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PERSPECTIVE

DON'T PROMISE WHEN YOU'RE HAPPY. DON'T REPLY WHEN YOU'RE ANGRY. DON'T DECIDE WHEN YOU'RE SAD.

Assam CM's flight diversion sparks fresh call for high-speed rail in Northeast

GUWAHATI
The forced diversion of Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's IndiGo flight from Dibrugarh to Guwahati due to severe thunderstorms, making it unsafe to land in Guwahati on Sunday night, has once again brought into focus the urgent need for high-speed rail connectivity in Assam and the Northeast.

The flight later resumed safely. Sarma was attending a day-long programme at Margherita in Tinsukia district of Upper Assam, around 570 kilometres from the state capital, Guwahati, a journey that would take just 1 hour and 18 minutes by bullet train. The nearest airport is in the neighbouring district of Dibrugarh, at Mohanbari.

The Chief Minister could have completed the 570-kilometre journey between Tinsukia and Guwahati in barely an hour on a bullet train, enjoying the speed and comfort of air travel without the risks of weather disruptions.

Experts say this is not just a matter of convenience, but one of public safety and economics.

The Northeast's hilly terrain, dense forests, and unpredictable weather make air travel particularly vulnerable. Over the past decade, the region has witnessed several aviation tragedies that underline these risks.

In June 2019, an Indian Air Force AN-32 transport aircraft crashed in Arunachal Pradesh, killing 13 personnel.

WHO SAID WHAT



No incremental changes... it's time for quantum jumps!
~ Narendra Modi, PM

Ajay Kumar Bhalla sworn in as Nagaland governor, tribal panel continues boycott



KOHIMA

Ajay Kumar Bhalla took oath as Nagaland's 22nd governor at Raj Bhavan. Five major tribes boycotted the ceremony protesting job reservation policy. Government formed

Reservation Review Commission amid tribal demands

Ajay Kumar Bhalla, Governor of Manipur, was on August 25 sworn in as the 22nd Governor of Nagaland at Raj Bhavan, following the death of Governor La Ganesan.

Chief Justice of the Gauhati High Court, Justice Ashutosh Kumar, administered the oath of office. The ceremony was attended by Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio, Deputy Chief Ministers TR Zeliang and Y Patton, ministers, MLAs, senior officials, and dignitaries.

After the swearing-in, Bhalla held his first meeting with the state cabinet at Raj Bhavan and inspected a ceremonial guard of honour. A reception followed, where political leaders, church representatives, tribal bodies, and civil society groups extended greetings to the new governor.

Notably absent were members of the Committee on Review of Reservation Policy (CORRP), representing the Ao, Angami, Lotha, Pengma, and Sumi tribes. The panel has been pressing for changes to the state's four-decade-old job reservation system.

Although the government recently announced a Reservation Review Commission, the committee rejected it, demanding the inclusion of tribal and civil society representatives.

NPP urges special electoral roll revision in Manipur ahead of 2027 polls

IMPHAL

The National People's Party (NPP) has called on the central government to initiate a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of Manipur's electoral rolls before the 2027 Legislative Assembly elections, citing concerns over the presence of illegal migrants and their alleged role in fuelling ethnic unrest in the state.

Addressing the media on Sunday at the party's state office in Naoremthong, Imphal West, NPP national vice president and former deputy chief minister Yumnam Joykumar Singh claimed that the last Assembly election saw widespread irregularities. He pointed to issues such as dual voter registration, bogus voting, and illegal migrant participation as serious concerns.

"The party's general body meeting has unanimously decided to press both the central government and the Election Commission of India to complete a thorough revision of the electoral rolls well before the next state polls," said Joykumar.

The NPP, which currently holds seven seats in the 60-member Manipur

Legislative Assembly, withdrew its support from the BJP-led government in November 2024, citing the administration's inability to handle the ongoing crisis. Despite pulling out of the alliance in Manipur, the NPP continues to be part of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) at the national level.

Joykumar also spoke about steps towards restoring peace, underlining the importance of dialogue between community-based civil organisations. He praised recent interactions between Thadou Inpi Manipur, a key Kuki-Zo representative body, and Meitei organisations as a constructive development.

Looking ahead, Joykumar proposed that any new coalition government formed with NPP's support should operate under a Manipur Democratic Alliance (MDA). He emphasised the need for a common minimum programme and a long-term strategy for peace and reconciliation. He further reiterated that Chief Minister N. Biren Singh's resignation had exposed the failure of the state government to uphold law and order during the prolonged conflict.

Parliament panel urges Centre to protect Indian tea industry



GUWAHATI

The Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce has urged the Centre to ensure a level playing field for India's tea sector amid growing competition from South Asian and Southeast Asian countries, including Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

The recommendations were presented in the Committee's 194th report, titled 'Performance Evaluation and Review of Some Commodity Boards', during the recently concluded Parliament session.

India, the world's second-largest tea grower by area and the fourth-largest exporter, is under increasing pressure from rising imports.

The Committee noted that many tea-exporting countries offer subsidies

and export incentives, making their products more competitive than Indian teas.

It further recommended that authorities impose restrictions on the import of low-quality teas, as traders reportedly repackage, rebrand, and blend them with Indian-origin teas before selling them in global markets, often without proper disclosure.

Echoing these concerns, Assam BJP MLA Mrinal Saikia raised the alarm over the surge in tea imports from Kenya.

Posting on X (formerly Twitter) on August 24, he warned: "If steps are not taken to curb the excessive import of Kenyan tea, the Assam tea industry faces the risk of collapse."

According to data shared by Saikia, India has imported 45% more Kenyan tea this year, even as warehouses in Assam are overflowing with unsold stock and auction prices continue to drop.

For Assam's 1.33 lakh Small Tea Growers (STGs), who produce 55% of the state's tea and support nearly a million livelihoods, the situation has become critical.

Prices for raw green leaf have already fallen to Rs 12-14 per kg, with fears of further decline due to rising imports.

Emphasising the broader socio-economic impact, Saikia pointed out that lakhs of people, from estate workers to smallholder cultivators, depend directly on the tea industry.

