieved under the leadership of late chairman Isak Chishi Swu and myself as chief political negotiator."

Atem said the ongoing Indo-Naga political dialogue is based on three principles — that discussions would be unconditional, held at the highest level, and conducted in a third country.

The Centre and NSCN-IM entered into a ceasefire in 1997, beginning negotiations for a political resolution to the long-standing conflict.

After more than 70 rounds of talks, the Centre signed the Framework Agreement with NSCN-IM in 2015.

However, the Centre has not accepted NSCN-IM's persistent demand for a separate flag and constitution for the Nagas, which has led to prolonged negotiations.

The Centre also entered into parallel negotiations with the WC NNPGs, a coalition of seven Naga groups, in 2017, and inked the Agreed Position in the same year.

While the WC NNPGs have expressed willingness to accept whatever is possible and continue negotiations on other contentious demands, the NSCN-IM has declared it will not accept any solution without a separate flag and constitution.

Soon after the programme, Muivah reached his birthplace Sordal village in the Tangkul Naga-dominated Ukhrul district, located some 25 km from the district headquarters.

Muivah is scheduled to stay in the village for a week before heading back to Dimapur via Manipur's Senapati district on October 29. (PTI)

## Rijiju on 2-day visit to Mizoram for Dampa bypoll campaign

**AIZAWL, Oct 22:** Union minister Kiren Rijiju commenced his two-day visit to Mizoram on Wednesday to campaign for the BJP candidate in the November 11 Dampa assembly by-election, a party leader said.

Soon after his arrival in Aizawl, the Union Parliamentary Affairs and Minority Affairs Minister left for West Phaileng area, which falls under Dampa assembly segment in Mamit district, to campaign for BJP candidate Lalmangaiha, Mizoram BJP media convener Johny Lalthanpuia said.

He said the BJP leader will address a public rally at Reiek on Thursday and leave for Delhi the same day.

Johny said that other central BJP leaders, including Union Science and Technology and Earth Sciences Minister Jitendra Singh, will also visit Mizoram to campaign for the party candidate.

Campaign for the Dampa by-election is gaining momentum with all contesting parties putting their best efforts to woo voters.

Chief Minister Lalduhoma on Tuesday expressed confidence that his party, the Zoram People's Movement (ZPM), will win the upcoming bypoll.

He had claimed that electoral



trends in the state have historically favoured the ruling party in assembly bypolls.

Congress president Lal Thanzara, while addressing party workers at Kanghmung village on Tuesday, had accused both the ruling ZPM and opposition Mizo National Front (MNF) of earlier not fulfilling their poll promises.

The Dampa bypoll was necessitated by the death of incumbent MNF MLA Lalrinluanga Sailo on July 21.

The upcoming bypoll will see a five-cornered contest among as many political parties, according to election officials.

The last date for withdrawal of candidature is October 24, they

said. Ruling ZPM has fielded Mizo singer and preacher Vanlalsailova, main opposition MNF has nominated its senior vice president and former health minister Dr R Lalthangliana and Congress has fielded its vice president and former transport minister John Rotluangliana.

The BJP nominated its leader Lalmangaiha and a relatively small party People's Conference (PC) also fielded its vice president K Zahmingthanga.

There are 20,790 voters, including 10,185 female voters, in Dampa assembly segment, according to the final roll published on September 30. (PTI)

## On this occasion, Saha welcomed 690 voters from 200 families into the Bharatiya Janata Party Politics of division will not work in Tripura: CM



**HT Correspondent**

**AGARTALA, Oct 22:** Chief Minister Manik Saha on Wednesday said that some people are still pursuing the politics of division and conspiracy in the style of the communists, but trying to mislead the Janajati community will not be of any use.

He said that the people of Tripura believe in peace, development, and democracy, and the present state government will not tolerate the use of muscle power in the state under any circumstances.

"If anyone attacks us, we will give a befitting reply through legal means," he said.

Chief minister Manik Saha said this at the inauguration of the Takajala Mandal office on Wednesday.

On this occasion, Saha welcomed 690 voters from 200 families into the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Saha said, "Our predecessors established the Bharatiya Janata Party through self-sacrifice. Dr

Shyama Prasad Mukherjee died mysteriously in Jammu and Kashmir while trying to protect the integrity of India. The BJP continues to move forward with the ideals of Pandit Deen Dayal Ji. His body was recovered in Mughalsarai. The Karyakartas of the BJP are not afraid of any situation.

