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## CM defends move to limit ESZ around KNP

*'Extension of eco-sensitive zone, as demanded by oppn parties, will make survival for locals untenable'*

GUWAHATI, Aug 17: Assam Chief Minister Biswa Sarma on Monday defended his government's move to approach the Centre for notifying a one-km radius around the Kaziranga National Park as an eco-sensitive zone.

He maintained that the government was well within the Supreme Court's directives in this regard and said that notifying up to a 10 kms radius as an eco-sensitive zone, as demanded by several opposition parties, will make survival for the locals untenable.

"If the eco-sensitive zone is till Bokakhat or Kaliabor, how will the people survive? The local people themselves have a case before the Supreme Court against any such notification," Sarma said at a press



conference, when asked about an ongoing controversy over demarcating of an eco-sensitive zone around the

UNESCO World Heritage Site.

He claimed that the indigenous Mising community and even MLA

Akhil Gogoi have been resisting notifying a wider eco-sensitive zone area. "Local people have to run businesses to survive. Even the Numaligarh Refinery will have to be closed down if 10 kms around Kaziranga is notified," he said.

He also cited a Supreme Court judgment, which puts the eco-sensitive zone at a 1 to 3 kms radius, about which he had mentioned earlier, leading to the row over demarcating the protected area around the Park.

The government's decision to ask the Centre to notify a one-km eco-sensitive zone around the Park a few days ago to allow building and other activities had drawn criticism from opposition and a section of people, who claimed that it would hurt the ecosystem. (PTI)

## Assam MLA urges PM to declare floods in 3 severely affected districts as 'national disaster'

GUWAHATI, Aug 17: Assam MLA Akhil Gogoi has urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to declare the recent severe floods in the three districts of Sivasagar, Charaideo and Jorhat as a 'national disaster' and provide Rs 10 lakh to each affected family and business enterprise.

The Rajior Dal MLA from Sivasagar assembly constituency, in a letter to the Prime Minister, submitted a 22-point charter of demands to facilitate urgent recovery, resettlement and long-term rebuilding caused by the devastating floods.

The legislator also called for a CBI investigation into the causes of the July 19 floods, specifically focusing on illegal coal mining in the Assam-Nagaland border areas and illegal sand/stone mining along the bed of the River Dikhow with the help of alleged political patrons.



Gogoi said that the disaster threatens not only human lives and agricultural land but also the civilisational heritage of Assam, and as such, the floods in the three dis-

tricts should be declared a national disaster. He also urged for a special 'Reconstruction package' of Rs 1,000 crore to rebuild infrastructure in the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Sonia, Rahul spreading anarchy; Chidambaram 'pure naxal': Himanta



GUWAHATI, Aug 17: Assam Chief Minister Biswa Sarma on Monday accused Congress leaders Sonia and Rahul Gandhi of openly "engaging in anti-national" activities and trying to "spread anarchy" in the

country in an attempt to return to power. Sarma also took a swipe at former Union Home Minister P Chidambaram over his 'dimagi Naxal' remark, claiming that the senior opposition leader is a "pure Naxal" and an enquiry should be done to find if he knowingly didn't take steps against Maoists when he was in the Union Cabinet.

"Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi are nearly on a mission to oppose the nation. Whether it is by instigating protests in the name of Gen Z, they have vowed to spoil the atmosphere of the country," Sarma said at a press conference here. Asked about the two Congress leaders purportedly opposing full rendition of 'Vande Mataram' during Independence Day celebration, the CM said, "Sonia Gandhi's behaviour shows that if the Congress returns to power by some mistake, what will the condition of the country be?"

"They are openly engaging in anti-national activities and provoking people to agitate, sit on dharna, all for the sake of anarchy. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Assamese filmmaker receives 'Secret Program Fellini' Award in Italy

GUWAHATI, Aug 17: Assamese filmmaker Maharshi Tuhin Kashyap has been awarded the 'Secret Program Fellini' Award at the 27th Lucania Film Festival in Pisticci, Basilicata, Italy, for his film 'Kok Kok Kokooook'.

The Fellini Award is presented in honour of celebrated filmmaker Federico Fellini as a tribute to his extraordinary contribution to world cinema and enduring influence on generations of filmmakers, according to a release on Monday.

Acclaimed Iranian filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf curated the programme and presented the film with the Secret Program Fellini Award, making the recognition a significant moment in Kashyap's emerging international career, the release said.

'Kok Kok Kokooook' is having its European premiere at the Lucania Film Festival, following an international festival journey that began with

its World premiere at Busan International Film Festival. The film subsequently travelled to festivals including the International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK) and the Dhaka International Film Festival, before arriving in Italy for its European premiere at Lucania.

Made as Kashyap's graduation film at the Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute (SRFTI), 'Kok Kok Kokooook' marks a remarkable journey from a film-school project to international festival recognition.

The Assamese film revolves around Siken, a migrant chicken seller who loves his RX100 motorcycle very dearly, and when it gets lost, he suffers immensely. Missing his dear bike and fear of being framed in a fake police case, he eventually transforms into the motorcycle himself. The film is a magic realism take on the contemporary politics of Assam and India (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Drug peddlers behind policeman's death: Himanta

GUWAHATI, Aug 17: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday said that there was credible information that drug peddlers were behind the recent death of a police sub-inspector in an apparent hit-and-run incident.

He also claimed that traffickers have changed the route of smuggling in narcotics to Assam from Myanmar, and the government was working to stop it.

Addressing a press conference here, Sarma said, "There is credible information that Nabajit Das was killed by peddlers. Police are investigating the matter and details will be shared later."

Sub-inspector Das, the in-charge of Liaison outpost in Dima Hasao district, was killed after being hit by a car while conducting naka checking in the area on Friday evening. Two persons have been arrested, while two others are absconding.

Asserting the state government's tough stance against drugs, the chief minister said just three days ago, a cartel leading to Punjab was uprooted in Guwahati. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



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India's biggest public participation exercise, Census 2027, is about to start.

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## Govt to soon announce high-level panel on 'Banking for Viksit Bharat': FM

**NEW DELHI, Aug 17:** Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said the government would soon constitute a high-level panel on 'Banking for Viksit Bharat' to draw up a blueprint to create lenders capable of meeting the financing needs of a developed India.

In this year's Budget, the finance minister had proposed a high-level committee on 'Banking for Viksit Bharat' to comprehensively review the sector and align it with India's next phase of growth.

Addressing the two-day PSB Confluence here, Sitharaman said, "The intensive discussions of today and tomorrow come at a time we expect the announcement on the high-powered committee to look into banking for Viksit Bharat. Sooner, the committee will be announced."

She expressed hope that the deliberation at the two-day meeting would provide substantive material for the committee also to look at. "So the committee would probably have that material before them even as they deliberate. And even as they deliberate, to give us their thoughts and also the recommendations which will help us to clearly understand where the committee wants India to go towards Viksit Bharat and in that the role of banks," she said.

Emphasising that the Viksit Bharat goal of 2047 is actually not too far away, she said, "your NPAs are at the lowest ever Indian banking has seen, and therefore there cannot be a better position of strength with which you can take on reforms."

"I propose setting up a high-



level committee on 'Banking for Viksit Bharat' to comprehensively review the sector and align it with India's next phase of growth, while safeguarding financial stability, inclusion and consumer protection," she had said in the Budget speech on February 1.

Speaking at Monday's event, Financial Services Secretary Sanjay Lohia said it is imperative for public sector banks to sustain the current momentum, especially as competition is becoming sharper.

"Technology is reshaping business models, customer experiences are evolving, and new areas of economic activity are emerging rapidly," he said.

Therefore, state-owned banks must continue to strengthen their competitiveness, growth within the domestic financial landscape, and against evolving global benchmarks, he said.

"This will require the institutions to anticipate opportunities, deepen sectoral expertise, and con-

tinuously adapt their capabilities, products and business models," he said.

"Financial institutions also have an important role where specialised expertise and financing structures can complement the scale and reach of banks," he said.

The two-day deliberation is structured around seven key themes: deposit mobilisation, banking for youth, supporting the investment cycle, supporting global capability centres, agriculture and horticulture value-chain infrastructure, re-imagining the credit card business and priority sector lending.

The PSB Confluence brings together approximately 125 participants, including chairmen, managing directors and executive directors of public sector banks and PFIs, such as NABARD, EXIM Bank, SIDBI, NHB, IFCL, IFCI and NaBFID, alongside senior officials from the Indian Banks' Association and the Department of

Financial Services.

Deposit mobilisation is fundamental to sustainable economic growth, Lohia said.

As household savings preferences change, banks need to strengthen their deposit base through customer privacy, convenience, consistency in service, product innovation, and sustained customer relationships, he said.

It will be equally important for banks to upgrade as India's gap in increasing the digital population will shape the future of savings, borrowings, investments, and financial services.

"It is our responsibility to facilitate the reach of banking to our youth, both in terms of opening bank accounts, making loans available for educational purposes, and for starting new ventures," he said.

"Global capability centres similarly represent an emerging ecosystem of opportunities across infrastructure, entering businesses, and employment. We have to examine how banks can facilitate the growth of GCCs in the country," he said.

Lohia also said that reimagining the credit card business for banks reflects another area where customer behaviour, technology, and competition are changing rapidly.

Public sector banks need to examine how they can build stronger propositions in the credit card business while maintaining responsible underwriting, customer protection, and appropriate risk controls, he said.

"Banks cannot grow their customer base and CASA (current account savings account) deposits without a strong credit card facility," he added. (PTI)

## LG Electronics India posts strongest quarterly growth since listing

**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Aug 17:** LG Electronics India Limited (LGE India) reported its strongest quarterly growth since listing, with revenue from operations rising 15.5% to ₹ 72.33 billion in Q1 FY27 from ₹ 62.63 billion in the year-ago quarter.

EBITDA increased 26.2% to ₹ 9.04 billion, while the EBITDA margin expanded by 106 basis points to 12.5%. Profit after tax (PAT) rose 27.2% to ₹ 6.53 billion from ₹ 5.13 billion.

The company attributed the stronger profitability to a richer premium product mix, operating leverage from higher volumes and continued cost discipline.

Growth was recorded across all product categories, with televisions benefiting from demand for larger

screens, refrigerators from premium capacities, air conditioners from extended summer demand and washing machines maintaining growth despite being out of season.

The Home Entertainment segment recorded 22.3% revenue growth to ₹ 16.57 billion, with its EBIT margin expanding 336 basis points to 19%.

The Home Appliances & Air Solution segment grew 13.6% to ₹ 55.77 billion, while EBIT increased 13.8% to ₹ 6.42 billion.

LG Electronics India Managing Director Hong Ju Jeon said the results reflected a structural shift in India's consumer durables market towards premium, technology-led and energy-efficient products.

He said the company would continue focusing on premiumisation, B2B and exports, while strengthen-

ing India's role as a manufacturing and export hub.

The company said its Make-in-India, Make-for-India and Make-India-Global strategy continued to gain traction.

The LG Essential Series expanded its presence in Tier-2 and Tier-3 markets, while exports also grew.

Its Information Display business recorded its highest-ever quarterly performance, supported by government and institutional orders.

For FY27, the company expects continued momentum ahead of the festive season, particularly in large-screen televisions, washing machines and refrigerators.

It also plans to expand its B2B and export businesses, while new production capacity at Sri City is progressing as planned.

## Arohan Financial Services extends flood relief to Assam



**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Aug 17:** Arohan Financial Services Limited has extended emergency relief support to flood-affected people in Charaideo and Sivasagar districts, distributing essential food, drinking water and hygiene supplies to families affected by the ongoing monsoon floods.

The relief drive, launched on July 31, covers Sonari in Charaideo district and Nazira, Amguri and Sivasagar

blocks in Sivasagar district through the company's local branch network.

Relief kits distributed among affected households included chira/poha, sugar, biscuits, powdered milk, drinking water bottles, soap and mosquito-repellent dhupe.

According to the company, its local presence enabled its teams to mobilise quickly and respond to the needs of affected communities facing disruptions to livelihoods, mobility and access to essential goods and markets.

The relief effort is expected to continue, with more affected communities to be covered in the coming days.

Arohan Managing Director Manoj Nambiar said timely access to basic necessities could make a critical difference to families during disasters and that the company's teams worked with local communities to ensure essential supplies reached those in need.

Nambiar also said Arohan would implement the State Level Bankers' Committee decision to provide a moratorium to eligible borrowers in the four affected blocks, in accordance with applicable RBI guidelines and based on customer requests, providing relief until businesses and livelihoods return to normal.

The initiative forms part of the company's CSR commitment to supporting vulnerable communities and strengthening their resilience during natural disasters.

## Sensex drops 281 pts, Nifty falls for 5<sup>th</sup> day amid rising crude oil prices

**MUMBAI, Aug 17:** Benchmark Sensex dropped by 281 points, while the broader Nifty fell for the fifth straight session on Monday, due to selling in IT, FMCG, and telecom shares amid rising crude oil prices and persistent geopolitical tensions in West Asia.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 281.09 points, or 0.36 per cent, to settle at 77,728.16. During the day, it dropped 555.5 points, or 0.71 per cent, to 77,453.75.

Falling for the fifth consecutive day, the 50-share NSE Nifty declined 78.35 points, or 0.32 per cent, to end at 24,287.65, taking the losses to the fifth day.

From the Sensex pack, Infosys, HCL Tech, Sun Pharma, Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra and ITC were among the biggest laggards, Tata Steel, Axis Bank, Reliance Industries and Bharat Electronics were among the winners.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, climbed 1.11 per cent to USD 89.50 per barrel.

"Indian equity markets ended marginally lower on Monday, extending last week's cautious tone as persistent uncertainty surrounding the US-Iran conflict and the absence of meaningful progress to-

ward reopening the Strait of Hormuz kept investors on the sidelines," Ponnudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

The BSE SmallCap Select index was up 0.38 per cent, while MidCap Select index dipped 0.11 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, IT dropped 1.74 per cent, followed by Focused IT (1.56 per cent), Telecommunication (1.16 per cent), Hospitals (0.94 per cent), FMCG (0.79 per cent), Healthcare (0.56 per cent), Services (0.48 per cent) and Consumer Durables (0.44 per cent).

Realty climbed 1.38 per cent, followed by Metal jumped 1.03 per cent, Capital Goods (0.78 per cent), Industrials (0.60 per cent) and Commodities (0.45 per cent).

Among the Tata Group stocks, TCS dropped 1.87 per cent, Tata Investment Corporation edged lower by 1.68 per cent, Trent declined 1.34 per cent, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles was down 1.09 per cent and Tata Chemicals fell 1.04 per cent on the BSE amid reports that the Tata Sons annual general meeting scheduled for August 18 may not take place after Sir Ratan Tata Trust, a key shareholder in the holding company of the Tata Group,

was unable to nominate a representative due to a regulatory restriction imposed by Maharashtra's Charity Commissioner.

Also, Tata Consumer Products lost 0.46 per cent, Tata Power dipped 0.44 per cent, Tata Communications skidded 0.40 per cent and Tata Elxsi slipped 0.13 per cent.

In Asian markets, Japan's Nikkei 225, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended higher. Equity markets in South Korea were closed due to a holiday. Markets in Europe were trading on a mixed note. US markets ended lower on Friday.

"Indian equity markets extended their losing streak for a fifth consecutive session on Monday as elevated crude oil prices continued to weigh on investor sentiment despite a recovery from intraday lows," Harisvelan Radhakrishnan, Founder & CEO of HST Wealth, a Research Analyst firm, said. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹ 508.12 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

On Friday, the Sensex was down 70.71 points, or 0.09 per cent, to settle at 78,009.25. The Nifty dipped 29.85 points, or 0.12 per cent, to end at 24,366. (PTI)

## Gold rebounds ₹ 600 to ₹ 1.56 lakh/10g as weak US dollar breathes life into bullion

**NEW DELHI, Aug 17:** Gold prices rebounded by ₹ 600 to ₹ 1,56,800 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday as a weak US dollar and firm global trends breathed fresh life into bullion demand.

The yellow metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at ₹ 1,56,200 per 10 grams on Friday.

However, silver remained flat at ₹ 2,40,000 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes) for the second straight session, according to local traders.

"Gold advanced on Monday, supported by a softer dollar and easing expectations for aggressive Federal Reserve's tightening following a series of weaker US economic indicators," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

Moderate US inflation data last week, along with softer employment and retail sales figures, reduced expectations of further monetary policy tightening and kept the dollar under pressure, improving demand for precious metals, he added.

The recovery extended to the international markets, with spot gold trading 0.48 per cent higher at USD 4,397.59 per ounce. Silver rose more than 1 per cent to USD 65.58 per ounce.