439 Myanmar nationals among 460 foreigners arrested for crimes in Mizoram over five years

AIZAWL

The Mizoram Police have reported the arrest of 460 foreigners, including 439 Myanmar nationals, for various crimes over the five years up to May 2025.

Narcotic substances, including heroin, methamphetamine, crystal 'meth' and ganja (cannabis), worth Rs 770.95 crore were also seized by the state police alone during the period.

Atotal of 15,673 people, including 14,432 locals and 781 from other states, were arrested in different criminal cases during the same period.

"As many as 460 foreign nationals have also been arrested for different crimes, including drugs and arms trafficking, child sexual abuse, forgery, burglary, theft and violation of visa norms," it said.

Of the 460 foreign nationals, 439 were from Myanmar, 18 from Bangladesh and three from other countries, the data said.

The highest arrest of foreign nationals was made in 2022, a year after a military coup in Myanmar, during which 124 people were apprehended, followed by 106 in 2023 and 89 in 2024, the data said.

In the current year alone, 57 foreigners, including 53 Myanmar nationals, have been arrested so far, it said.



Of the 15,673 people held on charges of crimes, 1,666 were arrested for allegedly smuggling narcotic substances, while 254 were booked under the Arms Act and Explosive Substances Act.

Theft remained the biggest offence with 5,495 cases registered and 3,704 people arrested, followed by burglary, which recorded 4,686 cases and 2,917 arrests during the period, it said.

The data suggested that 1,694 people have been arrested under the Mizoram Liquor (Prohibition) Act, which bans the manu-

facture, sale and consumption of liquor in the state, it said.

Among the arrested Myanmar nationals, 185 were booked for drug smuggling cases, followed by 66 for visa norm violation, 43 for arms and explosive smuggling, 40 for theft and burglary and nine each were arrested for murder and child sexual abuse, the data said.

Barring four Bangladesh nationals, who were arrested under the Arms Act and Explosive Substances Act, all other foreigners were held under the Foreigners Act, it said.

Mizoram has been grappling with the menace of drug trafficking from Southeast Asian countries, particularly Myanmar, and the police data showed a continuous increase in the seizure of narcotic substances, particularly from 2023.

The total value of different types of drugs seized by the state police in 2022 stood at Rs 43.43 crore, Rs 189.66 crore in 2023 and Rs 211.63 crore in 2024, the data said.

The state police also seized drugs worth over Rs 106.56 crore in just five months between January and May this year, it said.

The value of recovered drugs was estimated at Rs 167.82 crore and Rs 51.83 crore in 2020 and 2021, respectively.

Assam CM, Kiren Rijju slams Syeda Hameed for backing Bangladeshis: 'Assam not for infiltrators'

GUWAHATI

Union Minister Kiren Rijju and Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday sharply criticised Syeda Saiyidain Hameed, a former Planning Commission member during the Manmohan Singh government, for supporting Bangladeshis living in India. He called her remarks "misleading."

Hameed, who visited Assam alongside other activists, said Bangladeshis "are also humans" and should not be denied the right to live in India, arguing that "Earth is so large."

In response, Rijju stated, "Misleading in the name of humanity. It's about our land and identity. Why are minority Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, and Sikhs persecuted in Bangladesh and Pakistan? Syeda Hameed may be close to Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, but she shouldn't support illegal migrants."

Hameed's comments came amid Assam state government efforts to evict illegal settlers from government lands. Accompanied by activists like Prashant Bhushan and Harsh Mander, she accused the Assam government of unfairly targeting Muslims by labeling them as Bangladeshis.

She further said, "What is wrong if they are Bangladeshis? Bangladeshis are also humans."



Earth is so large; Bangladeshis can live here. They are not depriving anyone of their rights."

In a related development, Prashant Bhushan criticised Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, accusing him of carrying out "lawless and illegal activities." Bhushan alleged that the government was pushing citizens into Bangladesh and demolishing homes illegally.

Bhushan described the situation as a "complete loot" by the Assam government, which, he claims, is trying to conceal these activities from public scrutiny.

Chief Minister Sarma defended his govern-

ment's actions and suggested that Congress leaders and intellectuals involved in the issue could destabilise the state.

The Assam government has also faced accusations of transferring agriculturally productive tribal lands to private corporations, including the Adani Group. Bhushan condemned these moves, saying they form part of a broader strategy benefiting select companies at the expense of local communities. He also criticised attempts to block independent investigations into these activities.

Syeda Saiyidain Hameed, who was part of a delegation of opposition leaders and policymakers including Harsh Mander, Wajahat Habibullah, Fayaz Shaheen, Prashant Bhushan, and Jawahar Sircar, sparked a major political controversy in Assam with her remarks defending Bangladeshis' "right" to reside in India. The BJP accused Congress of "rewarding those who justify illegal infiltration and demographic seizure."

The delegation recently visited Goalpara and the surrounding areas, where the Assam government has conducted eviction drives targeting Bangladeshis.

After the visit, Hameed told the media that the Assam government committed "the most

inhuman acts" against minority communities during the eviction drives.

She asked, "What is wrong in being Bangladeshi? Bangladeshis are human beings too; the Earth is very big, and they can live here. They are not depriving anyone of their rights. However, the government says Bangladeshis are depriving others of their rights. This is extremely mischievous and very detrimental to humanity. They are humans; Allah made this Earth for humans, not for Satan. If a human being is staying somewhere, why should he be thrown out so mercilessly?"

Hameed's remarks drew a sharp reaction from Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who said the delegation came to the state to manipulate facts.

On X, Sarma wrote: "After Jamaat-e-Hind's outburst demanding my dismissal yesterday, a Delhi-based team—Harsh Mander, Wajahat Habibullah, Fayaz Shaheen, Prashant Bhushan, and Jawahar Sircar—is now camping in Assam. Their sole aim is to paint lawful evictions as a so-called 'humanitarian crisis.' This is a planned attempt to weaken our fight against illegal encroachers. We remain alert and firm—no propaganda or pressure will stop us from protecting our land and culture."

Sarma followed up with a more pointed attack directed at Hameed. He wrote:

"People like Syeda Hameed, a close confidant of the Gandhi family, legitimise illegal infiltrators as they seek to realise Jinnah's dream of making Assam a part of Pakistan."