They may try to stop us or resort to violence, but such things are temporary and will not succeed in the long run. The BJP was able to wrest power from the communists by strengthening its organization."

Saha said that anyone who threatens the BJP is living in a dream.

"We all have the right to do politics, but there should be dignity in politics. We have seen the rule of the Communists and the Congress before. We witnessed incidents of murder, terrorism, rape, and arson during their regimes. The BJP believes in Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas because we must move

forward with everyone. Everyone deserves development. We are working under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi," said Saha.

He further said that the BJP Janajati Morcha is working for the development of the Janajati community, but if anyone thinks they can obstruct that development, they are mistaken.

"I have come here several times before. The house of our Mandal President was attacked. This kind of culture, in the same style as the Communists, continues again and again. We want a fair and peaceful environment to develop in Tripura. The way the Prime Minister has changed the terminology of politics, we also want to change the terminology of Tripura's politics. If someone has a point to make, they can say it. We will do whatever is necessary for our safety. We will not harm anyone, but if someone harms us unjustly, we will seek justice through legal means," said Saha.

The chief minister also said that one of the objectives of the government is to improve the socio-economic condition of the Janajati people. "Earlier, the Janajati community was used for vote-bank politics. Many parties misled them and brought them to the streets. After our government came to power, we have prioritized the development of the Janajati community," he added.

The meeting was attended by Bharatiya Janata Party state president and MP Rajib Bhatnagar, state general secretary Bipin Debbarma, tribal welfare minister Bikas Debbarma, district president Biplab Chakraborty, Takajala Mandal leader Nirmal Debbarma, and other senior party leaders.

## No-confidence motions against Kohima Municipal leaders fail for lack of quorum

**KOHIMA, Oct 22:** The no-confidence motions moved against Kohima Municipal Council (KMC) chairperson Neikhozo Suokhrie and deputy chairperson Khrieliivi Chusi failed after the meeting did not meet the required quorum.

According to official orders issued by B Henok Buchem, Deputy Commissioner of Kohima, written notices of no-confidence against both the chairperson and deputy chairperson were submitted on October 9, under Section 15 of the Nagaland Municipal Act, 2023.

In accordance with the provisions of the Act, a meeting of all elected members of the KMC, excluding ex officio and nominated members, was convened for Tuesday in the office of the KMC to deliberate on the motions. The meeting call notice was issued on October 15.

However, the Deputy Commissioner stated that only six elected members were present during the meeting, falling short of the required quorum of more than half of the total number of elected members, as mandated under Sub-Section (2) of Section 15 of the Act.

"In view of the above, the motion of no confidence has failed and is hereby declared null and void. The proceedings of the meeting stand



dissolved," the DC's order stated.

As a result, both Neikhozo Suokhrie and Khrieliivi Chusi would continue to hold their respective offices as chairperson and deputy chairperson of the KMC.

The development, which follows the earlier filing of the no-confidence notices against the two KMC leaders, signalled growing differences within the members of the civic body. The motion was moved by 10 councillors, including seven of the NDPP and three Independent councillors.

Sources said that though NDPP officially merged with NPP on October 18, and documents have been submitted to the assembly speaker, the same has not been done for any KMC.

In the 19-member KMC, NDPP has 13 councillors, three are Na-

tional Peoples' Party (NPP) councillors, and three are Independents.

Talking to PTI here, Chairperson Suokhrie and Deputy Chairperson Chusi said both of them were appointed by the party high command to lead the KMC.

"I was chosen by the party high command to be chairperson, and if they want me to relinquish, I will do so," Suokhrie said, adding that whatever has happened has happened, but henceforth all the councillors will continue to work together for the uplift and betterment of the 19 wards in the state capital. He, along with Chusi, also thanked the councillors for reposing their faith in them. Elections to the Urban Local Bodies in Nagaland were held after more than 20 years in June last year. (PTI)

## Biren Singh greets Amit Shah on birthday

**IMPHAL, Oct 22:** Former Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh on Wednesday said the state remains grateful to Union Home Minister Amit Shah for his steadfast support in fostering peace and unity among communities.

Greeting Shah on his 61st birthday, Singh, in a post on X, said, "Warm birthday greetings to Hon'ble Union Home and Cooperation Minister Shri Amit Shah ji. Your unwavering dedication to the nation continues to inspire millions."