"Spot gold was trading with a gain of 0.5 per cent at USD 4,398 per ounce and is expected to maintain a positive undertone on dollar weakness and capped oil prices," Praveen Singh, Head of Commodities at Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said.

The geopolitical backdrop, however, remains in



focus.

Singh said US President Donald Trump is preparing to impose more economic sanctions on Iran, in addition to the 2,200 sanctions already in place since 2018, including a continued blockade of Tehran's ports.

Meanwhile, the 60-day US-Iran MoU ceasefire is set to expire on Monday, although the deadline is not set in stone and has lost relevance following recent developments.

For traders, the next signpost is closer to home in the US policy calendar.

Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities, said market participants will focus on the Fed's FOMC meeting minutes this week for further cues on the US Central bank's interest-rate outlook and the next direction of bullion prices. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## Assam MLA urges PM

two worst-affected Assembly constituencies of Sivasagar and Nazira. He urged Modi to ensure that the one-time financial assistance of ₹ 15,000 declared by the Assam government is given to every flood-affected family previously excluded due to error or omission.

The MLA also called for initiating measures through the agriculture department to irrigate affected fields and supply high-quality seeds to every farmer in the three districts.

The PM should ensure that alternative settlement of land and a pucca house be given to every family who lost their homes in Nepalikhoti village of Nazira district along with allocation of houses under central and state schemes in the three affected districts.

Gogoi further urged that river embankments in the three districts should be raised and strengthened, damaged embankments be reconstructed, and modern sluice gates be constructed at strategic locations to drain discharge from rivers.

He also called for sanction and approval of comprehensive desiltation projects for the Dikhow, Darika, Janji, Mitong and Namdang rivers along with construction of drainage bridges on national highways to drain out water from towns and adjacent areas.

Gogoi appealed to the Prime Minister to allocate sufficient funds for the repair, renovation and reconstruction of damaged educational institutions, religious places and public infrastructure.

The Rajar Dal MLA's demands also include comprehensive financial compensation for damaged fisheries, small tea growers, agarwood cultivators, youth-managed cooperatives of piggery, poultry, duck, goat farms, plant nurseries, agricultural farms and the local handloom and handicraft sectors for equipment and inventory losses.

Gogoi, in his letter released to the media on Monday, further urged for providing free books and uniforms to all affected students in government, private and semi-private schools and waive admission fees from primary to degree level.

The government should also organise mobile medical units in all flood-hit villages every third day to prevent water-borne diseases.

Gogoi said the catastrophic floods have inflicted extensive damage on individuals and torn apart the socio-economic fabric of the affected districts, for which the immediate attention and financial support of the central government is required.

The recent devastating floods in the state have so far claimed 104 lives. (PTI)

## Sonia, Rahul spreading

The 'Ma-Beta' (mother-son) attempt to stop the 'Vande Mataram' manifests what will be the country's future if the Congress comes to power," the BJP leader asserted. On Chidambaram calling himself a "dimagi naxal" after PM Narendra Modi used the term during his Independence Day speech, Sarma mentioned that it was during his tenure as Union Home minister that senior Congress leader V C Shukla and others were killed in an attack in Chhattisgarh, and "still Congress did nothing to eradicate Naxalism".

"With Chidambaram calling himself 'dimagi naxal', there should be an enquiry whether he knowingly didn't take steps against Naxals when he was the Home minister," Sarma said. "I think Chidambaram is not just a 'dimagi naxal', he is a 'pure naxal' who wants anarchy in the country," he claimed.

Sarma maintained that it is under PM Narendra Modi and Union Home minister Amit Shah that a "naxal-mukt" India has been possible and there is all-round peace, including smooth national day celebrations in Assam. (PTI)

## Assamese filmmaker receives

as well as the plight of migrants. "Having our film 'Kok Kok Kokokook' curated by legendary filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf, and receiving an award from him, feels like a dream. His films have always deeply influenced and inspired me," Kashyap told PTI.

He said that receiving an award named after one of the world's greatest filmmakers and presented to him by another great filmmaker of world cinema is a moment that fills him with renewed thoughts, immense enthusiasm, and inspiration to create and explore new ideas.

"I am deeply grateful to my entire cast and crew, whose collective efforts made this film possible. This recognition belongs to all of us," Kashyap added.

Kashyap's first feature film 'Kok Kok Kokokook', had its world premiere at the Busan International Film Festival. His short film 'The Horse From Heaven' was an official entry at the Oscar Awards 2023 and has won Best Film at the VGIF Film Festival, Golden Raven Film Festival, Bengaluru International Short Film Festival and others. His nonfiction film 'Flowers In A Hailstorm' premiered at the Nara International Film Festival in Japan. (PTI)

## Drug peddlers behind

He maintained that the traffickers are changing the route used to smuggle in drugs to Assam.

Earlier, it was brought from Myanmar through Manipur and Mizoram, but now it is being routed through Changlang in Arunachal Pradesh and then Tinsukia, Sarma said. "We are aware of their design and we are working on it," he added. (PTI)

**শুধৰনি**

মোৰ শুদ্ধ নাম নুৰুল ইছলাম, পিতা ইয়াজুদ্দিন সেখ, মোৰ সকলো নথি-পত্ৰত মোৰ নাম নুৰুল ইছলাম আছে। কিন্তু ভুল ক্ৰমে মানকাচৰ ৰাজহ চক্ৰৰ অধীনস্থ ময়নাৰাধা গাঁৱত থকা পট্টা নং ৪৪০ দাগ নং ৭৬৭ মাটি ভোখৰৰ নথি-পত্ৰত মোৰ নাম নুৰ ইছলাম উঠিছে। সেয়ে মটি ভোখৰৰ নথি-পত্ৰত মোৰ শুদ্ধ নাম নুৰুল ইছলাম হ'ব লাগে।

নাম : নুৰুল ইছলাম।  
পিতা : ইয়াজুদ্দিন সেখ।  
গাঁও : মানুলাপাৰা।  
ডাকঘৰ : মানুলাপাৰা।  
ডিলা : দক্ষিণ শালমাৰা  
মানকাচৰ (অসম)

**LOST**

It is hereby known to all that I have lost my original Sale Deed bearing Reg. Deed No. 3839 dated 5/6/1992 which was executed in favour of my husband Late Hemanta Kumar Brahma and later mutated in my name by inheritance. If anybody will find the aforesaid Sale Deed then he/she is requested to inform the undersign within 10 (Ten) days from the date of publication of this news.

Smt. Nirupa Brahma,  
Wife of Late Hemanta Kumar Brahma,  
Daughter of Shri Rajendra Nath Brahma,  
Resident of Paxeeman Residency, H/No. 201, Chachal Road, Sixmile, Khanapara, Guwahati-22, District-Kamrup (M), Assam

**AFFIDAVIT**

I have change my old home address Vill-Manduli, P.O- Kharikhana P.S-Lanka Dist- Nagaon to a new home address Vill- Bordolong P.O-Kharikhana P.S.- Lanka Dist-Hojai in my Aadhaar Card vide no. 876254580552, Through an Affidavit No. In-AS55508903283632Y sworn before Executive Magistrate, Sankardev Nagar, Akash Kumar Verma Vill- Bordolong P.O.- Kharikhana P.S.- Lanka Dist- Hojai

**Tender Notice No. APGCL/KLHEP/GM-Tech-22/C/ 2026-27/05/ 513 Date: 18-08-2026**

**ASSAM POWER GENERATION CORPORATION LIMITED**  
**NOTICE INVITING TENDER**

| Sl. No. | Name of work                                                                            | Approx. value of work(Rs.) (including GST) | Earnest money in the shape of DD/Bankers Cheque. |                           | Time of completion |
|---------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
|         |                                                                                         |                                            | 1% for SC/ST/OBC (Rs.)                           | 2% for General/Firm (Rs.) |                    |
| 1       | Servicing of 07 nos. of OPU units installed for the Radial Gates at Hatidubi Dam, KLHEP | 1274400.00                                 | 12744.00                                         | 25488.00                  | 60 days            |

Tender Paper issue : Up to 04:00 PM on 25.08.2026  
Tender receiving : Up to 01:00 PM on 26.08.2026  
Tender opening : At 3:00 PM on 26.08.2026

Detailed tender documents & eligibility criteria may be obtained from the O/o. the General Manager, KLHEP, APGCL, Lengry West Karbi Anglong, Assam during working hours by submitting Rs. 472/- (Rupees Four Hundred Seventy-two only) inclusive of GST in the shape of DD/Bankers cheque to be duly pledged in favour of The General Manager, KLHEP, APGCL, Lengry from any nationalized bank (preferably SBI).

Sd/-  
General Manager  
APGCL, KLHEP, Lengry,  
West Karbi Anglong,  
Assam-782450

## Govt clears 31 proposals of ₹ 7,877 cr

**NEW DELHI, Aug 17:** The government has cleared 31 fresh proposals under the electronics components manufacturing scheme, entailing investments of ₹ 7,877 crore, the secretary in the IT ministry, S Krishnan, said on Monday. According to Krishnan, the government has received a total investment proposal of ₹ 69,548 crore, against a target of ₹ 59,350 crore. "Currently, we have cleared almost 31 applications, which have been dealt with in this particular session or in this particular gathering, and totally, the investment that we are talking about is ₹ 7,877 crore," he said at an event jointly organised by Elcina and the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY). The approved proposals include those of GX Group, Centum Electronics, Ennovi Mobility Solutions, Allied Engineering Works, Globe Capacitors, Syrna SGS Technology, Rosenberger Interconnect, Sensata Technologies, and Britannia RFID Technologies, among others. Krishna said the fresh tranche of investment will be spread across 10 states. (PTI)



# Kaushik Rai reviews healthcare, infrastructure projects in Silchar

**Minister inaugurates new CT Scan machine at Silchar Medical College, inspects Integrated DC Office construction**



**HT Correspondent**

**SILCHAR, Aug 17:** Assam Minister for Food, Public Distribution and Consumer Affairs, Housing and Urban Affairs and Cooperation Kaushik Rai on Monday conducted ground-level inspections of healthcare services and ongoing infrastruc-

ture projects in Silchar, seeking direct feedback from patients, officials and project personnel.

At Silchar Medical College and Hospital, Rai inaugurated a newly installed CT Scan machine and visited various departments to assess patient services, availability of facil-

ities, cleanliness and overall functioning.

He also interacted with patients and their family members and directed hospital authorities to address the difficulties raised by them.

Rai said the new CT Scan facility would make advanced diagnostic

services more accessible to people across the Barak Valley and reduce the need for patients to travel outside the region for such tests.

He added that improving medical infrastructure and the patient experience remained a priority of the State government.

The Minister later inspected the ongoing construction of the Integrated District Commissioner's Office in Cachar.

Accompanied by Cachar DC Rahul Kumar Gupta and PWD (Building) officials, he reviewed the progress and work schedule and directed officials and the contractor to ensure timely completion without compromising construction quality.

Rai said field inspections helped identify issues that might not be apparent from official reports and stressed that government projects and public services must meet the expectations of the people.

He added that such inspections would continue and departments would be expected to follow up on issues identified during field visits, particularly those affecting public services and timely completion of projects.

## Maa Manasha Puja celebrations to begin in Nagaon

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, Aug 17:** The historic Shri Shri Maa Manasha Mandir on Thakur Ramkrishna Road in Nagaon town is preparing to host its annual Shri Shri Maa Manasha Puja with religious fervour and a series of cultural activities.

Established in 1948, the temple is described as Nagaon's first permanent shrine dedicated to Maa Manasha Devi and has maintained a 78-year tradition of spiritual devotion and cultural heritage.

As part of this year's celebrations, the temple committee will organise a solo devotional dance competition on August 19 from 7 pm, with Group A for children up to Class V and Group B for students of Classes VI to X.

An art competition will also be held on August 19, followed by a quiz competition and prize distribution ceremony on August 20.

Committee president Gautam Chandra Saha invited devotees, residents and young people to participate in the celebrations and help uphold the temple's spiritual and cultural legacy.

The committee has urged devotees and local residents to attend the religious rituals and encouraged young participants to take part in the competitions.

## Foundation stones laid for Helena & Gaide memorial park, training centre



**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, Aug 17:** BTC Chief Hagrama Mohilary on Monday laid the foundation stones for the Helena & Gaide Memorial Park at Boshgaon Forest Village, Kokrajhar and the Helena & Gaide Training Centre at Kashiabari, Gossaigaon, under Phase-I of the Infrastructure Development Fund (IDF) for 2026-27.

The project has a sanctioned cost of Rs 5 crore. The proposed memorial park, spread over about 1.4 bighas, will feature pathways, landscaped areas, a mound, statue, sitting sheds, an entrance gate and boundary wall.

The training centre, covering approximately eight bighas, will have a boundary wall and entrance gate.

The programme was attended

by MLA Sabharam Basumatary, BTC EM Mritunjay Narzary, MCLA William Narzary, former Assam Minister Pramila Rani Brahma, Gossaigaon Municipal Board Chairman Narapati Brahma and other dignitaries.

Mohilary said the park and training centre would serve as a lasting tribute to Helena and Gaide, remembered as the first women martyrs of the Bodoland Movement.

He said the initiative would help preserve their contributions, values and legacy while providing spaces for remembrance, learning and community interaction.

The project is also expected to promote local culture, heritage and tourism and create a landmark public space reflecting the cultural identity of the area.

## NFR announces fresh changes in train services amid restoration work

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Aug 17:** Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has announced further changes in train services as restoration work continues near New Harangajao station following the settlement of railway tracks on Line-1 and Line-2.

Train operations through the Lumding-Badarpur Hill Section are being maintained via Line-3 with enhanced safety measures.

Train No 15615 (Guwahati-Silchar) Express, scheduled to commence its journey on August 18, and Train No 15616 (Silchar-Guwahati) Express, scheduled for August 19, have been cancelled.

Several trains have also been rescheduled.

Train No 15650 (Narangi-Agartala) Express will depart Narangi at 10.30 pm on August 18, while Train No 15649 (Agartala-Narangi) Express will depart Agartala at 11.30

pm.

Train No 15609 (Guwahati-Sairang) Express will depart Guwahati at 11.30 pm, while Train No 15610 (Sairang-Guwahati) Express will depart Sairang at 9.30 pm.

Both are scheduled for August 18.

Train No 15611 (Rangiya-Silchar) Express will depart Rangiya at 11.30 pm on August 18, while Train No 15612 (Silchar-Rangiya) Express will depart Silchar at 5 am on August 19.

Train No 15628 (Coimbatore-Silchar) Express will depart Silchar at 4.10 am on August 19.

Meanwhile, Train No 15625 (Deoghar-Agartala) Express, commencing its journey on August 17, will be regulated suitably en route.

NFR said the changes have been necessitated by the ongoing restoration work and urged passengers to take note of the revised schedules.

## Sanjay Singh seeks comprehensive relief package for flood-hit districts AAP leader criticises Centre and State governments

**HT Correspondent**

**SIVASAGAR, Aug 17:** Aam Aadmi Party leader and Delhi MP Sanjay Singh on Monday visited flood-affected areas of Sivasagar and Charaideo districts and urged the Centre to announce a comprehensive compensation package for rebuilding infrastructure damaged by the floods.

Before visiting the affected areas, Singh told media-persons at Hotel Ibis that the scale of the disaster, which he said had affected more than a million people and rendered thousands homeless, warranted substantial financial assistance beyond emergency relief.

Singh criticised the Prime Minister over the government's handling of Assam's recurring flood problem, alleging that repeated assurances of a permanent solution had not translated into adequate action.

Referring to the reported decision to reduce the 10-km safety zone to 1 km, Singh alleged that the move was contrary to forest protection policies and could aggravate human-wildlife conflict.

He also criticised the Centre's ethanol-blending pol-



icy, alleging that it was causing damage to vehicle engines.

On the education sector, Singh claimed that students, members of the younger generations, parents and others had taken to the streets over alleged corruption and mismanagement.

He said the movement against the NDA would grow stronger in the days ahead.

## NFR upgrades Netaji Vidyapith Railway Higher Secondary School

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Aug 17:** Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has undertaken comprehensive infrastructure upgradation of Netaji Vidyapith Railway Higher Secondary School, Maligaon, with the aim of providing students with modern and improved educational facilities.

A new G+1 RCC building comprising 20 classrooms with modern furniture has been constructed as part of the initiative.

The works also included construction of a covered prayer shed, renovation and modernisation of the Subir Raha Memorial Auditorium, improvement of the school facade, installation of a new canopy and exterior painting.

The approach road, existing offices

and classrooms and drainage system have also been improved.