Today, Assamese identity is on the brink of extinction because of the tacit support of people like her. But we are the sons and daughters of Lachit Barphukan—WE WILL FIGHT till the last drop of our blood to save our State and our identity.

Let me make it very clear: Bangladeshis are not welcome in Assam. It is not their land.

Anyone sympathising with them may accommodate them in their own backyards.

Assam is not up for grabs by illegal infiltrators—NOT NOW, NOT EVER."

The Asom Gana Parishad also condemned Hameed's statement. Its general secretary, Tolan Konwar, said Hameed could not understand Assam's situation because she was not born there. Konwar added, "She does not have the same respect for Assam. It is obvious that she can't understand the Bangladeshi issue in Assam. She is not even aware of the famous Assam Agitation. How dare she say Assam can't survive without Bangladeshis?"



VOLUME:1, ISSUE 557

WHEN WISDOM TOOK THE CROWN

We pray to Ganesha to remove difficulties from our path. However, on the ground, this means developing our emotional intelligence to get out of difficulties ourselves with minimal damage control. So, let us revisit in greater detail than September 2022, a story of high emotional intelligence.

This tale concerns one of the world's oldest royal houses, which went under the rubble of time. Trigarta was an ancient kingdom in Punjab, traversing the rivers Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej. It is mentioned in the Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Brahmanda Purana. The Trigartas are said to have fought off the Persians and Assyrians and appear in the annals of Alexander's expedition to India in 326 BCE. Raja Parmanand Chandra is believed to be the 'Porus' who fought and lost to Alexander on the banks of the Beas. When 'Porus' was brought captive to him, Alexander, who considered him a worthy foe, asked him how he wished to be treated, and 'Porus' reportedly answered with superb simplicity: "Like a king."

In the Mahabharata, the kings of Trigarta are described as sworn territorial enemies of Matsya, a kingdom allied to the Pandavas. So, they fought against them under their first cousin, Duryodhana, at Kurukshetra. Susharma, the Trigarta raja, led a do-or-die squadron called the Samsaptaka to capture Yudhishtira. He and his entire force were killed by Arjuna.

Just so, the Trigarta rajahs are said to have fought and lost to Sri Rama. The Trigartas are nobles of the Chandravanshi or 'lunar dynasty'. The Katoch Rajputs, who claim descent from the Trigartas, founded the kingdom of Kangra in the hills to the east of Punjab that later became the modern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. The first-known Katoch raja was Bhumi Chand, and the Brahmanda Purana says he built the original temple to Devi Parvati at Jwalamukhi in the Kangra Valley, which still draws flocks of devotees. The Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Zuan Xang visited the Katoch kingdom in the seventh century, then known as 'Jalandhara'.

The Katoch also fought the great kingdom of Kannauj, from which the royal houses of Marwar and Bikaner sprang. They battled Mohammed of Ghazni and Mohammed of Ghor, and resisted Akbar's siege in 1615. They sided with Guru Gobind Singh against Aurangzeb and fought Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who visited Jwalamukhi in 1815 and covered the temple spire with gold. The Katoch also fought the British. In 1847, Raja Parmodh Chandra fired a 101-gun salute, a practice later reserved by the British Crown for itself, to inform his people that their king was on the throne. He led an army of 8,000 Katoch across the Beas against the British forces stationed in Pathankot for the Second Anglo-Sikh War. Parmodh Chandra was betrayed by a person named Pahad Chand, defeated, and deported to the hill town of Almora, where he died in 1851. Kangra was subsumed in the British Empire. Today, any number of Katoch fight in the Indian armed forces. To follow the annals of the Katoch clan is to unspool the history of North India in one skein, for they appear in every epoch—sturdy warriors who repeatedly fought forces greater than theirs. Their fortunes foundered, but they went on. No other noble house seems to have had quite that continuity.

Although the princely order was abolished by modern India in 1971, a Katoch raja by name still exists today, and there are four branches of Katoch: Jaswal, Guleria, Sibaia and Dadwal.

Our tale is about a scion of this ancient clan sometime in the fifteenth century. He was the founder of the scenic hill kingdom of Guler, a Katoch king called Raja Hari Chand from the old royal family of Kangra.

Like most royals and feudal chiefs around the world, Hari Chand loved the hunt. One fine day in late summer, his quarry led him on a long chase, and the king left his companions far behind. Along the way, he dismounted to look for tracks. His foot slipped and he fell into a deep hole. "A dry well," he thought before his head struck a rock and he passed out. The grasses that hid the well closed over it again.

Meanwhile, the king's companions searched the forest, growing increasingly afraid. When the king's horse was discovered, a companion rushed back to the fort to get reinforcements. The king's younger brother, the prime minister, the senapati, and a select band of soldiers and trackers went looking. After days of desperate search, they were forced to mourn the king as dead. His younger brother was crowned the new raja of Guler.

Months into the new reign, the court was disturbed one day by a great commotion in the forecourt. Into a shocked silence walked Raja Hari Chand, leaner, scarred, and simply dressed. The new king ran forward to hug his elder brother and touch his feet. Tears in his eyes, he bowed and indicated the throne to him.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"All knowledge is worth having." - Jacqueline Carey

Trump's H-1B Squeeze Push for Homegrown Jobs

SHIVAJI SARKAR

It's a complex scenario. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his Independence Day speech, announced a ₹1 lakh crore job-generation plan through Employees Provident Fund (EPF) incentivisation. A welcome move—yet not an alternative to the Donald Trump-led assault on the H-1B visa. It needs an out of box solution.

This could be an indigenous way to create jobs, but it needs far more ingenuity. The focus must be on revitalising industry, ensuring fair wage policies, and securing long-term employment. India must evolve a system capable of generating enough quality jobs to counter U.S. arm-twisting on the visa issue.

The H-1B debate is now particularly critical for low-paid jobs. Highly skilled applicants at higher wage levels (Level 3 and 4) may still secure better deals, but U.S. corporate preference for low-wage Indian hires over American workers has triggered political pushback. Complaints have mounted over the years, and any U.S. president—Trump or otherwise—might have acted similarly.