Singh added, "Manipur remains deeply grateful for your steadfast support, especially during our most testing times, and for your efforts in fostering peace and unity among communities. May you be blessed with good health, long life, and continued strength to lead our nation with wisdom and courage." (PTI)

## Bandh called by civil society today

**AGARTALA, Oct 22:** The Tripura government has said that all its offices will remain open on October 23, the day a statewide bandh has been called by a civil society organisation to demand immediate implementation of the Tiprasa accord.

The Tripura Civil Society has called for the bandh on Thursday on an eight-point charter of demands, including immediate implementation of the Tiprasa accord, identifying all illegal immigrants, setting up detention camps in each district for illegal immigrants.

"It has come to the government's notice that some organisations have called a statewide bandh on October 23. Keeping in mind the issue, the government offices and undertaking offices will remain open on October 23. The government workforce will work as usual", a release issued by the state Information and Cultural Affairs (ICA) department said.

The concerned authorities have been asked to submit information regarding attendance in government offices on October 23 to the general administration department, the release said.

State police PRO, Rajdeep Deb, said the police will take all necessary steps to ensure peace on Thursday.

Tipra Motha Party (TMP) MLA Ranjit Debbarma, who is leading the movement, said Tripura Civil Society will erect barricades in 25 locations of the state in support of the bandh. (PTI)

## Panchayat and municipal elections to be held simultaneously in December 2025: SEC

**HT Correspondent**

**ITANAGAR, Oct 22:** The Arunachal Pradesh State Election Commission (APSEC) has announced that elections to the Panchayati Raj Institutions and municipal bodies in the state will be held simultaneously in December 2025. In an intimation letter issued to all district administrations, APSEC Under Secretary Tage Nipa stated that the State Election Commission has decided to conduct the general elections to the Panchayati Raj Institutions in December 2025.

The Commission has directed all district administrations to begin necessary preparations within their respective jurisdictions.

The SEC has further instructed the district administrations to reserve seats for women in the Zila Parishads and Gram Panchayats and to issue notifications in accordance with the relevant Acts and rules.

These notifications, along with intimation to the State Election Commission, are to be submitted on or before October 30, 2025.

According to available information, there are currently 242 Zila Parishad segments in the state, which may increase to 244 following the creation of the new Bichom district. Similarly, there are around 8,145 Gram Panchayat segments, though this number is subject to change based on population, geography, and administrative adjustments.

The final figures will be confirmed once the official election notification is issued by the Department of Panchayati Raj.

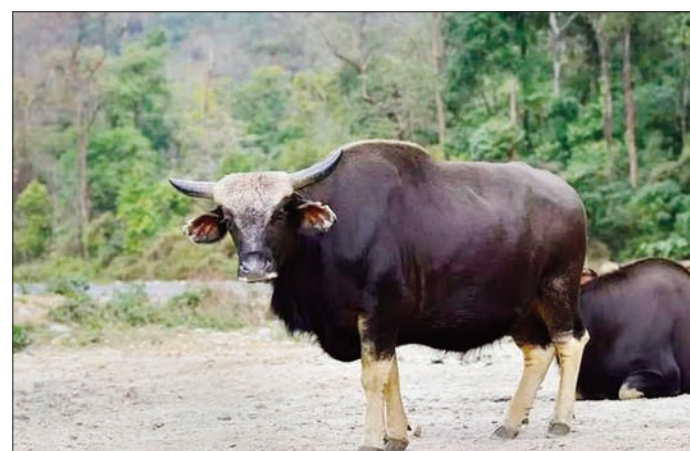
It has also been informed that elections to the Itanagar Municipal Corporation (IMC) and Pasighat Municipal Council (PMC) will be held along with the Panchayat polls.

## A total of 18 Mithuns (Bos frontalis) have dead due to FMD FMD outbreak among Mithuns, JE confirmed in pigs in Arunachal's West Siang

**ITANAGAR, Oct 22:** An outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) has been reported among Mithuns and Japanese Encephalitis (JE) among pigs in Kamba circle of West Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh, officials said on Wednesday.

A total of 18 Mithuns (Bos frontalis) have died due to FMD, following which the district administration imposed a ban on the transportation and sale of meat of all hooved animals, including Mithuns, pigs, cattle and sheep.

The Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department has set up a quarantine gate at Wak village, which is the boundary of between Aalo and Kamba circles, on the Aalo-Kamba-Mechuka Road to contain the spread of the



disease. Dr T Kamchi, who is investigating the outbreak, said the measure is critical as FMD can spread rapidly between hooved animals, including cattle, sheep, pigs

and Mithun, a bovine animal which is culturally and economically important for the state.

The department is being assisted by volunteers of the Tani Ao

Mithun Farmers' Welfare Society.

The official said the quarantine will remain in place until the department lifts it.

Dr Kamchi said that an outbreak of Japanese Encephalitis (JE) has also been confirmed in pigs in Kamba circle.

The disease was first detected in Libu Bene village and is spreading to other villages, he said, adding that the disease was confirmed by the ICAR-National Institute of Veterinary Epidemiology (NIVEDI), Bengaluru.

He said JE-related pig deaths have been reported in Gemo Tali village, where there are no FMD-affected Mithuns.

The department is engaged in treatment and preventive measures to contain the diseases, Dr Kamchi added. (PTI)

## NHRC takes suo motu cognizance of reported attacks on journo

**HT Correspondent**

**AGARTALA, Oct 22:** The National Human Rights Commission, (NHRC) India, has taken suo motu cognizance of media reports about the attack on a journalist in Tripura on 21st September. As per NHRC in the cases, the Commission has issued notices to the Director Generals of Police of Tripura, Anurag Dhanar, calling for detailed reports on the matters within two weeks.

Reportedly, the journalist in Tripura was assaulted by a group of miscreants with sticks and sharp weapons while he was attending a clothes distribution programme organised by a political party in Hezamara area of West Tripura. His motorcycle was also stolen.

On September 21 four BJP workers, including BJP ST Morcha vice president Mangal Debbarma, and a journalist Kamal Kanti Tripura of a local TV channel were injured after Tipra Motha supporters allegedly attacked a cloth distribution program at Hezamara in West Tripura during the cloth distribution program.

## Arunachal CM wishes Amit Shah on his birthday

**ITANAGAR, Oct 22:** Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Wednesday extended heartfelt birthday greetings to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, lauding him as a "valiant sentinel of India's internal security" and a "symbol of organisational acumen and political foresight".

In a post on X, Khandu praised Shah's unwavering commitment and transformative leadership, saying that his "resolute leadership and dedication to the nation are the pillars of India's unity and progress".

"Under your guidance, the nation is reaching new heights, and a sense of confidence and pride is awakening in every Indian," Khandu wrote in his post, reflecting the deep admiration and respect shared by many for the senior BJP leader.

The chief minister further wished Shah excellent health, long life, and boundless energy to continue his service to the nation.

"May God grant you excellent health, long life, and boundless energy so that you may continue to serve Mother India in this manner. Jai Bharat, Jai Tiranga," Khandu added. (PTI)

## Two cadres of Myanmar-based 'armed outfit' held

**UKHRUL, Oct 22:** Two cadres of a Myanmar-based 'armed outfit' have been apprehended by Assam Rifles in Manipur's Chandel district, a statement from the paramilitary force said on Wednesday.

The two cadres were arrested on October 18 near the Sajik Tampak area in the district, which shares a border with the neighbouring country, it said.

The two have been identified as members of the United Tribal Volunteers Group, the Assam Rifles said.

Acting on specific intelligence, the operation "effectively thwarted an attempt at cross-border militant movement along the India-Myanmar frontier", the statement said. (PTI)

## Play domestic cricket to maintain fitness, Jagdale advises Kohli and Rohit

**INDORE, Oct 22:** Former national selector Sanjay Jagdale feels Indian batting greats Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma should play domestic cricket to maintain match fitness, especially now that they feature in only one format.

Jagdale, also a former BCCI secretary, said the duo's hopes of featuring in the 2027 World Cup, will ultimately depend on their form and fitness.

"The decision they've taken to play just one format is tough on them," Jagdale told PTI.

"They've both been outstanding in white-ball cricket, but if you're not playing regularly, rustiness will creep in, like it happened with Dhoni in the IPL and even with Brian Lara, Matthew Hayden.

"A lot of cricketers, once they retire from international cricket, aren't quite the same, it is natural," Jagdale added.

The pair returned to international cricket after nearly six months in the first ODI against Australia last week but failed to make an impact, with Rohit managing only eight runs off 14 balls while Kohli departed for an eight-ball duck.