The renovated auditorium, new classrooms, prayer shed and upgraded facade were inaugurated by NFR General Manager Chetan Kumar Shrivastava on August 15.

Established on January 23, 1948, in honour of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, the school has produced several distinguished alumni, including former NIT Silchar Director Dr Paritosh Kanta Banik, former Vardhman Mahavir Medical College and Hospital Principal Dr Jayashree Bhattacharjee and FIDE-rated chess player Rajib Dhar.

The infrastructure upgrade reflects NFR's continued efforts to strengthen educational facilities and provide students with a safer and better learning environment.

## PIB holds media workshop on Census 2027, drug abuse and consumer protection



**HT Correspondent**

**GOALPARA, Aug 17:** The Press Information Bureau (PIB), Guwahati, organised a district-level media workshop, 'Varta', at Goalpara Press Club on Monday, focusing on Census 2027, Nasha Mukh Bharat and consumer protection.

Around 55 media representatives and officials attended the programme.

Goalpara District Commissioner Prodig Timung, ACS, said Census data would remain

strictly confidential and urged citizens to provide accurate information, highlighting its importance for planning and welfare schemes.

Additional Deputy Commissioner Darshana Chetia, ACS, explained the phases of Census 2027, including digital enumeration and self-enumeration.

She said digital tools would enable faster, real-time data collection and clarified that the Census is a statistical exercise and does not require citizens to submit documents.

District Social Welfare Officer Abu Mustafa Arshad Hussain highlighted the harmful effects of drug abuse and urged the media to strengthen awareness efforts for a drug-free society.

Dr Shakanka Sekhar Borkotoky, BIS Consultant, spoke on consumer safety, BIS standards, ISI marking, gold hallmarking and the BIS Care App.

The workshop aimed to strengthen coordination between the government and the media and promote accurate reporting on public welfare initiatives.

## Couple killed in road accident at Jagiroad

**HT Correspondent**

**JAGIROAD, Aug 17:** A couple was killed and another person seriously injured in a road accident on NH-27 at Bhomoraguri in Jagiroad on Monday afternoon.

The deceased were identified as Rupiyoti Nath, 26, of Maligaon, Guwahati and Chumangi Bora, 24, of Dapabari Deuri in Sonitpur.

According to reports, the couple were travelling on a motorcycle when their vehicle collided with another motorcycle taking a U-turn on NH-27.

The motorcycle carrying the couple reportedly skidded across the road divider and collided with a truck coming from the opposite direction.

The two died on the spot.

The injured person was identified as Ganesh Chandra Pal of Kanabari in Nakhola, Jagiroad.

Police reached the spot and took necessary action.

## Former ONGC employee killed in road accident on Sivasagar bypass

**HT Correspondent**

**SIVASAGAR, Aug 17:** A 65-year-old former ONGC employee, Anil Kakoti of Purana Amolapatty in Sivasagar, was killed in a road accident on NH-37 at Zenganiakatia on Monday.

According to reports, Kakoti was travelling on his scooter to attend a religious function at a relative's residence when a speeding jeep allegedly hit his vehicle.

He sustained serious injuries and died in the accident.

The driver of the jeep later surrendered at Gaurisagar Police Station. Further details of the incident were not immediately available.

## Anup Kumar Jajodia named Best Lions President

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Aug 17:** Anup Kumar Jajodia, Charter President of the Lions Club of Guwahati Pride, was honoured as the Best President of Lions International District 322-G in Category D at the District Awards Ceremony held at Hotel Omate, Guwahati recently.

The Lions Club of Guwahati Pride was also adjudged the Best New Lions Club of District 322-G for 2025-26.

The club received awards for Best Public Relations Activities, Best Lions Anna Daan Seva (Feed the Hunger) and Best Lions Mission Earth (Environmental Care).

The club also received Appreciation Awards from Lions International for Hunger Week and Environmental Week, besides extensive coverage in print and electronic media for its humanitarian and community service initiatives.

Jajodia was further honoured with the International President's Appreciation Certificate, described in the release as the third-highest individual recognition in Lions International, during the club's inaugural year.

Speaking after receiving the honours, Jajodia thanked his family, club members, fellow Lions, leaders, media persons, well-wishers and supporters for their encouragement and cooperation.

## Family seeks financial assistance for 13-year-old girl's treatment

**HT Correspondent**

**GOSSAIGAON, Aug 17:** A 13-year-old girl from Gossaigaon in Kokrajhar district is undergoing treatment for a severe infection in her left hand, with her family appealing for financial assistance to meet the medical expenses.

Mariam Khatun, a Class VI student of Serfanguri ME School, reportedly sustained an injury while playing at school.

According to her family, the injury could not be adequately treated in time and the infection subsequently worsened.

Doctors have reportedly warned that further spread of the infection could pose a serious threat to her life.

The family has also been informed that amputation of the affected hand may become necessary if her condition deteriorates further.

Mariam's father, Moinuddin Sheikh of No 1 Palashguri village, works as an e-rickshaw driver and is struggling to meet the cost of her treatment due to his limited income.

Her mother has appealed to individuals, social organisations and well-wishers to extend financial assistance for her daughter's treatment.

Those willing to contribute may do so through PhonePe at 9365568558 (Jahiruddin Sk).

## New hall construction inaugurated at Mahatma Gandhi HS School

**HT Correspondent**

**MARGHERITA, Aug 17:** An initiative to strengthen the infrastructure of Mahatma Gandhi Higher Secondary School under Purni Pukhuri Gaon Panchayat in the 83rd Margherita Legislative Assembly constituency of Tinsukia district was launched on Monday with the formal inauguration of the construction of a new hall.

The project is being undertaken with the cooperation of Oil India Limited, Dulaijan, through its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) fund, under the initiative of the Oilfield Public Interest Protection Committee, Assam Tinsukia District Committee.

Initially proposed as a dining hall, the project was later converted into a general hall by Oil India authorities and is being constructed at an estimated cost of around Rs 7 lakh.

Mohsin Alqab, Public Affairs Officer, Oil India Limited; Padmabati Moran, Headmistress of the school; Nilmoni Ghimire, President of the School Management Committee; and Jahnur Shyam Sonowal, President of the Oilfield Public Interest Protection Committee, Assam Tinsukia District Committee, attended the inaugural programme along



with teachers, students and other guests.

Alqab urged those involved to complete the construction in a planned manner using quality materials to ensure a durable facility.

Interacting with students, he encouraged them to set goals, maintain discipline and pursue their studies with concentration.

Sonowal stressed the need for further infrastructure development at the school and urged Oil India Limited to consider constructing an additional auditorium and boundary wall.

Alqab assured the gathering that the demands would be discussed with the concerned authorities and that possible steps would be considered.

The new hall is expected to facilitate academic, cultural and other programmes at the school after its completion.

## Assam actor Rajdeep Choudhury draws attention for role in 'Simulacra'

**Actor-filmmaker plays a human-consciousness advocate in the sci-fi thriller streaming on Waves OTT**

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Aug 17:** Assam-born actor and filmmaker Rajdeep Choudhury is attracting attention for his performance as Rajneesh in the sci-fi thriller Simulacra, which is streaming free on Waves OTT.

Produced by Philasia Films and directed by Pankaj Sawant, the film explores a futuristic world where advanced technology can control, edit and erase human memories.

Rajneesh, played by Choudhury, rejects technological control and emphasises human consciousness, self-awareness and genuine human connection.

Choudhury's restrained performance uses expressions, reactions and silence to portray the character's inner world.

His character remains central to the narrative throughout the film, gradually connecting its various threads.



His casting came through a recommendation from fellow FTII alumnus and friend Tarun Gahlot, who was initially considered for the role but recommended Choudhury

after becoming unavailable for another project.

Choudhury said the experience reinforced the importance of professional relationships and friend-

ships in the film industry.

The actor shares screen space with Akshara Haasan and Satyajit Dubey, with whom he also developed friendships during the production.

Beyond acting, Choudhury directed Chalo India with Eric Ji: Varanasi, which was selected for the Indian Panorama at the International Film Festival of India, Goa.

His second documentary, Chalo India with Eric Ji: Mizoram, screened at the Oscar-qualifying Raindance Film Festival in London.

He is also set to appear in the British feature film A Teacher's Gift later this year.

Choudhury has urged audiences to watch Simulacra, saying the film raises questions about humanity's future in an age increasingly dominated by technology.



## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*The Dove, on silver pinions, winged her peaceful way.*  
- James Montgomery

## Hormuz deadlock and oil prices

Efforts to end the US-Iran conflict have stalled again, leaving the Strait of Hormuz largely closed to normal commercial traffic and deepening uncertainty over Gulf energy exports. Fresh shipping attacks and weakening forecasts for global oil consumption are adding another layer of risk to an already volatile market. Iran and the United States remain far apart over restoring the interim agreement reached in June, which had called for an immediate end to military operations and opened a 60-day period for negotiations towards a permanent settlement. The arrangement quickly unravelled. President Donald Trump declared it over on July 7, while Tehran formally suspended it about a week later. Negotiations through intermediaries have produced no progress on either restoring the agreement or establishing a timetable for implementing its commitments. Tehran maintains that Washington breached the arrangement shortly after it was reached and therefore rejects suggestions that the original negotiating period can simply be extended. The dispute centres partly on Hormuz, the narrow waterway linking the Gulf to the Arabian Sea. Before the conflict, roughly a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas flows passed through the strait. Washington says Tehran failed to meet commitments to reopen the route.

Iran says the United States has not fulfilled obligations involving the blockade of Iranian ports and the release of frozen assets. Trump has, meanwhile, hardened his rhetoric, asserting that the United States has "total control" of Hormuz and describing Iran as weakened by the conflict. Iranian authorities dispute that claim and insist the waterway will remain blocked until their conditions are accepted. Tehran has demanded access to frozen assets and broader changes to U. S. policy in the region. The diplomatic impasse has been accompanied by renewed danger for commercial shipping. A suspected Houthi attack on the Egyptian-owned cargo vessel Tihamah in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait on Tuesday killed four crew members. Two Yemeni rescuers were also reported killed. In a separate incident, a U. S. Navy helicopter fired Hellfire missiles at a Panama-flagged cargo vessel after it allegedly ignored orders linked to the blockade of Iranian ports.

Oil prices have consequently remained highly sensitive to diplomatic and military developments. Brent crude settled near \$89 a barrel after Tuesday's attacks, while West Texas Intermediate ended around \$83. Benchmark prices have swung sharply since fighting began in February, with Brent reaching \$126 at one stage as traders priced in the possibility of prolonged disruption to Gulf exports. Supply risks are increasingly colliding with a weaker demand picture. OPEC has cut its estimate for global oil demand growth in 2026 for a fourth consecutive month, reducing the projection to 580,000 barrels per day.

# The 1-km controversy: Is Kaziranga at risk?

Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve stands as one of the most remarkable wildlife sanctuaries in Asia, home to the world's largest population of the great one horned rhinoceros. Tucked away along the lush floodplains of the Brahmaputra River in Assam, this natural wonder represents decades of dedicated conservation success. A fresh wave of intense public debate has erupted over how to protect its edges. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma recently indicated that the state government intends to fix the width of the Eco-Sensitive Zone around Kaziranga to a minimum of one kilometre rather than relying on the standard ten-kilometre default buffer. This announcement triggered immediate reactions from environmentalists, local residents, legal experts, and wildlife enthusiasts who care deeply about the sanctuary's survival.

Understanding why this proposal creates such a stir requires looking closely at how Eco-Sensitive Zones work in practice. The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change introduced the concept of buffer zones around protected areas to absorb human impacts. Think of an Eco-Sensitive Zone as a protective cushion around a sanctuary. It softens the transition between dense human settlements and fragile wilderness. Within these zones, polluting industries, large mining operations, and commercial activities face strict bans or tight regulations. The idea is simple: wild animals do not understand human boundaries, so their immediate surroundings must remain safe, quiet, and ecologically intact.

When no specific zone gets officially notified for a national park, guidelines and court directions state that a default ten-kilometre boundary applies automatically. Kaziranga operated under this broad expectation for years. The state government now wants to finalize a clear, customized notification. By proposing a one-kilometre minimum boundary, officials argue they are bringing clarity and relieving surrounding human communities from unnecessary restrictions. Critics fear that shrinking the buffer zone opens up pristine land right on the doorstep of the national park to commercial projects, resort expansion, and urban construction. The official argument presented by the state government focuses heavily on regional economic growth and human livelihoods.

Towns like Bokakhat, Jakhlabandha, Kalabor, and nearby settlements have existed for generations alongside the park. Local leaders point out that a blanket ten-kilometre restriction stops essential public infrastructure from

being built. Building a municipal stadium, expanding local schools, constructing hospitals, or setting up small scale agro processing units becomes complicated when every project needs high level environmental clearances. Local residents often feel trapped in legal red tape when trying to build homes or small businesses on their ancestral property. The government maintains that narrowing the zone allows long overdue development to proceed smoothly without harming the core park area.

Environmental experts and conservation organizations view the situation through a completely different lens. They argue that Kaziranga cannot be evaluated as an isolated island of grass and forest. The park functions as part of a connected, living ecosystem that extends well south toward the Karbi Anglong hills. Every summer, heavy monsoon rains cause the Brahmaputra River to overflow its banks, submerging vast stretches of the low lying floodplains. When this inundation happens, thousands of animals including rhinos, wild buffaloes, deer, and elephants must leave the flooded park to seek safety on higher ground.

To reach the safety of the Karbi Anglong hills, animals must cross National Highway 715, previously known as National Highway 37. This stretch of road cuts directly through the historical animal movement paths. Over decades, wildlife experts identified specific natural passages, known as corridors, where herds routinely cross the road during floods. If the Eco-Sensitive Zone drops to just one kilometre in these critical locations, commercial developments like luxury resorts, hotels, warehouses, and brick kilns could spring up right alongside the highway.

Heavy construction, bright night lighting, high walls, and constant vehicular traffic could block these vital corridors permanently. Animals fleeing rising floodwaters would find their escape routes cut off, leading to mass drownings or increased vehicle strikes on the highway.

Unregulated commercial activity around the park poses another serious threat through habitat degradation. Over recent years, illegal stone quarrying and sand mining in the Karbi Anglong hills have already disturbed local river streams that flow directly down into Kaziranga. These streams bring fresh water and sediment to the wetlands inside the park. When mining activities muddy the water or alter stream flows, aquatic life suffers, aquatic plants die off, and the delicate balance of the grassland ecosystem degrades. Keeping a wider protective buffer zone helps contain these damaging activities before their impacts



reach the heart of the sanctuary.

Tourism adds another layer of complexity to the discussion. Kaziranga attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors from around the world each year, generating significant revenue for Assam and creating jobs for jeep drivers, nature guides, hotel staff, and artisans. The urge to build more resorts, restaurants, and entertainment facilities near the park gates is powerful. Investors see immense financial potential in purchasing land as close to the wilderness as possible. Without a generous Eco-Sensitive Zone, commercial pressure can quickly overwhelm rural landscapes. Unplanned tourism development creates severe garbage management problems, causes noise pollution that stresses wild animals, and drains local groundwater supplies that nearby villages depend on.

Distrust also stems from historical land ownership patterns around the park boundaries. Many local farmers and indigenous communities have lived near Kaziranga for generations, cultivating paddy fields that double as seasonal foraging grounds for birds and herbivores. When large private investors enter the market seeking land for commercial tourism, small landowners face economic pressure to sell. Many conservationists worry that reducing the buffer zone primarily benefits large commercial developers rather than the local villagers who have quietly coexisted with wildlife for decades.

Finding the right path forward requires moving away from an all or nothing mindset. Rigidly enforcing a single fixed distance everywhere around a park rarely works well because natural landscapes are not uniform. A flexible, scientific approach called micro-zoning offers a practical middle path. Instead of

applying a flat one-kilometre limit across the entire border, authorities can map out the area based on ecological sensitivity.

In critical animal corridors where elephants and rhinos cross toward the hills during monsoons, the buffer zone could remain wide, extending five or even ten kilometers to prevent any heavy construction. In areas directly adjacent to existing historical towns like Bokakhat, where wildlife movement is minimal and human settlement is already dense, the buffer zone could safely be kept narrower to allow normal civic life and public infrastructure to grow. Micro-zoning respects both natural biology and human needs, offering a balanced compromise based on hard data rather than administrative convenience.

Supreme Court rulings on environment management emphasize that while economic development is necessary, the precautionary principle must guide state policies. Protecting a World Heritage Site like Kaziranga is not just a regional responsibility, it is a global duty. The animals living inside the reserve depend entirely on human foresight to keep their ancient migration paths open.