India also needs to create conditions that keep its IIT graduates, thriving on taxpayers' money, and other top talent from flocking abroad. The government spends ₹10-15 lakh per student during a four-year IIT B.Tech programme, with the total IIT budget for FY 2024-25 at ₹9,660 crore. Yet 30-36 percent of IIT graduates migrate each year, according to LinkedIn and Threads data, and a National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) study. Among those who remain, an estimated 70 percent work for foreign MNCs like Google, Amazon, Microsoft, and McKinsey within India.

Indian nationals dominate the programme, receiving 72 per cent of H-1B visas, followed by 12 per cent for Chinese citizens. The majority of H-1B visa holders work in STEM fields like data science, AI, machine learning, and cybersecurity, with 65 per cent in computer-related jobs. Their median annual salary was (about ₹1.01 crore) annually.

The US visa-type problems could crop up anywhere. The UK has also put its foot down on jobs till the free trade agreement with India comes into force. India needs to retain its talent pool not by force or new laws but by making job conditions better than elsewhere. Narayan Murthy of Infosys suggesting 70-hour weekly shifts or S.N. Subrahmanyam, the chairman of L&T, suggesting a 90-hour work week without a weekly off, for Indian professionals have been doing great disservice to Indian techies.

The country needs to restore 48-hour week, 8-hour a day, instead of the amended Industrial Disputes Act's impractical 12-hour shifts. Such draconian moves would promote brain drain and invite ignominy to Indian workers world over. Can India solve the high denial



rates—peaking under the Trump administration—though recent years have seen a relative dip? In FY 2024, the denial rate for initial H-1B petitions dropped to about 2.5 percent, down from approximately 3.5 percent in FY 2023 and as low as 2.2 percent in FY 2022.

Despite this welcome trend, a more restrictive policies under a renewed Trump presidency re-evaluates denial rates. The Donald Trump administration is replacing the traditional H-1B visa lottery with a wage-based selection system. Looks like H1B visa will not be given to level 1 entry level jobs which means freshers with zero work experience and with degree in US universities may never get their visa and will be disqualified. So, most of start-ups can't afford to hire H-1B and most of international students can't be hired for entry level jobs.

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has issued warnings against hiring practices that disproportionately favour migrant workers—a practice that may amount to national origin discrimination. One high-profile case involved Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), where American professionals filed complaints alleging they were replaced by lower-paid Indian H-1B workers based on race and age—a practice they argue violated U.S. civil-rights law, the Wall Street Journal reports.

Similarly, Cognizant faced a U.S. jury ruling that found discriminatory treatment favouring Indian workers over other nationalities, with non-Indian applicants sidelined despite similar qualifications. On social media, former employees voiced concerns about these practices. One comment reads: "These individuals are given first, if not exclusive, preference for new U.S. positions, ... Non-Indians are disproportionately relegated to the bench, as jobs are given to ... Indians." This has evolved as a major issue creating public ire against Indians.

That's not the only issue. Beyond legal and ethical concerns, Indian H-1B visas issued for three years are

associated with considerable anxiety over job stability and immigration uncertainty. A recent poll revealed that one in six NRIs on H-1B visas feel threatened by potential deportation amid fears of visa renewals and unpredictable U.S. immigration policies.

Tech companies—including Amazon, Google, and Microsoft—have reportedly advised H-1B employees to avoid international travel, fearing possible visa denials or re-entry issues. The prolonged green card backlogs, particularly for Indian nationals, further exacerbate stress and impact workforce morale, says The Washington Post.

Despite the stereotype of H-1B workers being "cheap labour," data tells a different story. Average annual salaries for Indian H-1B professionals in tech hover around \$132,000. In some engineering fields, H-1B workers actually earn more than U.S.-born peers. Additionally, visa sponsorship costs, including government and legal fees, can run up to \$34,900, or even \$50,000 when applying for permanent residency.

The H-1B visa dynamics are shaping a complex battleground—where legal scrutiny, worker vulnerabilities, and economic stakes intersect. The EEOC warnings and past misconduct are harbingers of tougher times. How do we balance U.S. labour protection with fair treatment of Indian H-1B professionals who are highly skilled and contribute significantly to the economy—both in dollars and innovation?

As the policy pendulum swings, meaningful reform and equitable enforcement are critical. Ensuring that Indian professionals on H-1B visas are both protected from exploitation and evaluated on merit—not origin—will be vital in maintaining international competitiveness and ethical integrity.

The way out is that India itself creates an economy with high demand and opportunities absorbing talents in an industry that is humane and honours job laws and does not remain tucked to profit-making alone. It needs proper laws

that ensure wages and job safety. Once Indians, known for their mettle, are treated better at home, they are expected to be in demand across the world. India needs to revamp its labour laws and not scrap it for petty profits of the employers.

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

The recent PUCL report on Manipur violence is riddled with factually incorrect information, steeped in bias, and marred by glaring inaccuracies. Far from being a credible assessment, it seems crafted to sow discord and undermine the fragile peace which Manipur has worked tirelessly to achieve. The deceptive narrative of the report, built on Kuki propaganda and distortions on the genesis of the violence, threatens to reignite tensions in a region struggling for stability. Such reckless dissemination of disinformation by groups like PUCL demands scrutiny and accountability. Authorities must act swiftly to address this deliberate attempt to disrupt harmony with lies and manipulation. Responsible reporting should uplift, not destabilize, communities recovering from conflict. Manipur deserves truth and healing, not divisive agendas masquerading as advocacy. It is imperative that such misleading efforts are countered with facts and transparency to safeguard the hard-earned peace. The people of Manipur have endured enough and they need support for healing, not provocations that fuel unrest. ~ Sanajaoba, Research Scholar, South East Asian Studies, Manipur University

DEMOCRACY ON TRIAL: FROM THE RULE OF LAW TO RULE BY LAW

KAPIL SIBAL

The surest way to throttle democracy is to weaponise laws and target those opposing the government. This government seems to have converted this into an art.