"As it is, 50-over cricket will be played less," Jagdale said.



"I'd love to see them play domestic cricket. I don't know what's in their minds, but competing in domestic tournaments will definitely work in their favour."

It is tough for a player to remain razor sharp being a one-format cricketer, a case in point is former India opener Shikhar Dhawan who could not keep his place in the ODI side soon after captaining the side.

With ODI cricket now their only international format, it remains to

be seen whether the duo features in India's long-term plans, with the next 50-over World Cup still two years away.

By then, Rohit will be 40 and Kohli 38, but Jagdale remains optimistic.

"I don't think they're finished, but the 2027 World Cup will depend on their fitness," he said.

"There's a lot of cricket to be played before that. It's too early to say, but if they continue to perform, they can certainly be there."

On Shubman Gill replacing Rohit as ODI captain, Jagdale said it was a natural transition.

"Rohit has been a great captain and a terrific white-ball cricketer, a role model who changed the outlook of Indian players. But there's nothing wrong with the selectors looking ahead. It's a natural process."

He was all praise for Gill. "Gill had a terrific series against England. You learn on the job, but to start with, it's been a fine performance, drawing the series after losing the first Test is a good sign. He looks relaxed and confident, which bodes well for Indian cricket."

Jagdale also weighed in on the Asia Cup trophy controversy, as PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi continues to insist on personally handing over the trophy to India.

"This is something that has never happened," Jagdale remarked.

At the Asia Cup, India adopted a no handshake policy with their Pakistani counterparts.

"Either you don't play and pull out of the tournament, or if you do, then play in the true spirit of the game. We've refused bilateral series before," he added. (PTI)

## Harbhajan, Pollard, Du Plessis, Chawla to feature in Abu Dhabi T10 2025



**ABU DHABI, Oct 22:** Former India cricketers Harbhajan Singh, Sreesanth and Piyush Chawla, alongside West Indies' Kieron Pollard and South Africa's Faf du Plessis have confirmed for the Abu Dhabi T10 scheduled from November 18-30 at the Zayed Cricket Stadium here.

The ninth edition features five new teams -- Ajman Titans, Vista Riders, Royal Champs, Aspin Stallions, and Quetta Qavalry. -- joining last year's Delhi Bulls, Northern Warriors, and Deccan Gladiators to complete the eight-team line-up.

All the franchises have secured their respective squads with a combination of international cricketing stars and exciting young talent.

The Aspin Stallions have added former India spinner Harbhajan to their squad for the upcoming Abu Dhabi T10.

His experience and leadership will play a major role in guiding the team through their debut campaign at the competition.

With Harbhajan's spin, Sam Billings' smart batting, Tymal Mills' pace, and Andre Fletcher's explosive hitting, the Stallions have built a formidable team for the upcoming tournament.

The Ajman Titans have roped in India's World Cup-winning leg-spinner Chawla.

The franchise has also strengthened its batting lineup by bringing in Moeen Ali, Rilee Rossouw, and Alex Hales, adding both experience and firepower to the top order.

The Deccan Gladiators boast one of the most powerful batting line-ups in Nicholas Pooran, Russell, and Marcus Stoinis to add to David Wiese's all-round experience.

The Delhi Bulls are coming in with a skilled squad for the Abu Dhabi T10, led by two of the most seasoned all-rounders in the shorter format -- Pollard and Sunil Narine.

Adding more power, the Bulls have big guns like Tim David, Rovman Powell, and Phil Salt.

The Northern Warriors also have an impressive lineup with Shimron Hetmyer, Trent Boult, Tabraiz Shamsi, and Dinesh Chandimal up their ranks.

Quetta Qavalry have built a well-rounded squad with stars like Liam Livingstone, Jason Holder, and Imran Tahir in their ranks.

The Royal Champs have come into the contest with a strong lineup featuring experienced players like Jason Roy, Angelo Mathews, Shakib Al Hasan, and Chris Jordan.

Vista Riders have fortified their squad by adding India's World Cup-winning pacer Sreesanth, whose experience and skill will be key to leading the bowling attack.

In the batting department, the team will rely on du Plessis and Matthew Wade to provide quick runs and set the tone at the top.

"From surprise selections to strategic additions, it's clear the teams are gearing up for a thrilling edition," chairman, Mulk Holdings and T10 Global Sports Shaji U Mulik stated in a release.