Open dialogue between government officials, wildlife scientists, local community leaders, and environmental activists remains essential before any final notification gets sealed. Listening to the lived experiences of villagers who share their land with wild animals can yield practical solutions that legal documents often miss. Protecting Kaziranga requires ensuring that local people feel valued as true partners in conservation rather than obstacles to progress. Striking a genuine balance between human ambition and nature's quiet demands will determine whether Kaziranga remains a thriving sanctuary for generations to come.

## Kaziranga's eco-sensitive zone: Conservation at a crossroads

The proposal by the Government of Assam to reduce the Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) around Kaziranga National Park from 10 kilometres to just 1 kilometre has sparked an intense and wide-ranging debate, bringing conservation priorities and developmental aspirations into sharp and, at times, uncomfortable focus. As one of the world's most celebrated biodiversity hotspots and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Kaziranga represents not only Assam's ecological pride but also a critical global natural asset. Any decision concerning its protective buffer must therefore be approached with caution, scientific rigour, and a clear long-term vision that transcends immediate administrative convenience.

Eco-Sensitive Zones are conceptualised as "shock absorbers" around protected areas. Their purpose is not to halt development, but to regulate it in a manner that minimises ecological damage. These zones mitigate anthropogenic pressures, control unplanned land-use changes, and create a transition area between fragile ecosystems and zones of intensive human activity. In the case of Kaziranga, the ESZ has historically functioned as a crucial protective shield against encroachment, industrial expansion, quarrying, and haphazard infrastructure growth. The proposal to reduce this zone to a mere 1 kilometre raises a fundamental question: can such a narrow buffer realistically serve the ecological needs of a landscape as dynamic and complex as Kaziranga?

Kaziranga's ecological significance extends far beyond its notified boundaries. It is home to the largest population of the iconic one-horned rhinoceros, a conservation success story that has earned global recognition. Alongside the

rhino, the park supports a rich assemblage of wildlife, including tigers, elephants, swamp deer, wild water buffalo, and hundreds of bird species. Its mosaic of wetlands, grasslands, and semi-evergreen forests forms a living, breathing ecosystem that is constantly shaped by the Brahmaputra's flood dynamics.

Crucially, Kaziranga does not exist in isolation. It is part of a broader landscape that includes the Karbi Anglong hills, which serve as vital highlands for wildlife during annual floods. These hills are connected to the park through well-established animal corridors that facilitate seasonal migration. During the monsoon, when large parts of Kaziranga are submerged, animals instinctively move to higher ground in Karbi Anglong. This movement is not incidental; it is essential for survival. A reduced ESZ could fragment these corridors, leading to increased human-wildlife conflict, road accidents involving animals, and long-term genetic isolation of species.

The debate, however, cannot be framed as a simple binary between conservation and development. Proponents of the reduction argue that a smaller ESZ would ease regulatory restrictions, facilitate infrastructure projects, and improve the quality of life for local communities. There is some merit in these arguments. Villages surrounding Kaziranga face genuine developmental challenges—limited connectivity, restricted land-use options, and inadequate livelihood opportunities. It is both necessary and just to address these concerns.

Yet, the critical issue lies in the approach. Is shrinking the ESZ the most effective way to promote development, or could smarter, more nuanced planning achieve the same goals without compromising ecological integrity? Experience from across India and globally suggests that well-managed buffer zones

can support both conservation and sustainable development. The problem often lies not in the existence of regulations, but in their implementation.

Scientific evidence underscores the importance of maintaining ecologically appropriate buffer zones. In a landscape like Kaziranga, ecological processes do not adhere to administrative boundaries. Floodplains extend beyond the park, animal movement patterns cover vast areas, and seasonal habitats shift dynamically. A 1-kilometre ESZ may fail to capture these realities, potentially opening up ecologically sensitive areas to activities such as construction, commercial establishments, and even extractive industries. Once such land-use changes take root, reversing them becomes exceedingly difficult.

Another dimension that warrants serious consideration is climate resilience. Assam is increasingly experiencing the impacts of climate change—erratic rainfall patterns, intensified flooding, erosion, and habitat degradation. Kaziranga itself depends on the annual floods of the Brahmaputra for ecological renewal. These floods replenish nutrients, maintain grassland ecosystems, and control invasive species. However, human interventions in surrounding areas—such as embankments, highways, resorts, and settlements—can alter natural water flows and disrupt this delicate balance.

A robust ESZ plays a critical role in maintaining this balance. It acts as a buffer that absorbs shocks, prevents excessive human interference, and allows ecological processes to function relatively undisturbed. Weakening this buffer could make Kaziranga more vulnerable to climate-induced stresses, undermining decades of conservation success. It is equally important to recognise that local communities are not adversaries of conservation; they are indispensable partners. The future of Kaziranga depends as much on people as it does on wildlife. Therefore, instead of viewing ESZ regulations as restrictive, policymakers must reimagine them as enabling frameworks that promote sustainable livelihoods.

Eco-tourism, for instance, has immense potential in the Kaziranga landscape. When managed responsibly, it can generate income, create employment, and incentivise conservation. Similarly, promoting sustainable agriculture, organic farming, and non-timber forest-based livelihoods can provide viable alternatives to environmentally harmful activities. Capacity building, access to markets, and institutional support are key to making these initiatives successful.

A more balanced approach could involve zoning within the existing ESZ framework. Not all areas within the ESZ are equally sensitive. Through scientific mapping and participatory planning, it is possible to identify zones where limited development can be permitted

under strict guidelines, while ensuring that ecologically critical areas remain fully protected. Such a differentiated approach would allow for development without undermining the core objectives of conservation.

Transparency and public participation must also form the cornerstone of any decision-making process. Policies affecting a globally significant ecosystem like Kaziranga cannot be formulated in isolation. They require the collective wisdom of ecologists, hydrologists, social scientists, local communities, and conservation practitioners. A comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), backed by empirical data and field studies, is essential before implementing any major change in ESZ boundaries.

Furthermore, there is a need to consider cumulative impacts. Development projects, when viewed individually, may appear benign. However, their combined effect over time can lead to significant ecological degradation. Roads, resorts, mining activities, and urban expansion, when clustered around a protected area, can gradually erode its ecological resilience. The ESZ serves as a critical tool to manage these cumulative impacts.

Kaziranga's story is one of remarkable conservation success, but it is also a story of constant vigilance. The recovery of the one-horned rhinoceros from near extinction is a testament to sustained protection efforts. However, new challenges are emerging—climate change, habitat fragmentation, and increasing developmental pressures. In this context, weakening protective mechanisms could prove counterproductive. The proposed reduction of the ESZ should therefore be seen not merely as a technical adjustment, but as a policy choice with far-reaching implications. It reflects how we prioritise our natural heritage in the face of economic aspirations. It also raises deeper questions about the model of development we wish to pursue—one that is short-term and extractive, or one that is sustainable and inclusive.

In the final analysis, the issue is not just about reducing a boundary from 10 kilometres to 1 kilometre. It is about defining our collective commitment to preserving one of India's most iconic ecosystems. Development and conservation need not be mutually exclusive, but they must be carefully harmonised through informed decision-making, scientific evidence, and inclusive governance.

Kaziranga is more than a protected area; it is a living landscape that sustains biodiversity, supports livelihoods, and symbolises Assam's environmental identity. The choices we make today will shape its future for decades to come. In safeguarding Kaziranga, we are not merely protecting wildlife—we are preserving a legacy that belongs to future generations.

## Sharp increase in youth unemployment in first quarter of 2026-27

By: Dr Gyan Pathak

Periodic Labour Force Survey for the first quarter (April-June) of the current financial year 2026-27 shows a disturbing trend in youth unemployment rate, Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) and Worker Population Ratio. There has been a sharp increase in youth (15-29 years of age) unemployment rate since April 2025, when the new series of this labour data was launched, which hit the highest in the last one year.

The estimate of unemployment in Current Weekly Status (CWS) shows that youth unemployment rate in April-June 2026 reached 15.9 per cent, which was highest in any quarter since April 2025. It was 14.6 per cent in April-June 2025 and 14.3 per cent in October-December 2025, rising to 15 per cent in Jan-March 2026. While youth unemployment rate in the first quarter was 15.9 per cent, the share of female unemployment rate was 19.6 per cent and youth male unemployment rate 14.5 per cent. Youth unemployment rate was about three times the unemployment rate for all ages at 5.4 per cent.

Urban youth unemployment rate reached as high as 18.2 per cent in April-June 2026 quarter compared to 17.9 per cent during April-June 2025. The share of youth urban female unemployment rate during the first quarter of the current financial year was as high as 25.2 per cent and urban youth male unemployment rate 16 per cent.

Rural youth unemployment rate in the first quarter of the current year was 14.7 per cent compared to 13.1 per cent in the corresponding period last year. The share of rural female youth unemployment during April-June 2026 was 17.1 per cent and male youth male unemployment 13.8 per cent.

Compared to the youth unemployment rate, the unemployment rate for all age group in CWS was 5.4 per cent in April-June 2026. It has been rising in the last three quarters. In Oct-Dec 2025 it was 4.8 per cent, which rose to 5 per cent during Jan-March 2026. The share of female unemployment was 5.7 per cent in the first quarter of 2026-27 and for male it was 5.3 per cent. Urban unemployment rate was 6.7 per cent and rural unemployment rate was 4.8 per cent. All the data shows that urban unemployment rate has been worsening faster than the rural unemployment rate, though rural employment remains very low waged with little on not social security coverage.

As for LFPR in CWS, that is the number of persons employed and the number of persons in search of a job, it has been 40.7 per cent for youth during April-June 2026 which was a sharp decline from 42 per cent in the corresponding period last year. Female youth participation in the labour market has declined from 22.1 per cent to 21 per cent during this period, while the decline in male youth participation declined from 61.5 per cent to 60.4 per cent.

Urban youth participation during April-June 2026 was 41.2 per cent with share of

female youth at 20.8 per cent and male youth 60 per cent. Rural youth participation during this period was 40.5 per cent, with female youth participation 21 per cent and male youth participation 60.6 per cent.

For all age group labour participation was 41.5 per cent in the first quarter of 2026-27, with female participation at 25.5 per cent and male participation 57.7 per cent. Participation rate is deteriorating since Oct-Dec 2025 when it was 42.2 per cent. Urban participation was 39.7 per cent during April-June 2026 with female participation rate 19.9 per cent and male participation rate 59.2 per cent. Rural participation during this period was 42.3 per cent with female participation 28.1 per cent and male participation 56.9 per cent.

WPR, that is workers who actually worked at least one hour in the last seven days, for youth was 34.3 per cent in the first quarter of the current financial year. It has been deterioration since April-June 2025 when it was 35.8 per cent. Share of female youth WPR during April-June 2026 was as low as 16.8 per cent while it was 51.6 per cent for male youth.

Urban youth WPR was 33.7 per cent during April-June 2026, with share of female as low as 15.6 per cent and male 50.4 per cent. Rural youth WPR was 34.5 per cent with share of female 17.4 per cent and for male 52.3 per cent.

WPR in CWS for all age group in April-June 2026 was 39.2 per cent which was sharp decline from 40.2 per cent during Oct-Dec 2025. It declined to 39.9 per cent during Jan-March 2026. Urban WPR during April-June 2026 was 37.1 per cent with female WPR 18.2 per cent and male WPR 55.6 per cent. Rural WPR during this period was 40.2 per cent with female WPR 26.7 per cent and male 54.1 per cent.

The percentage distribution of workers in CWS of age 15 years and above shows that in rural areas, most of the workers (61.4 per cent) were self-employed during April-June, 2026. About 55.9 per cent of male and 72.0 per cent of female workers in rural areas were self-employed. Own account workers were 44 per cent. Contributing family workers were 16.1 per cent, regular wage or salaried workers were 16.1 per cent and casual labour were 22.5 per cent.

In urban areas, the majority of the workers in CWS (48.9 per cent) worked as regular wage/salaried, with 47.5 per cent of male workers and 54.8 per cent of female workers. Own account workers were 33 per cent, contributing family workers were 6.2 per cent, self-employed 39.9 per cent and casual workers 11.2 per cent.

The whole picture shows that the current financial year 2026-27 began with distortion in the labour market, and the first quarter was worst since the corresponding period in 2025. Labour market distortion needs to be taken seriously now, especially on account of the prospect of deficient rainfall this year and the impact of Middle East war and other external disturbances in the supply chain. (IPA Service)





# Changing Demographics and the Future of the Assamese

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The most complex, sensitive, and future-determining issue in contemporary Assamese social life is the rapidly changing demographic landscape and the existential crisis of the indigenous Assamese created by its impact. Within a specific geographical boundary, when the core structure of the population changes drastically and abnormally over a specific time gap, not only official statistics of that region change, but also its politics, economy, social policy, and overall cultural environment change. In the context of Assam, this change is neither an accidental disaster nor a miraculous event happening overnight; it is the outcome of a long-standing historical and political process, which has now reached a terrible and irreversible crossroads. If we only take emotion as our companion, protest on the streets, or vent our anger on social media, we will fail to reach the depth of the problem. Actually, to understand how demographic changes will determine the future of the Assamese, there is a need to analyze the equations of economics, land rights, and political power associated with numbers from a very harsh and ruthless realist perspective. The innate attraction towards the fertile lands and natural resources of Assam has drawn people to this region for ages, but in the past few decades, the character, intensity, and volume of this migration have taken an abnormal form, which has created a deep and logical apprehension in the minds of indigenous people about their future. This apprehension is not merely of identity, but the apprehension of becoming guests in one's own home.

If we realistically analyze the main factors behind this rapid change in Assam's demographics, we will see that it is closely intertwined with our economic weakness, lazy nature, and the complete lack of control over our own labor market. This process, which began since the British colonial rule, later took a terrifying shape due to political patronage for vote-bank interests and the flood-like influx of people from across the border. But just blaming the government or politicians will not help us understand the depth of this problem. A time came when the agrarian economy that was the main foundation of Assamese society began to develop cracks as we forgot to respect physical labor and started looking down upon manual work. As indigenous people left the fields, abandoned the mud and water, and headed towards cities or ran after government jobs, a cheap and hardworking labor class naturally arrived to fill that huge vacuum created in the rural economy.

There is a simple and ruthless rule of economics that wherever there is demand, supply will follow; just as nature dislikes a vacuum, so does economics. The people who came to fulfill the shortage of laborers in Assam's agricultural sector, construction sector, and small business did not remain merely laborers; with the money earned in exchange for that labor, they gradually began to assert their right over the land. The indigenous peasant, accustomed to comfort and luxury, could not compete with the sheer hard work and crop yield achieved by these people working to the bone in the fertile lands of \*char-chapories\* (riverine tracts) or lands abandoned by indigenous people. As a result, indigenous people, falling behind in economic competition, thought of selling their land and taking shelter in city rented houses or elsewhere. Thus, as land ownership transferred from one class to another, the demographic change took a permanent shape.

A deeply disappointing picture emerges when we look at Assam's current market system or economic aspect. From vegetable markets to fish and meat markets, masons, carpenters, salons, garages, and even small roadside shops—almost everywhere, a special community has established a monopoly hegemony. This is not a conspiracy; this is the reality of the market economy. The class that can provide labor and do business at lower profit margins naturally sees the market shift into their hands. But its far-reaching impact falls on demographics. When a specific community holds economic power, with the growth of their population, their social expansion also increases. While an indigenous Assamese boy sleeps until ten in the morning or hesitates to do minor physical work, people coming from outside wake up at four in the morning, get to work, and build their future. Backed by this economic power, they not only sustain themselves but can also settle ten other people of their community. Thus, a network is built that accelerates demographic change. Today, buying a piece of land or building a house in a place like Guwahati city has become like a dream for an ordinary middle-class indigenous Assamese, whereas some people rising from the laboring class have easily captured these. A nation economically cornered can never live its language or culture with pride. Without money in the pocket and without owning the land that provides food to the stomach, emotional nationalism cannot provide protection for long.

In a democratic system of governance, numbers are the biggest and most decisive force. The demographic change in Assam is slowly but surely

snatching away the key of political power from the hands of the indigenous people. Analyzing election results and voting trends shows that in many constituencies of Assam, people whose ancestors may have arrived here only a short time ago now play a decisive role. When the majority of voters in a constituency belong to a specific community or religion, political parties—no matter how nationalist they claim to be—are forced to protect the interests of that community and pander to them. As a result, issues of indigenous problems, the protection of language-culture, and safeguarding heritage become secondary. Although administrative efforts have been made in recent times to secure indigenous political rights through the delimitation process, how effective it will be in long-term planning remains shrouded in deep doubt. This is because the difference in population growth rates is very clear. If the population of one faction grows in a geometric progression and the population of another faction remains stagnant or decreases, after ten or twenty years the equation of constituencies will change anew. Then perhaps no legal protective shield or delimitation can give political security to the indigenous people. The example of Tripura is glaring right before our eyes, where demographic change reduced the indigenous tribal people to a minority in their own state and pushed them far away from political power. If a similar situation arises in Assam, there is no doubt that the future of the Assamese language and culture will be dark. Politics is a game of possibilities, and those possibilities always lie with the majority.