I recall the day the amendment to the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (UAPA), was taken up for discussion in Parliament. The Home Minister openly stated that this was necessary, for none could oppose the inclusion of terrorists and terrorist organisations in the First Schedule of the UAPA, seeking to destabilise our Republic. I intervened and expressed my fears that these laws are likely to be used against our citizens; it has turned out to be a reality.

The prosecution of young students, like Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam, under those laws has resulted in them languishing in jail for years without a trial. Such laws have been used against journalists, academics, and members of religious communities in this country. The obvious intent was to silence them.

The weaponisation of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA) is evident in its widespread use against political opponents, including chief ministers and ministers from opposition-ruled states, such as Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, Satyendra Jain, Hemant Soren, and Farooq Abdullah, among others. Valiant attempts were made to move against Siddaramaiah, but they came to naught. These laws have also been used to instil fear in several leaders who were once part of the opposition but have been persuaded to join the BJP to save themselves from prosecution and imprisonment.

The BJP has, particularly in Maharashtra,

rewarded opposition leaders against whom serious allegations of corruption were publicly made for causing a split in their erstwhile parties. They are now part of the coalition ruling Maharashtra.

The latest example of weaponisation of laws is the introduction of two Constitution (Amendment) Bills in Parliament on August 20, 2025. It is claimed that this is being done in public interest, for the welfare of the people and to uphold the principles of constitutional morality, and good governance—concepts that are alien to the functioning of this government.

What is likely to serve is not public interest, but the political interest of the ruling dispensation. This is clear from the fact that the proposed law provides that the chief ministers and ministers being investigated for offences punishable for more than five years and being in custody for more than 30 days will, on the 31st day, if they have not resigned, be dismissed by the governor of the state.

The principle of law that our Republic has embraced is that a person is innocent till proven guilty. In this case, a minister or a chief minister can be removed on a mere allegation without any proof. We are all aware that many such cases have been pending trial for over a decade and that the conviction rate in several of these prosecutions is abysmally low.

If the proposed constitutional amendments become law, it is most likely that trumped-up allegations will be made to target sitting chief ministers and ministers, and after 30 days in custody, they will be dismissed from those positions. Such allegations

in the past have served the political interests of the BJP. The present establishment seeks to utilise these laws for its own political purposes.

This weaponisation is also evident from how laws such as PMLA or UAPA have been used against influential ministers seeking to coerce them to join the BJP, or even public servants not belonging to any political party, in opposition-ruled states.

Ironically, since 2014, these laws have never been invoked against any minister in any of the BJP-ruled states, or, for that matter, against any minister within the ruling establishment at the Centre. Obviously, the selective use of such laws serves the political interest of the party in power.

The other matter of great concern is that such laws will allow the governor to dismiss a chief minister or a minister of the opposition-ruled state, which, under the present legal framework, can happen only upon conviction.

In addition, prosecution against public servants holding such positions can only be launched by seeking the sanction of the Council of Ministers in the case of prosecution against a minister and that of the governor in the case of a chief minister. By seeking to do away with the sanction provision, such laws weaponise the governors appointed by the Union to dismiss a minister or a chief minister. This is a direct invasion of the federal structure of this country, which the Supreme Court has held to be one of the basic features of the Constitution.

Having set out the above, it is also significant that these constitutional amendments have been

introduced by the present establishment, aware that such Bills cannot become law without garnering the support of a two-thirds majority in both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha.

The NDA, at present, consists of 293 members of the Lok Sabha, whereas for such Bills to pass muster, it must receive the support of 363 members. This is obviously a tall order, and these Bills, in all likelihood, will fail.

If they become law, they will surely be challenged in the courts. The courts will not favour such attempts to deface the Constitution. On the face of it, these Bills are manifestly unjust, violate the fundamental tenets of federalism and the basic principles of the rule of law.

One wonders why these Bills were introduced in the first place. There may be two reasons. One, the canard that the government wishes to rid the polity of criminals who are being prosecuted and that the opposition does not want to uphold the principles of constitutional morality—a political narrative, which in the context of how this government has jettisoned these principles, will not find favour with the people. Perhaps the other and real reason is to divert the attention of the people of India from the massive show of public support for opposition leaders in the run-up to the assembly elections in Bihar.

It appears constitutional democracy can be throttled and stymied through the weaponisation of laws. A new form of dictatorship!

Kapil Sibal | Senior lawyer and member of Rajya Sabha

Assam CM accuses activists of conspiracy to destabilise state amid eviction drives

GUWAHATI

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has accused prominent activists and civil rights leaders of orchestrating a campaign to create unrest in Assam, alleging they are working with Pakistani and Bangladeshi elements to weaken the state.

Speaking to the media, Sarma claimed that activists, including Harsh Mander and lawyer Prashant Bhushan, have been touring the state since yesterday, exclusively meeting minority community leaders to foster an atmosphere of instability.

"Since yesterday, a few individuals have been moving across Assam to spread unrest. Harsh Mander and Prashant

Bhushan have been visiting different places since yesterday," Sarma stated. He also named another group, including Johar Sirkar, Wajed Habibullah, and Fayaz Shahin as touring the lower Assam districts.

The Chief Minister drew parallels to the National Register of Citizens (NRC) process, suggesting similar tactics were being employed. "Like how these people came during the NRC and disrupted it. Similarly, they have begun another attempt," he said, adding that the government was closely monitoring their activities.

Sarma alleged the activists were specifically engaging with Jamiat-e-Islami to create unrest, and claimed social media accounts supporting such



activities originated from Pakistan and Bangladesh. "In Assam, Congress, Jamaat-e-Islam-e-Hind, Prashant Bhushan, intellectuals like Harsh Mander, along with elements from Bangladesh and Pakistan, are becoming active to weaken Assam," he declared.

The allegations come as the state BJP has demanded the arrest of Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind leader Mahmood Madani over comments linking Assam's eviction drives to situations in Gaza and Palestine. The party described these remarks as an insult to Assamese self-respect. Meanwhile, BJP spokesperson Jayanta Kumar Goswami accused Madani of viewing "Assam's problems only through the lens of the Muslim community" and called for police

action. He defended the government's eviction drives as necessary measures to protect indigenous rights and remove encroachers from government and forest lands.