**Full Squads:**

**Ajman Titans:** Moeen Ali, Rilee Rossouw, Piyush Chawla, Will Smeed, Jason Behardroff, Alex Hales, Dan Lawrence, Asif Ali, Chris Green, Akif Javed, Zaman Khan, Aneurin Donald, Alishan Sharafu, Haider Ali, Wasim Akram, Luc Benkenstein, Tom Aspinwall, Joe Clarke, Asif Khan.

**Aspin Stallions:** Sam Billings, Tymal Mills, Harbhajan Singh, Andre Fletcher, Avishka Fernando, Sherfane Rutherford, Binura Fernando, Saif Hassan, Ryan Burl, Akhilesh Bodugum, Ali Khan, Ben Cutting, Zohair Iqbal, Essam Muti Ur Rab, Hafeez ur Rehman, Ashmead Nedd, Matthew Hurst, Monank Patel, Harshit Seth.

**Deccan Gladiators:** Nicholas Pooran, Marcus Stoinis, Andre Russell, Akeal Hosein, Tom Kohler-Cadmore, Richard Gleeson, Usman Tariq, David Wiese, Lahiru Kumara, Jordan Thomp-

son, Dilpreet Singh Bajwa, Jake Ball, Ibrar Ahmed, Muhammad Jawadullah, Ajay Kumar, Ali Raza, Wafullah Tarakhil, Laurie Evans, Mark Chapman.

**Delhi Bulls:** Rovman Powell, Phil Salt, Kieron Pollard, Tim David, Sunil Narine, Blessing Muzarubani, Salman Irshad, James Vince, Tom Moores, Qais Ahmed, Mir Hamza, James Coles, Muhammad Rohid, Junaid Siddique, Farhan Khan, Brian Bennett, Arab Gul, Romario Shepherd, Fazalhaq Farooqi.

**Northern Warriors:** Shimron Hetmyer, Trent Boult, Thisara Perera, Johnson Charles, Colin Munro, Azmatullah Omarzai, Tabriz Shamsi, Odean Smith, Shahnawaz Dahani, Dinesh Chandimal, Hazratullah Zazai, Asitha Fernando, Sagar Kalyan, Yakim Kiran Rai, Shahid Iqbal Bhatta, Bilal Sami, Faridoun Dawoodzai, Prabhath Jayasuriya, Kadeem Alleyne.

**Quetta Qavalry:** Liam Livingstone, Jason Holder, Mohammad Amir, Sikandar Raza, Andries Gous, Evin Lewis, Imran Tahir, Fabian Allen, Abbas Afridi, Irfan Khan Niazi, George Scrimshaw, Khawaja Nafay, Muhammad Waseem, Abdul Ghafla, Khuzaima Bin Tanvir, Arafat Minhas, Umar Lohya, Gudakesh Motie, Ali Nasser.

**Royal Champs:** Jason Roy, Angelo Mathews, Shakib Al Hasan, Chris Jordan, Daniel Sams, Mohammad Shehzad, Niroshan Dickwella, Rishi Dhawan, Liam Dawson, Brandon McMullen, Isuru Udana, Quentin Sampson, Rahul Chopra, Haider Razaq, Zahid Ali, Kelvin Pitman, Vishen Halambaka, Ziaur Rahman Sharifi, Aaron Jones.

**Vista Riders:** Far du Plessis, Matthew Wade, Sreesanth, Dwaine Pretorius, Bhanuka Rajapaksa, Andrew Tye, Umukt Chand, Ben McDermott, Dilshan Madhusanka, Nahid Rana, Angelo Perera, Sean Dickson, Harshit Kaushik, Ansh Tandon, CP Rizwan, Izharulhaq Naveed, Akeem Augustine, Murali Vijay, Sharafuddin Ashraf. (PTI)

## Rajen Borgohain and Gopal Borgohain Memorial Football Tournament to begin from Oct 26

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, Oct 22:** The Kopahera Anchalik Sports Association is gearing up to host the Rajen Borgohain and Gopal Borgohain Memorial Football Tournament, a prestigious invitational football tournament, at the Kopahera Stadium from October 26.

The tournament, which has been a flagship event in the region, will feature some of the top football teams from across Assam, including Shalbagan FC, Tezpur City FC, Warrior India FC, Bodo Land FC, Star Sporting Club, Kotahguri FC, Riverrine FC, and New Star Club, Dhing.