The relationship between Assam's land problem and demographic change is very intimate, complex, and painful. Losing land rights from the hands of indigenous people means losing the ground beneath the nation's feet. Encroachments on government reserved forests, \*Satras\* (Vaisnavite monasteries), and government khas lands are not the only problems; the problem is much deeper. The problem is the tendency of indigenous people to voluntarily sell their ancestral property to outsiders. Out of immediate financial gain, inability to farm, or failure to clear medical expenses, many Assamese have sold their lands. Who bought them? Those who gathered money through back-breaking labor. Today, there are many regions in Assam's villages where previously only indigenous people lived, but now the demographics have changed. Observing who holds the ownership of flats or land in major cities of Assam, including Guwahati, gives a hint of the future. Land is not just a place to live; land is the

sole source of economic production. When a nation loses control over the source of production, it becomes dependent. This dependency makes a nation spineless. The reluctance of indigenous youth to adopt cooperative or modern agricultural methods in rural Assam and their disillusionment with land have accelerated demographic change. Today, if we want to check demographic change, we cannot save land merely by making laws. Buying and selling continue by evading laws. What is needed is to enhance the economic capability of the Assamese people so that they do not face situations where they have to sell land.

The future of language and culture is directly linked to demographic change because for a language to stay alive, the number of people speaking that language and its economic prestige must remain. Recent census data has already shown that the percentage of Assamese speakers in Assam is gradually and alarmingly declining. In contrast, the number of people speaking Bengali and other languages is growing rapidly. With changing demographics, in many regions of Assam, the Assamese language has now become a government operational language or a language of a specific community rather than a link language. Especially in many places of Lower Assam and Middle Assam, the use of the Assamese language has decreased in markets, streets, and crowded places. Even bigger than that, when Assamese people become a minority in a place, they are forced to adopt other languages due to social pressure or business necessity. This linguistic aggression not only changes words or grammar but also devours the mindset and cultural identity of a nation. Satriya culture, Bihu, and other indigenous traditions will remain protected only when the number of people practicing them forms a majority. Demographic change has truly given birth to a blended or hybrid culture, but how strong the main stream of the Assamese will remain in that blend is a major question. If we remain emotional and talk only about the pride of the language without increasing its practical utility in the real field, the possibility of the Assamese language being reduced to a near-dead language under demographic pressure cannot be ruled out.

What kind of future Assamese society will be depends on the harsh steps we take today. If demographic change continues at an unbridled pace like the present, the probability of Assamese people becoming completely ineffective in their own state within the next two decades is strong. Then perhaps an Assamese person might become the Chief Minister of Assam, but they may not be in a

political position to protect the interests of the indigenous people. Participation of local people in government jobs and trade-commerce may remain nominal. But what is the way to escape this dark future? We cannot stem this statistical storm merely through movements, slogans, emotional speeches, or burning tires on the street. For this, a well-thought-out, scientific, and hard-realist action plan is needed. First, Assamese people must give up the allure of a "luxurious life" and build hard work or a "work culture". As long as we remain dependent on outsider labor for our household chores, agricultural work, or small businesses, their aggression will continue. Self-reliance is not just a name for government schemes; it must become the sole mantra for a nation's survival. Second, the government must adopt strict policies for population control and create awareness among the public. Population growth rates can be reduced through improvements in education and health, which has been proven in many countries around the world. Without spreading the light of education in regions of Assam where population explosions have occurred, this problem cannot be solved.

In conclusion, we cannot deny the demographic change in Assam; it is a harsh and ruthless reality. It has brought an existential crisis for the Assamese nation, the solution of which will not be provided by any external force. But frustration or merely emotional reactions are not its solutions. We must understand that in the modern world, one cannot live solely on past glory or tales of heroism. A nation that fails to strengthen itself economically and intellectually with time is bound to vanish in the current of time. If the Assamese nation wants to survive in the future, it must re-establish its authority over its land, language, and economy. For this, a collective awakening will be needed—an awakening that is not merely political, but economic and cultural. If we do not sell our land, if we keep our market in our control, and if we groom our new generation as skilled human resources, then even if we fall behind in the game of numbers, we can maintain our dominance through quality and economic power. History bears witness that numbers are not everything; small countries like Israel or tiny communities like the Parsis have been able to maintain their place in the world through their intelligence, hard work, and unity. Now the time has come for self-analysis and silently yet firmly strengthening our foundation. Whether the future of the Assamese will be dark or bright will be determined by our current course of action, sacrifice, and foresight.

## From minority insecurity to terrorism: The reality of Pakistan

By: Lalit Garg

The recent statement made by Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari on the occasion of Independence Day is not merely a bitter and politically charged remark; it is also a reflection of a mindset in which hostility, distrust, resentment and ideological opposition towards India continue to remain deeply embedded. Commenting on the concept of "Akhand Bharat" (Undivided India), Zardari reportedly said that Indians believe in it, but that Muslims in Pakistan do not subscribe to the idea. At the same time, he claimed that Hindus in Pakistan are safe and happy. The question, therefore, is simple: should the world accept the assertion of a head of state at face value, or examine it against demographic data and realities on the ground? History does not judge nations merely by political rhetoric; it judges them by facts. In Pakistan's case, four areas—demography, the condition of minorities, religious freedom and terrorism—provide a revealing mirror of its own reality.

When Pakistan came into existence in 1947, Hindus constituted a significant proportion of its population. According to the 1951 Census, Hindus accounted for approximately 14.6 per cent of the population of the then Pakistan. In Pakistan's official 2023 Census, however, the population recorded under the categories of Hindu Jati and Scheduled Castes was 3,867,729 and 1,349,487 respectively, against a total population of approximately 240.46 million. Taken together, these figures amount to roughly 2.17 per cent of the population. The dramatic decline in the demographic share of Hindus cannot simply be dismissed as an insignificant statistical change; it raises serious questions about the historical and contemporary treatment of religious minorities in Pakistan.

India, too, must be assessed on the basis of facts. India's last fully published Census was conducted in 2011, when the Muslim population stood at 14.23 per cent, or approximately 172.2 million people. This is where a fundamental difference between India and Pakistan becomes evident. India did not make religion the basis of citizenship. The Constitution guarantees equal citizenship, freedom of religion and the right of every individual to practise and profess his or her faith. Indian Muslims have occupied important positions as President, Vice-President, Union Ministers, Governors, Chief Ministers, judges, military officers, academicians, entrepreneurs, artists, sportspersons and administrators. They have contributed substantially to virtually every sphere of national life. This is not a weakness of Indian democracy; it is one of its greatest strengths.

By contrast, the condition of religious minorities in Pakistan continues to raise serious concerns among international human-rights organisations. Human Rights Watch's 2026 reporting on Pakistan highlights the misuse of blasphemy laws and the vulnerability of religious minorities to violence, arbitrary detention and social pressure. Hindus, Christians and Ahmadis have faced serious challenges, including violence and allegations of forced marriage and religious conversion. In 2023, following allegations of blasphemy in Jaranwala, Punjab, mobs attacked churches and Christian homes. Human Rights Watch has also documented instances in which blasphemy laws have been exploited to facilitate the dispossession of minorities and force them to leave their homes. Against this background, Zardari's assertion that Hindus in

Pakistan are living happily and securely appears less like an objective assessment and more like a political narrative that deserves to be tested against verifiable evidence.

The true measure of whether minorities are safe in a country is not the statement of its president. It is whether minorities enjoy equal citizenship, religious freedom, protection of their temples and places of worship, equality before law and the right to live without fear. In India, Muslims and other minorities can question governments, criticise public policies, approach courts and seek constitutional remedies. That institutional space is fundamental to a democracy. It represents one of the key distinctions between a constitutional democracy such as India and a state where religious and communal insecurity continues to be a serious concern.

The second major issue is Pakistan's long-standing association with cross-border terrorism. For decades, terrorism emanating from or facilitated through Pakistan has remained one of the most serious security challenges confronting India. The 2001 Parliament attack, the 2008 Mumbai attacks, Pathankot, Uri, Pulwama and repeated incidents of violence in Jammu and Kashmir are part of this troubling history. Following the 2019 Pulwama terrorist attack, India carried out the Balakot air strike against a Jaish-e-Mohammed training facility. India's Ministry of External Affairs stated at the time that the action was directed against terrorist infrastructure because Pakistan had failed to take adequate measures against terrorist organisations operating from its territory. The Pahalgam terrorist attack of 2025 and the subsequent Operation Sindoor marked another significant moment in India's evolving security doctrine. Following the April 22, 2025 attack in which 26 people were killed, India announced on May 7 that it had conducted strikes against nine terrorist targets in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir. The Indian government described the operation as a targeted and controlled action against terrorist infrastructure.

This transformation is not limited to conventional military responses. India has increasingly focused on the financial, logistical and narcotics networks that sustain terrorism. The phenomenon of narco-terrorism—where narcotics smuggling is used to generate funds for terror networks—has emerged as an additional dimension of the security challenge. India's challenge today is therefore not merely an armed terrorist standing across the border. It is an interconnected ecosystem involving terrorism, weapons, drones, narcotics, disinformation and attempts to create social divisions. Over the past decade, India has increasingly communicated a clear strategic message: terrorism and dialogue cannot proceed on parallel tracks when one undermines the other. The surgical strikes of 2016, the Balakot action of 2019 and Operation Sindoor in 2025 are different events, but they convey a common principle—India will not remain confined to condemnation and diplomatic protests when confronted with terrorism directed against its citizens.

This transformed India is also essential to understanding Pakistan's continuing unease. India's economy, technological capabilities, space programme, defence manufacturing, digital infrastructure, global diplomacy and strategic influence have expanded considerably. India is no longer viewed merely as a South Asian power; it is increasingly regarded as an important participant in global decision-making and a significant partner in

shaping the international order. Pakistan's challenge is therefore not merely that India is moving ahead economically and strategically. A deeper challenge is that India is progressing while retaining its pluralistic and democratic identity. That is precisely why Zardari's remarks deserve scrutiny. Before commenting on India's internal diversity or invoking the idea of "Akhand Bharat," Pakistan's leadership should look inward and examine the condition of its own minorities and the forces threatening its social cohesion.

India's demographic reality itself demonstrates that the Muslim community has not disappeared or been marginalised out of existence. It remains a large and integral component of Indian society. At the same time, international human-rights organisations continue to express serious concerns about the security and religious freedoms of minorities in Pakistan. The international community, therefore, should also examine its approach towards Pakistan. Countries should not overlook serious issues merely because of short-term strategic or political interests. A nation should ultimately be judged by its conduct, not by its speeches. If a country publicly professes commitment to combating terrorism while terrorist networks operating from or linked to its territory continue to threaten its neighbours, the international community should not be satisfied merely by diplomatic assurances. Words must be matched by demonstrable action.

India's strength does not mean hatred towards any religion or hostility towards any nation. It means protecting its citizens, defending its borders, preserving national unity and responding firmly to terrorism. Indian Muslims are as Indian as Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Jains, Buddhists and members of every other community. India's unity derives not from uniformity but from the constitutional principle of equality amid diversity. The most important question before Pakistan today is not India. It is Pakistan itself. When will Pakistan acknowledge that using terrorism as an instrument of foreign policy ultimately destabilises the very society in whose name such policies are pursued? The people of Pakistan themselves have suffered enormously from terrorism and militant violence.

Before worrying about the imagined threat of "Akhand Bharat," Zardari and Pakistan's leadership would do well to worry about the unity, peace, stability and security of present-day Pakistan, including the protection of its religious minorities. There is a profound irony in history: a nation that repeatedly questions India's unity continues to struggle with terrorism, political instability, economic difficulties and social divisions within its own borders. The path forward for South Asia cannot lie in hatred, historical grievances or the export of terrorism. It lies in peace, constitutional democracy, protection of minorities, economic development, mutual respect and an unequivocal rejection of terrorism in all its forms. India's message should therefore remain clear: peace is welcome, dialogue is possible, but terrorism cannot be a tool of state policy. A confident and democratic India does not need to answer hatred with hatred. It needs to answer propaganda with facts, terrorism with resolve, and divisive politics with the enduring strength of its constitutional values. History will ultimately judge Pakistan not by what its leaders say about India, but by what Pakistan does within its own borders—to protect its minorities, defeat terrorism and build a peaceful and stable society.

## The Freedom Assam gave India: Remembering a region's role in the Independence struggle

By: Siddharth Roy

Every year, when the Tricolour rises on August 15, India commemorates the end of nearly two centuries of British rule. The familiar images of the Red Fort, the national anthem and the Prime Minister's address can sometimes make independence appear as a single historical moment. It was not. August 15, 1947, was the culmination of generations of resistance, political awakening, sacrifice and mobilisation across the subcontinent.

The demand for complete independence acquired a decisive national character when the Indian National Congress adopted the goal of Purna Swaraj in 1929 and observed January 26, 1930, as Independence Day. The subsequent Civil Disobedience Movement, the mass campaigns led by Mahatma Gandhi, the sacrifices of revolutionaries and the political upheavals of the 1940s steadily eroded the foundations of colonial rule. The Second World War further weakened Britain, while the Indian freedom movement made continued imperial governance increasingly untenable.

Yet the history of Indian independence cannot be adequately understood from Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta or other major centres alone. The struggle acquired its truly national character because distant provinces and frontier regions participated in it. Assam was one such region.

Resistance before the Gandhian Era Assam's engagement with the freedom struggle predates the arrival of mass Gandhian politics. The uprising of 1857 found an echo in the province through the resistance associated with Maniram Dewan and Piyali Barua.

Maniram Dewan, once associated with the British administration and later with Assam's emerging tea industry, gradually became critical of colonial rule. He sought to restore Assamese political authority and became involved in a plan to challenge British power during the upheavals of 1857. Piyali Barua joined him in the effort. The conspiracy was uncovered, and both men were executed at Jorhat in 1858.

Their deaths are significant because they demonstrate that Assamese resistance was rooted not merely in imported nationalist ideas but also in a profound sense of political dispossession. Long before independence became a mass political demand, Assam had produced individuals willing to challenge colonial sovereignty.

**Nationalism Reaches the Brahmaputra Valley**

The arrival of Gandhi transformed the character of Indian nationalism. The Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920-22 brought large sections of Assamese society into active politics. Students, lawyers, traders, workers and ordinary villagers responded to the call for boycott and self-reliance.

Gopinath Bordoloi emerged as one of the central political figures of this period. His commitment to the nationalist cause eventually earned him imprisonment. More importantly, he helped connect Assam's regional political concerns with the larger Indian struggle.

The significance of this phase lay in the transformation of nationalism from an elite political idea into a social movement.

Khadi, constructive work, boycott and public meetings introduced the idea of swaraj into ordinary life. Assam's participation demonstrated that the nationalist movement was capable of crossing considerable geographical and cultural distances.

**1942: When Assam Rose**

The most dramatic chapter of Assam's freedom struggle came during the Quit India Movement. When Gandhi issued the call of "Do or Die" in August 1942, the colonial administration responded with arrests and repression. Yet Assam witnessed widespread demonstrations, underground activity and attempts to challenge the authority of the colonial state.

One of the most unforgettable episodes occurred at Gohpur on September 20, 1942. Kanaklata Barua, a teenager from the region, led a procession towards the police station with the national flag. She was determined to hoist the Tricolour despite the threat of police action. When the procession was ordered to stop, she continued forward and was shot dead while carrying the flag. Her martyrdom has acquired a significance far beyond the circumstances of her death. Kanaklata represents the remarkable participation of young people in India's freedom struggle and reminds us that the national movement was sustained by individuals who possessed neither political office nor material power.

**Dhekiajuli and the Courage of Ordinary People**

The same day witnessed another tragic episode at Dhekiajuli, where police firing killed several protesters. The victims included women and young people. Among them was Tuleswari Barua, remembered for her participation despite her young age. Dhekiajuli is particularly important because it reveals the social depth of Assam's nationalist movement. The freedom struggle was not simply a contest among political leaders. It reached villages and small towns, bringing peasants, workers, women and young people into confrontation with the colonial state. History often remembers the speeches of great leaders more readily than the courage of anonymous participants. Yet movements become transformative precisely when ordinary people decide that political freedom is worth personal risk.