Goswami warned of potential consequences if opposition parties formed a future government, claiming leaders like Arshad Madani and Mahmood Madani could become political advisors, resulting in "dominance of infiltrators."

The BJP has accused Congress and its allies of promoting what it terms "Madani culture" in Assam, alleging this undermines indigenous Assamese interests.

Sarma concluded with a call for unity: "We all must remain united to defeat this conspiracy."

SC issues notice over delay in Tripura Village Committee elections, Pradyot Manikya says he won't remain silent

AGARTALA

The Supreme Court on Monday, August 25 issued a notice in response to a plea seeking immediate directions to the Election Commission of India (ECI) and the Tripura State Election Commission for holding the long-pending Village Committee elections under the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAAC) Act, 1994.

Sharing the update, Tripura royal scion and Tripura Motha founder Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma said that a couple of months ago, he had moved the apex court over the delay in Village Committee elections.

He pointed out that despite the expiry of the tenure of the Village Committees, polls have not been conducted within the stipulated timeframe, thereby depriving the tribal population of their constitutional right to local self-governance. The apex court has granted four weeks' time to the ECI, the Tripura Election Commission, and the State Government to explain the reasons for the delay in conducting the elections. I thank the Hon SC for issuing notice. Our people have suffered and people who have done this should be held accountable. Fear of losing election cannot mean you can curtail the democratic rights of the indigenous people of Tripura. I am not going to remain silent," said Pradyot Manikya Debbarma.

Arunachal: Infant dies after alleged wrong treatment at TRHIMS, family demands justice



ITANAGAR

Infant admitted with minor fever received sleeping injection at TRHIMS. Baby's condition worsened leading to vomiting and referral to Dibrugarh. Infant died before reaching advanced care hospital in Dibrugarh.

A case of alleged medical negligence has sparked outrage in Arunachal Pradesh after the death of an infant at Tomo Riba Institute of Health and Medical Sciences (TRHIMS).

According to sources, the child,

less than a year old, was admitted to TRHIMS with a minor fever. However, instead of routine treatment, the infant was reportedly administered a sleeping injection along with other medicines. Soon after, the child began vomiting.

As per reports, the baby's condition worsened, and the parents were referred to Dibrugarh for advanced medical care. Tragically, the infant died on the way before reaching the hospital.

Family members, along with local residents, have accused the attending nurse and doctors of gross negligence. The incident has triggered widespread anger, with demands for accountability and a thorough investigation into the matter.

Authorities are yet to issue an official statement regarding the allegations.

"Contrary to national interest": Gaurav Gogoi against India vs Pakistan cricket clash



GUWAHATI

Assam Congress president Gaurav Gogoi has urged the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to ensure that India does not participate in cricket matches against Pakistan,

stating that it would be contrary to national interest.

He said that with cross-border tensions persisting between the two neighbours following the Pahalgam terror attack, playing cricket with Pakistan is "contrary to national interest".

India is slated to play Pakistan in a group stage match of the Asia Cup in Dubai on September 14.

In a letter to BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia, which was shared with the press here on Monday, Gogoi said, "While cricket has always been a sport that brings joy among people, in the context of current India and Pakistan relations, such engagements should not be prioritised over national interest." He said the "cross-border tensions still persist and we all are aware of the sacrifices of our armed forces".

"In such circumstances,

playing bilateral cricket with Pakistan appears contrary to the national interest," he said in the letter, dated August 23.

Gogoi, the president of the Assam Congress, noted that India had sent delegations to various countries to make the world aware that Pakistan was behind the Pahalgam attack.

"Even our Honourable Prime Minister mentioned that water and blood cannot flow together," he said, referring to India pulling out of the Indus Waters Treaty immediately after the attack in Jammu and Kashmir in April.

"Engaging with Pakistan at this stage sends out a message that undermines the sentiments of the people of India who stand firmly against any compromise on national security," he asserted. The Jorhat MP also pointed out that Pakistan had backed out of playing hockey in India,

citing security concerns.

"Resuming cricket ties under the present circumstances may dilute the seriousness of national concerns regarding security and diplomacy," he maintained.

"India's stance in global forums and in bilateral relations must reflect unity, strength, and the highest regard for our sovereignty and security," he said in the letter to Saikia, who is also the advocate general of Assam.

Gogoi urged the BCCI to take a "clear stand" and avoid cricketing engagements with Pakistan until conditions are favourable and conducive to the nation's interest.

He had, on August 14, urged Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to use his close association with Saikia to persuade the country's apex cricket body to pull out of the encounter with Pakistan.

Akhil Gogoi calls for strong opposition unity ahead of 2026 Assam Polls

SIVSAGAR

Rajior Dal president and Sivasagar MLA Akhil Gogoi on Sunday underlined the importance of opposition unity in Assam ahead of the 2026 Legislative Assembly elections, stressing that a consolidated front must "stand for the people."

Speaking at a program held in the Meteka Gaon Panchayat area near Sivasagar town, Gogoi said his party is fully prepared for the upcoming elections. His remarks come on the eve of a crucial meeting scheduled for tomorrow, where all political parties in Assam are expected to deliberate on election strategies. A key agenda of the meeting will be whether the Congress joins the opposition alliance for the polls.

Since August 19, Rajior Dal has



been carrying out a 15-day National Awareness March across the Sivasagar constituency. The cam-

paign is designed to foster direct interaction with citizens, share the party's vision for governance,

and gather feedback on local and state-level issues. Party workers and leaders have been actively participating, highlighting the need for a united opposition to address Assam's challenges and ensure equitable development.

Addressing the gathering, Gogoi described the forthcoming meeting of opposition parties as "crucial for shaping Assam's political future."

"We are focused on creating a strong opposition alliance that can stand for the people and provide real solutions to the state's pressing problems," he said.

The event also served as a platform for Rajior Dal leaders to engage with local residents, listen to their concerns, and present the party's roadmap for governance and development.

North East Computer Traders Association to organise IT Fair

Annual General Meeting & Formation of New Executive Body 2025-2027



BISWADEEP GUPTA

GUWAHATI: The North East Computer Traders Association (NECTA), established in 2001, successfully conducted its Annual General Meeting (AGM) today at Hotel Vishwaratna, Guwahati.