The tournament is expected to draw a large crowd of football enthusiasts and promises to be an exciting competition. The organising committee, led by Heramba Prasad Deka, Mahendra Deka, Suresh Deka and Dikram Borgohain, has confirmed that the tournament will kick off on October 26 with a match between Shalbagan FC and New Star Club.

The Kopahera Anchalik Sports Association has been instrumental in promoting football in the region, and this tournament is expected to further boost the sport's popularity.

With its rich history and competitive spirit, the Rajen Borgohain and Gopal Borgohain Memorial Football Tournament is set to be a thrilling event for football fans in Assam.

## Kramnik's comments shameful but where were Naroditsky's friends when he was alive: FIDE CEO

**NEW DELHI, Oct 22:** International Chess Federation (FIDE) CEO Emil Sutovsky on Wednesday said former world champion Vladimir Kramnik's savoury comments on American Grandmaster Daniel Naroditsky were "appalling and outright shameful" but also questioned the "virtue signalling and like-grabbing" that has followed the young player's shocking death in "loneliness".

Naroditsky, who faced unsubstantiated allegations of cheating by Kramnik months before his shocking demise at 29 in North Carolina, was also reportedly battling psychological issues and had stepped back from commentary and online chess that made him famous. His family has refrained from revealing the exact cause of his death.

Sutovsky questioned the outpouring of love for Naroditsky is no longer alive as he was mostly isolated when "alive and unwell".

"Amount of love given to Danya post-mortem is unprecedented. I can't recall anything of the kind. But here is the problem - where all of you were when Danya was alive and unwell?" he asked in a lengthy post on 'X'.

The FIDE CEO said while Kramnik's tendency to level allegations without concrete evidence is unacceptable and will be dealt with, it is hard to ignore the fact that Naroditsky was fighting loneliness in the wake of the charges "that kept haunting him for more than a year."

"One thing is clear: the way Kramnik approaches it, simply can't be accepted. And his reaction on Danya's passing is appalling and outright shameful. FIDE is not a court of justice, but we will act within our jurisdiction," he said.

Kramnik, in his social media posts, after Naroditsky's death alluded that the player might have also indulged in substance abuse.

"...let's not oversimplify it. It is too simple to focus on Kramnik and forget everything else. Danya was clearly not at his best in recent months. He stopped appearing as a commentator for one reason or another, he was not his usual self," Sutovsky revealed.

"Now, all those who claim how dear Danya was to their heart, how good a friend they were, where have you been? What did you do? All these Kramnik attacks on Danya happened not this week or month. It



was not like a shocking accusation, that killed Danya overnight.

"So, I ask you, alleged Danya's friends, what did you do to help him for half a year or so?" he asked without taking names.

World number one Magnus Carlsen, American star Hikaru Nakamura and Indian GM Nihal Sarin have been among the most vocal in raising concerns about the impact that Kramnik's allegations had on Naroditsky.

While Sarin said the "baseless accusations and public interrogations he faced in recent months caused him immense pressure and pain," Carlsen also acknowledged that Naroditsky was not in a "great space" after the verbal attacks from the former world champion.

Sutovsky said Naroditsky had stopped streaming and commentary several months ago but not much was heard from his support group on what was transpiring behind the scenes.

"Did many of you write him to ask, whether he is OK? Why he, arguably the best online commentator disappeared from the screens? Did you text him to ask why did he stop streaming?" he asked.

"All the recent years I had a feeling Danya was not a happy person, although he made many people happy...The boy with shining eyes had less and less shining left. And now, he is gone. Way too early.

"If he looks from above, he might be surprised to read about this or that person allegedly being his friend. Danya was kind to many, but it feels like most of the time he was lonely. Virtue signalling and like-grabbing is the worst way to pay respect to Danya," he added. (PTI)

## Indian top-order's strike-rate not a concern but big scores are expected in next matches: Muzumdar

**NAVI MUMBAI, Oct 22:** Head coach Amol Muzumdar on Wednesday threw his weight behind under-fire Indian batters, whose patchy run has left the team struggling in its effort to reach the semifinals of the Women's World Cup, saying a big knock from them is around the corner.

India needs a victory over New Zealand to reach the final four stage, but for that, the hosts will require their batters to come to the party here on Thursday.