**The Women Who Refused to Remain Spectators**

Assam's women played a remarkable role in the struggle. Bhogswari Phukanani, a mother from Nagaon, became one of the most enduring symbols of this participation.

During the Quit India Movement, she actively participated in nationalist activities. In September 1942, during a confrontation involving the national flag, she resisted a British officer's attempt to seize it. She was shot and subsequently died of her injuries. Her story is important because it disrupts the conventional portrayal of India's freedom movement as overwhelmingly male. In Assam, women entered the political struggle not merely as supporters but as organisers, protesters and martyrs.

**Kushal Konwar and the Price of Conviction**

Kushal Konwar represents another strand of Assamese nationalism. A com-

mitted follower of Gandhian principles, he participated in the freedom movement and was eventually arrested in connection with the derailment of a military train near Sarupathar during the Quit India period.

Although he maintained that he had no involvement in the act, the colonial authorities convicted him and executed him at Jorhat Jail in 1943. His death illustrates the severity with which the British administration dealt with resistance in Assam during the final phase of the freedom struggle.

**Beyond a Few Famous Names**

The history of Assam's independence movement cannot be reduced to a handful of celebrated personalities. Behind them stood thousands of people whose names rarely appear in national textbooks. There were volunteers who organised meetings, villagers who sheltered activists, students who joined demonstrations, women who carried messages, workers who participated in protests and families who endured imprisonment and economic hardship. The courage of such people transformed nationalism from an abstract political doctrine into a lived experience.

Assam's geography also gave its struggle a distinctive character. The Brahmaputra Valley, tea gardens, riverine settlements and frontier communities formed different social worlds, yet the idea of freedom gradually connected them to the larger national movement.

**Making Assam Visible in the National Memory**

Seventy-nine years after independence, the historical contribution of Assam deserves greater visibility in India's national narrative. The purpose is not regional glorification. It is historical completeness. India became independent because innumerable struggles converged. Maniram Dewan and Piyali Barua represented an early challenge to colonial domination. Gopinath Bordoloi helped consolidate modern political mobilisation. Kanaklata Barua, Bhogswari Phukanani, Kushal Konwar, Tuleswari Barua and countless others demonstrated that the final struggle could demand the ultimate sacrifice.

Their stories also remind contemporary India that freedom is never merely the absence of foreign rule. It is the continuing ability of citizens to live with dignity, participate in democracy and protect the plural character of the republic.

**The Flag and Its Forgotten Stories**

On August 15, the Tricolour will once again fly over government buildings, schools, villages and homes across Assam. Its meaning becomes deeper when we remember the people who once marched towards colonial police stations carrying that very symbol. The independence of 1947 was a national achievement because it was built from countless local acts of courage. Assam was not on the margins of that story. It was one of the places where the idea of freedom was tested in blood.

The proper tribute to its freedom fighters, therefore, is not merely remembrance on a national holiday. It is to ensure that their stories remain part of India's historical consciousness. A nation honours its freedom most faithfully when it remembers not only when independence arrived, but also the many people, places and sacrifices that made its arrival possible.



'The SIT will submit its status report to the Supreme Court in a sealed cover'

## Ram temple donations row: SC asks SIT to conclude probe expeditiously, file status report

**NEW DELHI, Aug 17:** The Supreme Court on Monday asked a court-appointed Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the alleged embezzlement of donations at the Ram temple in Ayodhya to complete its investigation expeditiously and take it to a logical conclusion.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joyimalya Bagchi and V Mohana also directed the SIT to file a status report in a sealed cover on the progress made in the investigation.

"The SIT, which includes a forensic auditor, will submit its status report to the Supreme Court in a sealed cover. The report will be first perused by us and seen if we have to release it to all the parties," it said.

The bench also asked the SIT to consider objectively any suggestions made by the different litigants before the court for qualitative improvement of the investigation and its transparency.



provement of the investigation and its transparency.

It permitted the petitioners seeking a court-monitored investigation by an independent agency or the CBI, and other public-spirited persons to submit suggestions to the office of the Solicitor General on any aspect that should be probed by the SIT

in connection with the allegations of donations theft.

It said the office of Solicitor General Tushar Mehta will forward the suggestions to the SIT, which would be considered objectively.

"We also permit the petitioners or any other bona fide public-spirited person to give their suggestions to the office of the Solicitor

General with respect to the aspects that may be required to be thoroughly investigated by the SIT.

"The office of the Solicitor General shall forward the suggestions to the SIT. We have no reason to doubt that the same shall be objectively considered," it ordered.

The bench said after examining the report of the SIT, the court may issue certain directions for reforms in the management of donations made by the devotees visiting the Ram temple.

On July 27, the top court took note of the setting up of the four-member SIT headed by IGP Kiran S to probe the alleged embezzlement of donations at the Ram temple.

It had asked the Uttar Pradesh government to also include a forensic auditor in the probe team.

Observing that "remedial actions will have to be taken", the bench had said that steps will be taken to

"ensure transparency".

The bench had also directed the SIT to submit a status report in two weeks.

Earlier on July 20, the bench had asked the Uttar Pradesh government to apprise it about the possibility of setting up an SIT to probe the alleged embezzlement of donations.

On July 13, the bench had directed the Uttar Pradesh Police to submit a status report in the matter.

It had also issued a notice to the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust on pleas seeking a fair and time-bound probe into the alleged donations theft.

After allegations of irregularities in the management of donations surfaced at the temple, several petitioners, including RJD MP Sudhakar Singh, moved the apex court seeking a probe by the CBI and a forensic audit of the finances of the temple trust. (PTI)

## Go swadeshi, money spent on imports being used to destabilise India: Adityanath



**LUCKNOW, Aug 17:** Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday urged people to opt for swadeshi products, claiming that money spent on imported items is being used to destabilise the country.

Speaking during the launch of a new e-Pos-based commission system for fair price shop dealers in Lucknow, Adityanath hit out at the Samajwadi Party, accusing it of cheating the poor and of hunger deaths during their rule.

He said that under the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh, 15 crore people are availing free ration facilities through the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana.

"When money flows out of the country, a portion of it is often used to fuel terrorism and destabilise India," he said, asserting that a swadeshi campaign should begin at the village level.

"Strive to take local products to the global stage," he added.

The chief minister further claimed that under the previous Samajwadi Party rule, people in the state were dying of starvation.

"I remember what the situation was like before 2017. People used to die of starvation. Some SP worker or the other would keep the poor person's ration card at their own home, and the unfortunate person would die of hunger. That is not the situation today," Adityanath said.

"Arrangements are being made to deliver rations directly to the homes of destitute and persons with disabilities," he added.

He further said that free LPG connections were provided to two crore families, while free electricity connections have been provided to 1.53 crore families.

The CM also said 10,000 ration shops have been established as 'Annappurna Bhavans'.

"The previous government was engaged in plunder," he claimed, adding that after coming to power, he spoke to fair price shop dealers.

"I told them that along with rations, there were 39 types of items that they could stock and sell in

their shop, like clothes, soap, toothpaste, oil, and so on. Previously, this was not permitted," he said.

Claiming that the Food and Civil Supplies Department has undergone extensive reform post 2017, Adityanath said not a "single complaint" regarding ration distribution was received.

He lauded the fair price shop dealers for distributing ration during the COVID-19 pandemic and urged them to become symbols of trust.

"Expedite construction of Annappurna Bhavans. The government would allocate the necessary funds for the construction of quality buildings and warehouses," he said.

The chief minister said that while ration distribution would take place over 7-10 days, the warehouses could be utilised for other activities during the remaining 20 days to generate additional income.

Prioritising local products such as those under the 'One District, One Product' (ODOPO) scheme during festivals like Holi and Diwali would encourage local artisans and craftspeople, while also strengthening India's economy, he said.

Deputy CMs Keshav Prasad Maurya and Brajesh Pathak were among those present on the occasion.

Later on X, Adityanath congratulated the UP people for participating in the 'Har Ghar Tiranga' mega-campaign with zeal and enthusiasm.

In a letter addressed to the people of the state, shared on X, Adityanath said, "Today marks the grand culmination of the massive campaign to hoist the Tricolour across five crore households in Uttar Pradesh. Heartfelt congratulations and best wishes to all the residents of the state who participated in the 'Har Ghar Tiranga' mega-campaign with zeal and enthusiasm."

He also urged the youth to rise above caste and take the path of unity and harmony. (PTI)

## BJP mounts major protest against NC govt in Jammu, accuses it of failing on promises

**JAMMU, Aug 17:** Hundreds of BJP workers, led by Jammu and Kashmir party president Sat Sharma, took to the streets here on Monday to protest against the National Conference-led government, accusing it of failing to fulfil its election promises and address unemployment and development issues.

Carrying placards and party flags, the BJP activists gathered at Dogra Chowk, Maheshpura, and Panjtiirbi before marching separately toward the Civil Secretariat via Shalimar Road under the leadership of Sharma, Member of Parliament Jugal Kishore Sharma, and Leader of Opposition in the J-K Assembly Sunil Sharma, raising slogans against the NC-Congress alliance. Several senior party leaders demanded the resignation of Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, alleging large-scale corruption and complete failure of governance.

Protesters also set ablaze effigies of the NC-Congress government, while police and paramilitary personnel were deployed in large numbers along the march routes and the Civil Secretariat. Women workers of the BJP Mahila Morcha also participated in the demonstration.

"Thousands of BJP workers, MPs, legislators and common people are on the roads to express their anger against the NC-led government. The elections were held after a long gap, and the National Conference came to power after making several promises before the elections. But now, when it is time to actually work, they keep raising the issue of statehood to mislead the public," the J-K BJP president said. (PTI)

## Congress disrespected Vande Mataram, must apologise: Goa BJP



**PANAJI, Aug 17:** Amid a row over an Independence Day video featuring Sonia Gandhi and other leaders, the BJP in Goa on Monday accused the opposition party of disrespecting Vande Mataram and demanded an apology.

Addressing a press conference in Panaji, Goa BJP spokesperson Daji Krishna Salkar alleged that the Congress had curtailed the singing of Vande Mataram in 1937 on the grounds that it was not secular.

"The way they split Vande Mataram in 1937, they partitioned the country in 1947," Salkar said, adding that the BJP had started the practice of singing the complete version of the national song.

Referring to a video featuring Sonia Gandhi, Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi at the AICC headquarters on Independence Day, he alleged that the actions of Congress leaders showed they were opposed to Vande Mataram.

"The Congress should admit that they don't like singing Vande Mataram," Salkar added.

He also alleged that people had witnessed Sonia Gandhi trying to stop the singing of Vande Mataram and claimed that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had said that Vande Mataram was not the national anthem.

"The Congress has been completely exposed over their hatred towards Vande Mataram. They should tender an apology," he said. (PTI)

## Pension reforms to make administrative system more efficient: Jitendra Singh

**NEW DELHI, Aug 17:** Union Minister Jitendra Singh on Monday said the government's pension reforms are aimed not only at providing ease of living to pensioners but also at making the administrative system more efficient.

Addressing the 9th National ANUBHAV Awards Ceremony-2026 and the 60th Pre-Retirement Counselling Workshop at Vigyan Bhawan here, he said technology-driven pension service delivery has brought greater efficiency, while saving significant manpower and financial resources.

Singh, the Minister of State for Personnel, said retiring employees are a national asset and called for continued use of technology and feedback from pensioners to make the pension system simpler, more responsive and aligned with changing social requirements.

He said the pension reforms were aimed not only at providing ease of living to pensioners but also at making the entire administrative system more efficient, according to a Personnel Ministry statement.

Singh said the government has continued to simplify pension procedures in response to changing administrative and social requirements.

"Unnecessary provisions have been removed from pension forms and cumbersome procedures have been replaced with simpler processes," the minister said.

He said the pension system must remain in a continuous state of reform, with changes guided by experience, feedback and evolving social requirements.

Singh said the increasing use of technology in pension services has

simultaneously improved convenience and reduced the administrative burden on the system.

He said the experiences of retiring and retired employees provide valuable feedback for identifying systemic gaps and improving government practices.

The ANUBHAV initiative, launched in 2015 on the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, allows retiring government employees to share their experience while working with the government through a dedicated portal.

Singh congratulated all the national ANUBHAV awardees and jury award recipients and said government employees who have devoted decades to public service constitute a valuable national asset.

Pension reforms, he said, are therefore not merely about processing retirement benefits but about ensuring dignity, convenience and continued engagement with the experience and expertise of those who have contributed to the nation's development.

Secretary, Department of Pension and Pensioners' Welfare, Nivedita Shukla Verma said ANUBHAV has become an important platform for capturing and sharing the institutional experience of retired government employees.

More than 14,000 experiences have been shared on the portal so far, while the 2026 awards received over 2,000 nominations, the highest number so far.

The 60th Pre-Retirement Counselling Workshop brought together around 800 central government officials in the national capital region scheduled to retire in March 2027.(PTI)

## Rahul Gandhi seeks accountability over UGC-NET exam cancellation by NTA

**NEW DELHI, Aug 17:** The Congress on Monday attacked the government after the National Testing Agency announced a retest for three papers of the UGC-NET June 2026 examination, with Rahul Gandhi demanding that the NTA leadership be held accountable for it and asserting that his party will not stop until Prime Minister Narendra Modi answers for students' years being "stolen".

Gandhi alleged that the education system was "an extraction machine".

"Modi ji, look at what your NTA has just done. UGC-NET exams for Sociology, English and Commerce were held between 22 and 30 June. Nearly two months later, NTA has cancelled all three because it set faulty papers and repeated old questions," he said.

Gandhi said thousands of candidates who prepared for years, filled forms, paid the fees, travelled to distant centres, must now do it all again in September.

"NTA makes the mistake but the student serves the sentence," he said.

"I said this in Kota, in Dehradun, in Prayagraj, and I will keep saying it -- this is no longer an education system. It is an extraction machine. It takes your money, your years, your mental health, and your confidence and returns nothing. Not even a job," the leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said.

"NTA still won't answer the real question -- were these papers leaked before the exam?"

"Just like every other arm of the Modi government, NTA never says it's their fault. Just like every other compromised paper, I am ab-



olutely sure there will be no accountability," Gandhi also said.

He said Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation was the first step, not the last. "NTA's leadership must be held accountable too," he demanded.

"To every student sitting this exam again in September - you are not the problem. PM Modi built a system that cannot run an exam and then blames the students who take it. Your years are being stolen and we will not stop until PM Modi answers for it," Gandhi said in his post.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said that nearly two months after the UGC NET June 2026 exam, the NTA itself admitted that the question papers for English, commerce, and sociology contained factual, typographical, and translation errors.

"Names of prominent scholars were misspelled, book titles were garbled, there were errors in the language of the questions, mistakes in grammatical and gender-number agreement, punctuation errors, and non-standard terms

were used for established concepts," Ramesh said in his post in Hindi on X.

Not only that, the NTA's committee found that a large number of such questions were repeated - ones that had already been asked in previous exams, he said.

Now, the exams for these three subjects will be held again on September 9 and 10, the Congress leader pointed out.

"Our question is: Why should the country's students bear the punishment for NTA's mistakes? Does it really take nearly two months to detect such serious errors?" Ramesh said.

How will the losses be compensated -- and by whom -- for those students who, due to this delay, will be deprived of admission to this year's academic session in various universities, he asked.

"The question isn't just why the exam is being held again. The question is how a question paper with such serious errors was prepared and approved in the first place," Ramesh said.

Whose responsibility is this negligence in a national-level exam tied to the careers of millions of young people, the Congress general secretary asked.

"Why should candidates pay the price for mistakes in the examination system? These questions aren't just for the thousands of students in these three subjects. The government must explain why the results for thousands of candidates who have already taken the exams in 84 other subjects are delayed," he said.

Ramesh asserted that for the young people who took the exam in June, every day matters.

## Lawyers' strike postpones hearing in Rahul Gandhi defamation case

**SULTANPUR (UP), Aug 17:** The hearing in a defamation case against Rahul Gandhi, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, was postponed on Monday due to a lawyers' strike, with the court setting August 21 for the next hearing, a lawyer said.

Proceedings could not take place before the MP-MLA court here because lawyers abstained from work following an emergency meeting and resolution by the Sultanpur Bar Association, said Santosh Kumar Pandey, counsel for complainant Vijay Mishra.

"In view of the absence of advocates, the court has fixed August 21 as the next date of hearing," Pandey said. Further legal proceedings will be taken up when the case file is produced before the court on that date, he said.