On this occasion, the new 15-member Executive Body for the term 2025-2027 officially took the oath of office and assumed charge under the Presidentship of Joydeep Gupta.

After assuming charge, Gupta

expressed his heartfelt gratitude to all the respected members of NECTA for electing him as the President. He assured the gathering that he, along with his newly elected team, would strive to discharge their responsibilities with the highest commitment, dedication, and sincerity to further strengthen the IT trade community in the North East.

The newly elected office bearers include Pranjal Barua as General Secretary and Ashok Kumar Goel as Treasurer, along with 12 other Executive Members representing different segments of the IT trade fraternity across the region.

In his address, Gupta also announced plans to organize a grand IT Fair in the near future, which will serve as a platform for traders, manufacturers, and technology partners to showcase innovations and opportunities. He further added that NECTA will seek the support and collaboration of the Government of Assam to ensure the success of this initiative and to create greater opportunities for the IT ecosystem in the region.

The AGM concluded with renewed enthusiasm and optimism as NECTA embarks on a new chapter under its newly elected leadership.

Dhubri women SHG members receive Rs 10,000 aid; focus on empowerment

DHUBRI

Rs 10,000 cheques distributed to SHG women in Dhubri to promote entrepreneurship. Scheme targets 2 lakh women across Assam for self-reliance and business growth. Beneficiaries include tailoring, poultry, piggery, and handicrafts entrepreneurs.

Members of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Assam's Dhubri, on August 25, received cheques worth Rs 10,000 under the Mukhyamantri Mahila Udyog Abhiyan Scheme - a move aimed at empowering women entrepreneurs.

The event, held at Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua Playground, saw a large gathering of beneficiaries and dignitaries. The Guardian Minister of Dhubri District, Ranjit Kumar Das, presided over the open meeting organized by the Dhubri District Administration. He personally handed over the cheques to members of the Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission and the Assam State Urban



Livelihood Mission.

In his address, Minister Ranjit Kumar Das highlighted the scheme's core objective to encourage the self-reliant journey of Assamese

women. He stated that the campaign aims to put two lakh women from SHGs across the state on the path of entrepreneurship and self-reliance. "Under this scheme, a fund of Rs

10,000 will be given to each eligible woman," the Minister announced. He further elaborated that the initiative is designed to promote diverse business opportunities, including tailoring, poultry farming, piggery, and handicrafts, thereby creating alternative livelihood opportunities in both rural and urban areas.

Under Dhubri Assembly Constituency No. 8, a total of 4,242 SHGs within the Dhubri Municipality areas are beneficiaries of this scheme, with a total of 9,433 women set to benefit. The Minister also mentioned that the scheme will facilitate beneficiaries in connecting with banks and will be implemented in three phases. He expressed confidence that the scheme would empower SHG members to become successful entrepreneurs, thereby strengthening the rural and urban economies of both Dhubri district and Assam as a whole.

The cheque distribution ceremony was attended by several distinguished guests, including Additional Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam, B. Kalyan Chakraborty; Dhubri district Commissioner, Dibakar Nath; senior BJP leader Shiladitya Deb; and Dhubri Municipality Chairman, Dr. Debamoy Sanyal.

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SC judgment on house demolitions of accused persons reaffirmed citizens' rights: CJI Gavai



PANAJI

Chief Justice of India B R Gavai has said he was glad that the Supreme Court's ruling against the demolition of houses of accused persons without following due procedure of law upheld the rights of citizens.

He was part of the SC bench that last year slammed instant "bulldozer justice" and laid down pan-India guidelines on demolition of properties, saying the executive could become a judge and declare an accused as guilty and demolish his house.

Speaking at a felicitation function organised by the Goa High Court Bar Association in Panaji on Saturday, the CJI also explained the reasoning behind his landmark judgment on the creamy layer in the reserved category.

Pointing out to the speeches by earlier speakers during the felicitation, which referred to his historic judgments, CJI Gavai said, "I am really happy that we could do something as a custodian of the Constitution for protecting the rights of citizens whose houses were demol-

ished without following the procedures of law."

He said that the buildings or houses of the people who had not even been tried by the law and who had been accused of certain charges were being demolished without following the due procedure of law.

The CJI said the SC bench held that the houses did not belong solely to an accused person, yet the other family members residing there were made to suffer despite no fault of their own.

Even if a person is convicted, the CJI said, he is still entitled to the rule of law.

"The rule of law is paramount in the country. I am happy that we could lay down the guidelines. We could prohibit the Executive not to become a judge," he said.

CJI Gavai said the Indian Constitution recognises the separation of powers of the executive, judiciary and legislature.

"And if the executive is permitted to be the judge, then we will be hitting at the very concept of separation of power," he said.

Referring to the SC judg-

ment on sub-classification of scheduled castes, CJI Gavai said that he had been widely criticised for the judgment by the people belonging to his own community.

"I always believed that I have to write my judgment not by demands or desires of the people, but as per the law that I understand and as per my own conscience," he said.

CJI Gavai said he had observed that when a first-generation individual from a reserved category becomes an IAS officer, the benefit often extends to subsequent generations, with the second and even third generation also entering the IAS through the same category.

"The question which I had put to myself was that the son or daughter of a person who gets the best education in a school in Mumbai or in Delhi can he be equated with the son or daughter of a mason or agricultural labourer in a village and taking education in a Zilla Parishad or gram panchayat school," he said.

He said Article 14 of the Constitution does not mean equality among unequals.

"What is contemplated is that unequal treatment to unequals so that they become equals," he said.

"Therefore, by putting a child of a labourer residing in a village and a child of chief secretary residing in Mumbai and studying in the best of the school, my view is that it hits at the very best concept of equality," he added.

Our soldiers did not kill terrorists based on their religion, but because of their deeds: Rajnath Singh

JODHPUR

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday asserted that Indian forces gave a "befitting reply" to Pakistan during Operation Sindoor and "our soldiers did not kill terrorists based on their religion, but because of their deeds".

Addressing an event here, Singh also lauded the people of border areas for supporting the administration and the armed forces during the military operation to avenge the Pahalgam terror attack.