While Indian batters remain in search of a World Cup hundred in this edition, the strike-rates of opener Pratika Rawal (70.99) and Harleen Deol (75.11) also highlighted the issue of top-order acceleration.

"We are well aware that a three-figure mark hasn't come in this World Cup," Muzumdar replied when asked whether the team is working on the conversion rate.

"But if you look at the past year-and-a-half, the 18 months that have passed before the World Cup, we've definitely had a lot of hundreds that we've seen than ever before, I guess. Yes, the three-figure mark has not been reached," he said on the eve of their match against New Zealand.

However, Muzumdar dismissed the notion of Indian batters being under pressure because of lack of individual big scores.

"I don't think there is a lot of load on anyone. We've had honest discussions about it and the players also have been honest that instead of a fifty, we could have converted that into a hundred. They are aware of it and



I'm hopeful that it will come in the next couple of games," he said.

Muzumdar did not read much into the sub-80 strike rates of Rawal and Harleen in the competition, who only have one fifty between them to show in combined 10 innings.

"If you look at Pratika Rawal's progression from last December when she made her debut in international cricket she averages around 50 (47.04) and her strike rate is around 82-83 (81.92)," he said.

"I think that is fantastic and we would like her to continue the way she bats. The entire team is behind her and Harleen as well. I don't think any discussion has happened on that particular subject.

"I don't know why this is coming up but she's been fantastic with the group. You know, she's taken to international cricket as fish to water. We back her wholeheartedly," he added.

Despite the team's travails, Muzumdar

said skipper Harmanpreet Kaur has been handling the situation well.

"(In) a home World Cup, there has to be some kind of pressure. But this particular side is well equipped to handle that," Muzumdar said.

"We've got the liberty of having some experienced players as well as some youngsters coming through. We've built a side around it and I think all the players are well equipped to handle pressure.

"She's (Harmanpreet) been leading fantastically. If you can see the record that she's had in the bilateral before this World Cup has been fantastic in the last two years or so," Muzumdar said.

The Mumbai stalwart hoped for Harmanpreet to come up with a hefty knock sooner than later.

"She got into her groove (with the bat in the) last game, she could have converted that, but again, we come back to the same thing that if at all that could have been converted into (a) hundred, it would have been ideal.

"But knowing Harman, she's put in the hard yards and, hopefully, it all clicks in the next couple of games," he added.

Muzumdar said it was a tough call to drop Jimimah Rodrigues in the last match against England.

"Jemi has been a very important player, an integral part of this side, what we've built and sometimes you just have to take those tough calls," he said. (PTI)

## No illusions that India are favourites but we will look to control what we can: Sophie Devine

**NAVI MUMBAI, Oct 22:** New Zealand captain Sophie Devine on Wednesday said her side is under no illusions that India are favourites despite the unimaginable pressure on them for their virtual quarterfinal of the Women's World Cup here, adding that they will look to control what they can.

India and New Zealand's clash here on Thursday will be vital as a win for the hosts would give them the fourth place ahead of the semifinals.

On their part, New Zealand need to win both their remaining matches to make the final four.

"In all honesty, I can't begin to imagine the type of pressure that the Indian team is under. I know when we played at a home World Cup, the pressure that we felt to perform in front of our home crowd, in front of our own country, was at times overwhelming," Devine told the media on the eve of the game.

"I can't imagine what that's like with a billion people tuned into the TV screens and the expectation and the weight that's on their shoulders. I've got real empathy for them having to try and deal with that while also going out and perform."

"We're obviously under no illusions that India are still the favourites, without a doubt, and we'll wear that underdog badge with pride, as Kiwis often do," she added. The venerable Devine said New Zealand would look to cut out the noise and distraction, including prediction of rain, in order to challenge India.

"We know the pressure that India are under at home, but we're just going to go out there and, again, control what we can control and make sure we stick to what we do well as a Kiwi side. This is pretty much a quarterfinal and we're really stepping towards that pressure," she said.

"I haven't seen too many rain clouds but it rained last night when India turned up to train. It's one of those things you can't control. We've needed to move on. We've done that as a team and we know exactly where our path leads us and what we have to do to achieve that," Devine added.

Devine said as the most senior members of the New Zealand team, she and Suzie Bates would continue to lean on to each other.

"We take great pride in making sure that we're good enough to make sure that we're capable of being able to perform and that's always something we've said, is (that) we need to be leading with our performances and our actions," Devine said. (PTI)