The defamation complaint relates to remarks allegedly made by Gandhi in Bengaluru against Union Home Minister Amit Shah during the 2018 Karnataka assembly elections campaign.

Mishra filed the complaint before the Sultanpur MP/MLA court on August 4, 2018, alleging that the remarks were defamatory. The complainant referred to Gandhi's comment that the BJP claims to believe in honest and clean politics but has a party president who is an "accused" in a murder case.

Shah was the BJP president when Gandhi remarked. About four years before Gandhi's remark, a special CBI court in Mumbai had discharged Shah in a 2005 fake encounter case when he was a minister of state for home in Gujarat. (PTI)

'We have agreed to explore this option'

## Fadnavis holds talks with Centre to expedite clearances, industrial township plans in Maharashtra

**MUMBAI, Aug 17:** Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Monday said he held a series of discussions with central ministers in New Delhi to expedite pending environmental clearances and push major industrial township plans across the state.

Speaking to reporters in Delhi, Fadnavis said he had a "very good discussion" with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, briefing him on projects being implemented in co-ordination with the Centre and seeking assistance in expediting them.

The chief minister said he also met Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to discuss the proposed Uttan-Virar corridor, for which the state government had submitted a proposal to Japan International Cooperation Agency.

Given the scale of the project, Sitharaman suggested exploring funding through another multilateral agency, along with JICA, he said.

"We have agreed to explore this option. We will work on it in the coming period. But positively, we now have a possible way forward, and we want to start work on it in the future," he said.

The Uttan-Virar project is a major connectivity initiative for the Mumbai Metropolitan Region. The state has previously estimated the project cost at around ₹ 87,427 crore, with a funding model involving JICA assistance.

Fadnavis said he also met Union Environment and Forest Minister Bhupendra Yadav to follow up on pending environmental and forest clearances for various state projects.

The chief minister said another meeting with Sitharaman and



Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal would focus on industrial townships

being developed with Central assistance.

He said Maharashtra was seek-

ing the Centre's support to acquire an additional 8,000 acres for the Shendra-Bidkin industrial township under the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor.

The state is also acquiring 6,000 acres in Saoner, Nagpur district for an industrial township along the Delhi-Nagpur corridor, he said.

Fadnavis said Maharashtra would also seek support to develop an MIDC on the Mumbai-Bengaluru corridor and expressed hope that the state would benefit from the Centre's industrial park scheme.

He further said that the Pune Metro Line 3 project was nearing completion and is in the testing phase.

He said he had invited PM Modi to inaugurate the Metro and would seek an early date from him. (PTI)



# SC refuses to interfere with ECI's decision for SIR in Sikkim

**NEW DELHI, Aug 17:** The Supreme Court on Monday refused to interfere with the Election Commission of India's decision to fix 2002 as the base year for the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in Sikkim.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joyimalya Bagchi and V Mohana dismissed a PIL filed by 'Sikkimese Muniwasi Surakacha Sangh', an NGO, seeking a direction to the poll panel to consider 1993 as the base year instead of 2002 for the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise in the state.

The bench said, "The goal post cannot be shifted in the middle of the exercise. 2002 has been kept as the base year for the entire country. We will not interfere with the decision of the Election Commission of India (ECI)."



The NGO contended that electorate data added in 2002 do not match with the demographic data of Sikkim and considering 2002 as the base year would lead to further anomalies.

The bench, however, did not

agree with the petitioner, and said that voters enrolled in the electoral roll of 2002 have exercised their franchise in the subsequent polls held in the state.

It said that for the ongoing SIR exercise, the ECI has uniformly

kept 2002 as the base year for all states because the last SIR was then.

The bench said the petitioner can approach the ECI for creating a reasonable exemption for Sikkim.

CJI Kant observed that no aggrieved person has approached the court except for the NGO and told the petitioner's counsel that asking the court to interfere on this organisation's behalf with the ECI's decision will be a dangerous proposition.

Justice Bagchi said that every border state has the problem of migration and faces the issue of demographic changes.

The bench said no ground was made out to interfere with the ECI's decision to fix 2002 as the base year, and dismissed the petition. (PTI)

## Students take out rally to demand NRC ahead of census exercise in Manipur



**IMPHAL, Aug 17:** Hundreds of students on Monday took out a rally demanding implementation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Manipur before any census activity is conducted in the state.

The students took out the rally from Tiddim Road in Imphal West district for nearly 2 km to press

for their demands. They held posters and raised slogans that said "No NRC, No Census."

They also demanded that internally displaced people (IDPs) must return to their original homes before any census activity is taken up.

The protests were held under the aegis of the 'Campaign for

Just and Fair Delimitation (JFD) Student Wing".

The students also called for the government to defer the census exercise until the NRC is conducted, citing concerns over citizenship identification and demographic changes in the state.

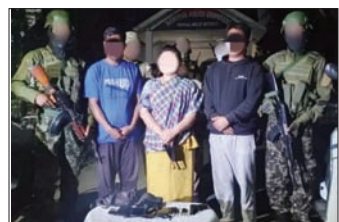
At DM College of Teacher Education in the state capital, a separate group of student protesters, mostly girls, attempted to disrupt a census training programme.

They were, however, stopped by security forces.

School students of CC Higher Secondary School in Imphal East also came out on the streets to raise slogans demanding NRC.

The house-listing phase of Census 2027 is scheduled to begin with self-enumeration from August 17. The main house-listing operations is scheduled from September 1 to September 30 this year. (PTI)

## Three militants arrested in Manipur



**IMPHAL, Aug 17:** Three militants with affiliations to different proscribed outfits have been arrested from Manipur's Imphal West district, police said on Monday.

K Lanchenba Meitei (19) was arrested from Thiyam Leishangkhang while Greatson Lourembam (25) was arrested from Awang Leikinhabhi Shantipur on Sunday, they said. According to an official, both were members of the banned People's Liberation Army.

N Shanta Meitei, a self-styled private of the United National Liberation Front (Koireng), was apprehended from Loushangkhong on Sunday. Security forces have also recovered one AK 56 rifle and four live rounds during an operation at Khozoul in Jiribam district on Saturday. (PTI)

## Ziro youth donate 21 units of blood in voluntary camp

**HT Correspondent**

**ZIRO, Aug 17:** The NSS Unit and Red Ribbon Club of St Clare College, Ziro, in collaboration with the Blood Centre at Gyati Takka Zonal General Hospital, organised an outdoor voluntary blood donation camp on the college campus on Monday.

A total of 32 potential donors, including nine males and 23 females, underwent preliminary health screening.

The drive resulted in the collection of 21 units of blood — eight from male and 13 from female donors.

The collection comprised eight units of A+, four of B+, six of O+ and three of AB+ blood groups.

No donor reactions were reported during the camp.

The screening also detected two cases of hypertension and four cases of anaemia.

The medical team conducted blood-group testing for all participants and counselled those requiring further medical attention.



The camp was coordinated by NSS Programme Officers Jeremia Modi, Nending Sumpi and Tage Tagyung, along with Red Ribbon Club Coordinator

Withom Sasia.

The organisers thanked the student donors, volunteers and the GTZGH medical team for their support.

## Tripura CM Saha congratulates Biplab Deb on appointment as BJP national general secretary

**AGARTALA, Aug 17:** Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Monday congratulated MP Biplab Kumar Deb on his appointment as the BJP's national general secretary.

"Heartiest congratulations to Biplab Kumar Deb Ji on being appointed as the national general secretary of BJP. Your extensive administrative experience and grassroots leadership will significantly strengthen the party organisation nationwide. Wishing you immense success in the new responsibility," Saha said in a Facebook post.

Deb, who became the BJP's Tripura state president in 2016, led the party to end the Left Front's 25-year rule in the state and became chief minister in 2018.

He resigned as chief minister in 2022 following a directive from the BJP's central leadership.

He later played a key organisational role in the BJP's campaigns during the Haryana and West Bengal Assembly elections, helping the party register victories, Saha said.

Saha also congratulated all the newly appointed BJP office-bearers announced by the party to strengthen the organisation.

"Under the guidance of PM Narendra Modi and party's national president Nitin Nabin, this energetic and experienced team will empower our karyakartas, strengthen the organisation and accelerate our mission of Viksit Bharat", he said in another post.



The BJP on Monday announced its new national team, appointing 13 vice presidents, including Ram Madhav, Lok Sabha MP D Purandeshwari and former Uttarakhand chief minister Tirath Singh Rawat.

Union Minister Piyush Goyal has been made national treasurer.

The party has retained B L Santhosh as National General Secretary (Organisation) and brought in former Union minister Smriti Irani and ex-Tripura chief minister Biplab Kumar Deb in its team of eight national general secretaries, according to the list released by the party. (PTI)

## Mizoram assembly monsoon session from Aug 25; state song to be adopted



**AIZAWL, Aug 17:** The Mizoram assembly will hold a two-day monsoon session from August 25, during which it is expected to formally adopt 'Ro Min Rel Sak Ang Che' as the official state song, an official said on Monday.

The schedule for the session was finalised at a meeting of the Business Advisory Committee (BAC)

on August 14, chaired by Speaker Lalbiakzama, she said.

A resolution seeking the formal adoption of the state song is expected to be moved during the session, while several bills are also likely to be introduced.

The state cabinet had on August 10 approved 'Ro Min Rel Sak Ang Che' as Mizoram's official state

song.

Composed in 1947 by renowned Mizo writer and composer Rokunga, the song, whose title translates to "Be Thou Our Counsellor", was declared the Mizo national anthem by the underground government of the Mizo National Front (MNF) during the insurgency.

Though it did not have official recognition for decades, the song has long been regarded as Mizoram's anthem.

In 2022, the then MNF-led state government directed all schools in Mizoram to sing the song before the start of classes.

The assembly secretariat has so far received 295 starred and 73 unstarred questions for ministers to answer orally and in writing during the session, the official said.

Two fresh bills, including the Mizoram Water Information and Governance Bill, 2026, have also been submitted for introduction in the House, she added. (PTI)

## Financial constraints major hurdle in narrowing DA gap: Tripura minister

**AGARTALA, Aug 17:** Financial constraints remain a major challenge for the Tripura government in narrowing the gap in Dearness Allowance (DA) between state employees and their central counterparts, Finance Minister Pranajit Singha Roy said on Monday.

State government employees currently receive 41 per cent DA, compared with 60 per cent for central employees, leaving a gap of 19 percentage points.

"The state government has a target to reduce the gap in DA between state government employees and central government staffers, but financial constraints remain a major challenge," Roy told reporters. He said Tripura used to receive around ₹ 4,000 crore annually from the Centre as revenue gap funding, but the assistance has since been discontinued, putting additional pressure on the state's finances.

"Not only Tripura, but the revenue gap fund has also been discontinued for all states in the country. The 16th Finance Commission has advised states to increase their own revenue to meet non-plan expenditure," Roy said.

The minister said the BJP-led government had not imposed any new tax on people in the past eight years, keeping in mind the financial burden on them, while DA had been released in a systematic manner. (PTI)

## Army commissions sewage treatment plant at Sikkim's Changu

**GANGTOK, Aug 17:** The Indian Army's Trishakti Corps has commissioned a modern sewage treatment plant (STP) in Sikkim's Changu at 12,313 ft, marking a significant step towards protecting the fragile high-altitude ecosystem around the revered Tsomgo Lake.

A statement from the Army on Monday said that the facility uses indigenous technology developed by the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC).

The Army said that the STP will ensure effective treatment of sewage and help protect vital water resources in an ecologically sensitive area. The use of home-grown technology also underlines the practical application of Indian scientific innovation in addressing environmental challenges in difficult terrain.

Tsomgo Lake, popularly known as Changu Lake, holds deep cultural and religious significance for the people of Sikkim. It is also a popular tourist destination in the state. The new facility is expected to help reduce the impact of wastewater on the lake and its surrounding ecosystem.

"Environmental stewardship and respect for local traditions are integral to our commitment to the people of the region. By combining indigenous technology with community partnership, this facility will help safeguard water resources and preserve the environment for future generations," a senior Army official said.

Gnathang-Machong MLA Pamin Lepcha inaugurated the facility in the presence of Army representatives and local stakeholders. (PTI)

## Khagi spice emerges as model of community-led livelihood, forest conservation in Arunachal

**ITANAGAR, Aug 17:** A traditional Himalayan spice harvested by indigenous communities in Arunachal Pradesh's West Kameng district has emerged as a promising model of community-led livelihood and forest conservation, benefiting more than 200 households, generating a turnover of ₹ 39 lakh and helping protect over 100 sq km of forest.

Known locally as Khagi, the spice is a species of Zanthoxylum, commonly associated with Sichuan pepper or Timur. Indigenous communities have traditionally used its dried fruits as a spice and condiment, while the plant also has a place in local traditional practices, Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein said in a social media post on Monday.

The initiative has helped turn what was once largely a subsistence forest resource into an organised source of income through sustainable harvesting and collective marketing.

More than 10 tonnes of Khagi have been sustainably marketed, he said.

The effort is centred around community-conserved forests in West Kameng, where indigenous communities



have been working collectively to manage forest resources while creating economic opportunities.

Such Community Conserved Areas (CCAs) are locally managed ecosystems in which communities decide how natural resources are used and conserved.

The Khagi initiative gained momentum after local communities began organising collective harvesting, aggregation and marketing.

With better market linkages, the produce could be sold collectively instead of individual families depending entirely on local traders and fluctuating prices.

The initiative has also enabled communities to use a portion of the income for conservation and community welfare.

Khagi has traditionally been collected from the wild and is particularly found in forest edges and open forests

around agricultural areas of West Kameng.

Researchers have noted its considerable economic potential, while also stressing the importance of sustainable management as the spice is largely sourced from natural habitats.

Similar community-led forest produce initiatives in West Kameng have received support from organisations including WWF-India and have been linked with responsible buyers such as Dabur India, Nahar Organics and NERAMAC, helping establish more reliable market connections for non-timber forest products.

In a media post on X, Mein said Khagi was showing what was possible when indigenous knowledge was combined with community-led enterprise.

"From a traditional forest resource to a sustainable livelihood," Mein said, describing the initiative as an example of development that creates opportunities for people while keeping forests protected.

He said such models of development should be encouraged as they combine livelihood generation with environmental conservation. (PTI)

No.TDB/15<sup>th</sup> FC/106/2024-25/442 Date:17/08/2026

**CORRIGENDUM**

Refer this Office NIT No. TDB/15<sup>th</sup> FC/106/2024-25/372 dated 23/07/2026. The Bid Submission start and end date and time in respect of above Office NIT have been extended as below.

|                             |                          |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Bid Submission start date : | 17/08/2026 from 10.00 AM |
| Bid submission end date     | 31/08/2026 upto 2.00 PM  |
| Bid Opening date            | 31/08/2026 at 3.00 PM    |

Other terms and condition of the NIT remain same.

Sd/-  
Block Dev. Officer  
Tamlapur Dev. Block,  
Tamlapur

**IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/1901**

No. DPRD/BTC/(15-FC)T(IX/UdI-04/2026/7, Dated Kokrajhar, the 14<sup>th</sup> Aug., 2026

**PRESS NOTICE**  
(e-Procurement)

The Director, P&RD, BTC, Kokrajhar invites bids for implementation of work "Const. of Solar Power Standalone DW facility with Odex System at Nepalpara Grazing (Activity Code-128503773)" for an amount not exceeding of Rs.26,50,000.00 (Rupees twenty six lakhs fifty thousand) only under the award of 15<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission (Grant No.66) for the year 2025-26 (i.e. 3604-00-200-4656-707-32-99) under Tied Grant during 2026-27 from the registered contractors of Class -I & Class- II (A,B & C) category of Assam PWD (Roads) / (Building), PHE, BTC.

Details may be seen at website <http://assamtenders.gov.in> and also at the Office of the undersigned during office hours.

Sd/-Director,  
Panchayat & Rural Development,  
BTC, Kokrajhar

**IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/1891**

No. DPRD/BTC/(15-FC)T(IX/UdI-03/2026/7, Dated Kokrajhar, the 14<sup>th</sup> Aug., 2026

**PRESS NOTICE**  
(e-Procurement)

The Director, P&RD, BTC, Kokrajhar invites bids for implementation of work "Const. of Solar Power Standalone DW facility with Odex System at Garsong Gaon (Activity Code-128503749)" for an amount not exceeding of Rs.26,50,000.00 (Rupees twenty six lakhs fifty thousand) only under the award of 15<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission (Grant No.66) for the year 2025-26 (i.e. 3604-00-200-4656-707-32-99) under Tied Grant during 2026-27 from the registered contractors of Class -I & Class- II (A,B & C) category of Assam PWD (Roads) / (Building), PHE, BTC.

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Sd/-Director,  
Panchayat & Rural Development,  
BTC, Kokrajhar

**IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/1889**



# Spinners Suthar, Jadeja sparkle as India in command despite Dinusha's maiden hundred

**GALLE, Aug 17:** Indian bowlers met an unexpected obstacle in centurion Sonal Dinusha but the Manav Suthar-led unit carried enough grunt to establish a sizable 178-run lead over Sri Lanka on the third day of the first Test here on Monday.

Sri Lanka were bowled out for 284 in their first innings as Suthar (4/76) and Ravindra Jadeja (3/57) led India's attack with skill and verve.

Once the hosts were reduced to 99 for five at lunch, thanks to the early brilliance of left-arm spinner Suthar, the end seemed imminent for them.

But Dinusha, who made a crafty maiden international hundred of 100 off 168 balls, and the seasoned Niroshan Dickwella (80, 115b) added 146 runs off 216 balls for the sixth wicket to keep the rampaging Indian bowlers at bay.

They added 116 runs in the second session without losing a wicket.

Unlike their top-order colleagues, Dickwella and Dinusha were not in a hurry, showing a lot of judiciousness in shot selection on a still good to bat pitch.

Sweep was a preferred mode of scoring for both the batters against Indian spinners, and the two Lankans displayed good skills from dispatching the balls from the stump line.

Dickwella, whose selection



kicked up a lot of furore in local cricketing circles, reached his 50 off 67 balls, while his younger partner was much slower in reaching the little landmark in 92 balls.

However, Dickwella, who was dropped on 20 by KL Rahul at slip off Suthar, had a momentary lapse of concentration, edging pacer

Prasidh Krishna to Rishabh Pant behind the stumps, a few minutes into the final session of the day.

However, Dinusha carried on and reached his hundred in 167 balls, but fell leg before to Jadeja in the very next ball.

The Dinusha-Dickwella alliance was a study class in remarkable

temperament and adequate technique while facing up to skillful spinners.

But the same cannot be said about the other batters in the Lankan top-order, who played with hard hands and drove away from body to get caught in awkward positions.

In the first session, the Indian bowlers led by left-arm spinner Suthar discovered immaculate lines to tear through the Sri Lankan top-order.

India resumed from overnight 460 for 9, and added only a couple of runs to finish their first essay on 462.

The Lankans needed a solid start for a strong pursuit of that total and they received anything but that.

Lead pacer Mohammad Siraj struck with his second delivery of the innings to deal an early jolt to the Lankans.

Nishan Fernando, who was impressive for SLC XI in the warm-up match, could not handle Siraj's away swing and bounce, snicking him to Devdutt Padikkal at first slip.

At 0/1, the Lankans were on the back foot immediately, and their lot never really improved in the subsequent overs.

Suthar was at the forefront of the tormentors gang, generating lovely flight, dip and turn to trouble the batters. (PTI)

## High on confidence, Indian women's team eyes big win over South Africa



**AMSTELVEEN, Aug 17:** High on confidence after holding Olympic silver medallists and world No. 4 China to a draw, India will look to strengthen their bid for a top-two finish in Pool D when they face South Africa in their second Women's Hockey World Cup match here on Tuesday.

India, ranked ninth in the world, produced a disciplined display to secure a 2-2 draw against a fancied Chinese side in their tournament opener. The result has given them a valuable point and put them in a good position to qualify for the second round. England currently lead Pool D following their 4-0 win over South Africa, with China and India next in the standings, while South Africa are fourth.

For the semifinal race the top two teams from each pool will be divided into two groups (E and F) of four teams each. Each team will play matches against the opponents

they did not face in the first round.

A team's result in the first round against the progressing team from its pool will be carried forward in second round. It means that India and China will not play each other if they reach the second round and their one point each from the draw will be carried forward.

For India, Tuesday's game is, therefore, an opportunity to put themselves firmly in control of their qualification hopes. A win over 18th-ranked South Africa would not only boost their chances of finishing in the top two but also provide momentum ahead of their final pool game. "We don't have to worry about the other teams' positions, but we need to maintain this momentum in the upcoming matches while avoiding complacency," coach Sjoerd Marjine said after the China game.

India showed plenty of promise in their opening match. Drag-flicker Deepika converted a penalty corner

and also earned another, while World Cup debutants Sunelita Toppo, Ishika and Shilpi Dabas displayed composure well beyond their experience.

Navneet Kaur, who was named Player of the Tournament at the World Cup Qualifiers, has also carried her impressive form into the tournament and will be one of India's key attacking threats.

However, Marjine knows there is room for improvement, particularly in possession and ball retention.

India controlled the opening quarter and went into half-time with a 2-1 lead, but their intensity dropped after the break. They sat deeper in the third quarter, allowing China to take control and eventually find the equaliser.

"We scored a penalty corner and a field goal, but I'm not happy with the third quarter. We need to work on ball possession and ball retention. The team must have felt relieved after the draw in the first match," Marjine said.

South Africa's 0-4 loss to England means they will enter the contest under pressure, but India will not be taking their lower-ranked opponents lightly.

The Indian team's best finish at the World Cup came at the inaugural edition in 1974, when they finished fourth under captain Ajinder Kaur. Their fourth-place finish at the Tokyo Olympics under Marjine had raised hopes of another strong showing on the global stage. (PTI)

## Gukesh became champion because he's a genius: Nihal Sarin

**PARIS, Aug 17:** Indian Grandmaster Nihal Sarin believes world champion D Gukesh's slump is a matter of confidence, not class, and hopes the upcoming Chess Olympiad in Samarkand will help him turn the corner. Gukesh has struggled since his historic 2024 World Championship win, dropping down the ratings list after finishing last at both the Norway Chess and the Chennai Grand Masters this year, alongside low finishes at the Tata Steel Masters and the Prague Masters.

"He simply needs to get his confidence back. I really hope he can do very well at the Olympiad. I think it will be quite important for him just to get his confidence back," Sarin told PTI.

"As they say, form is temporary, but class is permanent. Gukesh became World champion only because he's a genius, not because he's bad."

Sarin, the 22-year-old from Thrissur, who won the Rapid section of the Tata Steel Chess India in January and the Chess.com Bullet Chess Championship in June, reached the quarterfinal stage of the Esports World Cup in Paris last week before losing to Magnus Carlsen.

As for his own career, Sarin remains focused on a simpler objective. "I'll just try to reach my potential. I'm trying to keep in touch and feel good physically and mentally," he said.

**AI has added new dimension but I prefer an era where engines were less powerful**

Sarin would perhaps have preferred a different era of chess, one in which engines were not quite as powerful, but he is not resisting the changes that technology has brought to the game.

"It's just the evolution of the sport, like anything else, I think. A lot of new dimensions have come because of that," Sarin said, referring to the growing role of artificial intelligence in chess preparation.

"Preparation has a whole new outlook now. Nowadays, a lot of people know a lot of stuff, and it's about trying to find what is maybe hardest for your opponent to deal with at the board."

The rise of powerful engines has changed not only how players prepare but also what they look for in preparation. With so much information available, finding something difficult for an opponent to handle has become increasingly important.

"It is tricky," Sarin said. "Personally, I think I would have preferred to be in an era where engines were less powerful."

He does not, however, see the changes as something that can be stopped. If anything, he expects chess to continue moving towards faster formats.

Asked where he sees the game in the next five years, Sarin was reluctant to make a firm prediction.

"No idea. We have to just wait and see. I think more rapid and blitz will come. That's my feeling. Also, classical will probably get faster... just like how it happened in Test cricket." (PTI)

## Gen4 to take Formula E closer to F1, but championship sees room for both: Dodds

**LONDON, Aug 17:** Formula E is entering its Gen4 era with a clear ambition to close the performance gap with Formula One, with championship co-founder Alberto Longo believing the all-electric series could be running at near-F1 pace on several circuits by the end of the next four-season cycle.

Formula E bid farewell to its Gen3 cars at the London E-Prix on Sunday, and CEO Jeff Dodds believes its rapid evolution could eventually see electric racing outpace Formula One.

"What is fascinating in Formula E is to see the steps. Because every two-three years, we have a step in technology which is so big that it's even difficult to compare to the previous generation," Longo said.

"It was difficult to compare Gen3 to Gen2. It will be very difficult to compare Gen3 to Gen4. Because we speak to another level in terms of racing level, technology."

The Gen4 cars are expected to reach around 335 kmph, with lap times improving by six to 10 seconds at circuits through increased downforce, powertrain development and new tyres.

Longo expects the performance gap with Formula One to narrow substantially during Gen4's four-season cycle.

"By the time we end Gen4, in the fourth season of Gen4, we will be very close to times of Formula 1 in many tracks," he said.

CEO Dodds, who has worked in the Formula One ecosystem and describes himself as an F1 fan, believes Formula E's progress should not be measured simply by its proximity to the established championship.



to the established championship.

Formula E is only 12 years old, compared to F1's 76-year history, Dodds pointed out, and said the younger championship had experienced "hyper-growth" while developing a fundamentally different proposition.

"We don't need Formula 1 to fail for us to be successful or vice versa. We absolutely think there is room for both organisations to continue being incredibly successful," he said. Dodds believes Formula E's technological trajectory could eventually give it a performance advantage over combustion-powered racing.

"We already accelerate much faster than a Formula 1 car. We are at the infancy of the technology here at Formula E. The combustion engine's been around for 130 years, so that's been iterated to within an inch of its life," he said.

"So over the next four, five, six, seven years, we are going to get to

a point where the technology in Formula E can outpace a Formula 1 car. No question about that."

At the heart of Formula E's argument is efficiency. Dodds said the most efficient F1 combustion engine operates at roughly 55 per cent efficiency, while Gen4 technology is expected to be in the region of 97-98 per cent.

That, he argued, explains the absence of the traditional engine roar associated with motorsport.

"When people say to me, it would be great if these cars sounded noisier, like a Formula 1 car. What you're asking me is to make a car sound like the past. To make it sound less efficient, less performant, less technologically innovative," Dodds said.

"We're going to make our cars sound like this car. Our children... are likely to only exist driving a hybrid or an electric car. This needs to be a sound that they associate, not what my father associates with."

Longo believes the generational

shift could also change perceptions about the lack of engine noise, while the championship's new Disney+ partnership could address another challenge: awareness.

"We were missing up to now a platform to create the level of awareness that we deserve. I think the deal which has just been signed with Disney Plus will give us that type of approach. And also touching the right generation of kids watching this type of channels and streaming," said Longo.

He called the combination of Gen4's performance and greater television and streaming exposure a potential "game changer" for Formula E.

"The game changer is coming for Gen 4 with not only the car, not only the show that we will be able to showcase... but the performance perception will already start to convince the most skeptical ones on the fact that we can go very fast," Longo said.

The championship's progress comes despite the exit of several major manufacturers over the years, including Audi and BMW, a trend that has raised questions about Formula E's long-term appeal to carmakers.

**Exit of big manufacturers is not a concern**

Longo, however, rejected the suggestion that manufacturer departures represented a crisis.

"Manufacturers come and go. It doesn't matter if your name is Formula One, it doesn't matter if your name is WEC, it doesn't matter if your name is Indy or NASCAR," he said. (PTI)

"This is probably my last year in football," says Cristiano Ronaldo



**RIYADH, Aug 17:** Cristiano Ronaldo says this Saudi Pro League season is likely to be the last of his professional career.

The 41-year-old superstar's contract with Riyadh club Al-Nassr, signed in December 2022, expires next June, and he has told Vogue magazine that another is unlikely.

"This is probably my last year of football, and I want to leave a spectacular legacy," Ronaldo said.

The Portugal forward, who has scored 976 career goals, married long-time partner, Georgina Rodriguez, earlier this month.

"I have my future all mapped out," he said. "I have so many things to keep me busy that to tell you just one thing is hard. Because football could leave a big hole, you have to fill your time in various ways, not just one."

"And also have more fun, travel more, watch and play padel, which I really like, and continue to enjoy what I've earned — what we've earned. Because after all, it's been 25 years with a lot of sacrifice."

The 2026-27 SPL season is Ronaldo's 25th as a professional. During his career, he has won five Ballon d'Or awards and five UEFA Champions League titles.

Ronaldo's 28 league goals last season helped Al-Nassr become champion of Saudi Arabia in May to secure his first trophy since arriving in Riyadh, and a first league title for the club since 2019.

After returning from his wedding, he missed Al-Nassr's first game of its title defense on Saturday, watching from the sidelines as it opened with a 3-0 win over Al-Fateh.

"Cristiano is here today, and he is always present with us," Al-Nassr coach Ange Postecoglou said after the game.

Ronaldo could play against Al-Diryah in the King's Cup on Tuesday.

"The most important thing now is recovery, especially as we have only two days after this match," former Tottenham Hotspur and Nottingham Forest coach Postecoglou said.

Ronaldo's comments came days after long-time rival Lionel Messi revealed that, following his father's death, he may soon retire.

"I don't know how to carry on," Messi, 39, said. "I used to just play football, and now I'm really not sure if I'll carry on doing it for much longer." (AP)

## Iga Swiatek wins first match at Cincinnati Open

**MASON (OHIO), Aug 17:** Iga Swiatek overcame a short turnaround after winning in Toronto on Thursday to beat Colombian Emiliana Arango, 6-3, 6-0, on center court at the Cincinnati Open on Sunday. It was the seventh consecutive win for Swiatek, who won the title in Cincinnati last year.

"It's not like I was super tired after Toronto," Swiatek said on Sunday two days after arriving.

"I knew I just needed a little bit of rest. Usually one day before a tournament, I'm already in my match mode. But this time, I wanted to spend every hour possible just chilling." Also on Sunday, Aryna Sabalenka, who has spent 95 consecutive weeks at No. 1 dating to Oct. 21, 2024, got past Australian Talia Gibson, 6-2, 7-6 (2). Sabalenka improved to 15-3 in Cincinnati since 2022.

Coming off her loss to Swiatek in the finals in Toronto, No. 2-ranked Elena Rybakina beat American Taylor Townsend, 6-3, 6-4.

Rybakina, who reached the semifinals last year in Cincinnati, is looking for her 14th hard-court title in Cincinnati after winning the Australian Open in January. (AP)

**PANJIM, Aug 17:** India's growing franchise volleyball ecosystem and dedicated Under-21 tournaments are creating a clearer pathway for young players to progress from the grassroots to the professional game and eventually the senior national team, with the ultimate ambition of Olympic qualification.

The recently-concluded inaugural Guardians Trophy, organised by Goa Guardians, brought together Under-21 players from across the country, giving them an opportunity to compete at franchise level and showcase their talent to coaches and scouts.

Goa Guardians coach Viral Shah believes sustained investment in youth is essential for India's long-term prospects.

"The future of India is in these players. If we don't give them exposure and teach them at this level, then the future of Indian volleyball will suffer. This is the level where we can work with them and build them," Shah told PTI.

The tournament also exposed youngsters to players from different regions, helping them adapt to different cultures, languages and playing styles.

"Players from South, North, East and West are all here. Every culture, behaviour and playing style is different. When they stay together, they learn and communicate. Our aim



is to bring them together and build a team," Shah added.

For the players, the objective is to use these opportunities to develop their skills and earn a senior India call-up.

Hyderabad Black Hawks U-21 captain Deepak, who led his side to the inaugural Guardians Trophy title, said his immediate focus was on continuing his development.

"We have to develop our game further. I want to come to India and play for the senior

team," he said.

Deepak began playing volleyball in his village at the age of 10 or 11, inspired by his grandfather and father, who were also spikers.

Goa player Suraj said the expanding league structure was giving youngsters more opportunities to compete and learn.

"Volleyball is getting a lot of attention in India. There are a lot of leagues and new platforms. There is U-21 for the youth, there are

nationals, there is the league and there is PBL," he said.

He also highlighted the value of playing alongside experienced athletes.

"We get to learn a lot. There are senior players in our team, so we get experience from playing with them. We gain confidence. It is very good," Suraj said.

Yogesh Kumar, a Goa player and retained player of Mumbai Meteors in the Prime Volleyball League, believes the growth of youth tournaments could eventually strengthen India's international prospects.

"If the youth players progress, they will represent India very well at the senior level. That's why our Indian team can qualify for the Olympics," Yogesh said. He said the Guardians Trophy also provided a platform for young players to be noticed.

"Every team has an Under-21 player and every team has seen them. Players can be picked from here. It was a very good opportunity for us," he said.

The tournament's significance extends beyond the competition itself. The trials conducted by the franchise teams have widened the pool of players competing for opportunities, while academies and grassroots programmes are providing a more sustained development structure. (PTI)