The Defence Minister said that after the incident, he called the service chiefs and asked if they were ready for the operation.

"The chiefs of all three armed forces unanimously replied, 'We are ready for any operation.' This is India. The prime minister gave the necessary directives," he said.

"The target that was decided was hit precisely, just as planned. During Operation Sindoor, our forces received full support from all border regions. India is a country that not only considers people within its borders as members but also regards people across the world as part of its family, spreading the message of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam."

"India does not discriminate based on caste or religion. However, terrorists killed people after identifying their religion. Our soldiers did not kill the terrorists based on religion but because of their deeds," he said.

Under Operation Sindoor in May, precision strikes were carried out on multiple targets in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir linked to terror groups. The operation aimed at destroying terror infrastructure and neutralising key operatives following the April 22 Pahalgam attack.

Lauding Prime Minister Narendra Modi's efforts in the education sector, Singh said a significant transformation had taken place over the years that will help the country achieve new heights.

"There is a considerable difference between the education of our time and today's education."

"I had also studied in a village primary school. When I used to look at the globe on the principal's table, it felt like



a magical ball," he said.

He attributed the changes to decades of hard work, saying, "In recent years, there have been significant changes in education. Today, our children can access information on the internet. Such a huge transformation has taken place."

Singh expressed gratitude toward Prime Minister Modi, saying, "I want to thank Modi for showing a strong resolve to improve the education sector. Bringing reforms in education was not an easy task. Several commissions were formed and recommendations were given but the kind of reform that was needed did not come."

He said that today's children can acquire information from an app about the entire world.

"In our time, science meant only the blackboard," he said.

Singh said that the visible difference in the education sector is India's real

strength. "This is the real change and this is the future of India. This will take our country to even greater heights," he said.

Elaborating on India's history, he said that when people in other parts of the world were living in caves, Indian sages were writing the Natya Shastra. "When the world did not understand the causes of diseases, India had doctors like Sushruta. Knowledge of medicinal plants like turmeric, neem and ashwagandha existed, which scientists now acknowledge," he said.

Singh also touched upon the concept of spiritual growth, saying that the importance of balancing physical and spiritual development in children's education was important.

He said that children's development should not only be physical but also spiritual. "Spiritual devel-

opment can only happen through educational institutions. Give children education that will expand their minds," he said. He quoted former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, saying, "No one becomes great with a small mind. No one stands tall with a broken heart."

"Indian sages' minds were so vast that they considered everyone in the world as part of their family and spread the message of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam," he said.

"Imagine the mind as a circle. As you expand its circumference, your experience of happiness increases in proportion. In the end, you will attain supreme bliss," he said.

During the event, he inaugurated a sports academy in Jodhpur.

Union minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat and other leaders were also present on the occasion.

INTERNATIONAL

Bleak future for Rohingya refugees even as Bangladesh seeks to tackle crisis

NEWYORK

The rain was relentless the night Mohammad Kaisar fled for his life from his home in Myanmar's Maungdaw township.

Barefoot and exhausted, he trudged with his parents and four siblings on mud paths until they reached the Naf River.

On a flimsy boat, they crossed into Bangladesh, joining around a million of the largely Muslim Rohingya minority, fleeing a military crackdown in Myanmar's Rakhine state.

That was in 2017. Eight years later, rain still lashes down on his simple shelter in the sprawling refugee camps of Cox's Bazar.

But for the 28-year-old refugee, nothing has washed away his despair.

"War is raging. Hundreds are waiting at the border to enter Bangladesh. Every day, a new family from Rakhine takes refuge," Kaisar told AFP by telephone, speaking outside his cramped hut in Balukhali camp.

"How is it possible to return home? We were destined to stay in this crowded camp, sandwiched between small huts." Bangladesh on Monday is holding talks aimed at addressing the plight of Rohingya refugees, even as fresh arrivals cross over from war-torn Myanmar and shrinking aid flows deepen the crisis.

The meetings in Cox's Bazar are taking place ahead of a UN conference in New York on September 30.

Both Bangladesh and the UN want to provide stable conditions in Myanmar for the Rohingya to eventu-



ally return. "I consistently hear from Rohingya refugees that they want to return to their homes in Myanmar, but only when it is safe to do so," Nicholas Koumjian, who heads the UN's Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar, warned ahead of the meeting.

"Ending the violence and atrocities against civilians from all communities in Rakhine is critical for the eventual safe, dignified, voluntary and sustainable return of those that have been displaced."

But Kaisar's old homeland of Rakhine is the site of intense fighting in Myanmar's civil war, triggered by the 2021 coup that ousted the democratic government.

Bangladesh has recorded a surge of refugees from Myanmar since early 2024, with 150,000 more

Rohingya arriving.

For Kaisar, life in Myanmar was a spacious home, running a small grocery shop. Today, in the grim camps, it's a battle for survival.

Safety is fragile. Factional clashes have shaken the camp in recent months.

"We had two armed groups fighting only a few months ago. It was like a hostage situation," he said.

"Violence is common; children are the most vulnerable."

In Rakhine, restricted access due to fighting has been compounded by worldwide aid cutbacks spearheaded by US President Donald Trump's freeze on humanitarian funding.

The World Food Programme -- which received nearly half its 2024 donations from the United States -- warned this month that 57 percent

of families in central Rakhine are now unable to meet basic food needs.

In the camps, food too is a constant worry.

Each refugee receives a ration card worth about \$12 a month. Kaisar listed what that buys: 13 kilograms of rice, a litre of oil, a handful of onions and garlic, and a packet of salt.

"It fills our stomachs, but there is no nutrition," he said.

"I have a three-year-old son. He needs milk, eggs, lentils, but we cannot afford them. Nutrition centres in the camps provide support to children under two. After that, we are left to struggle."

Education is the next looming hurdle, and Kaisar fears for his young son. "Will he be able to study and get a job? Or will he spend his whole life as a refugee like me?" Kaisar asked.

He recalled how ordinary villagers in Bangladesh once handed him dry clothes and food after his escape. But beyond that generosity, the future looks bleak.

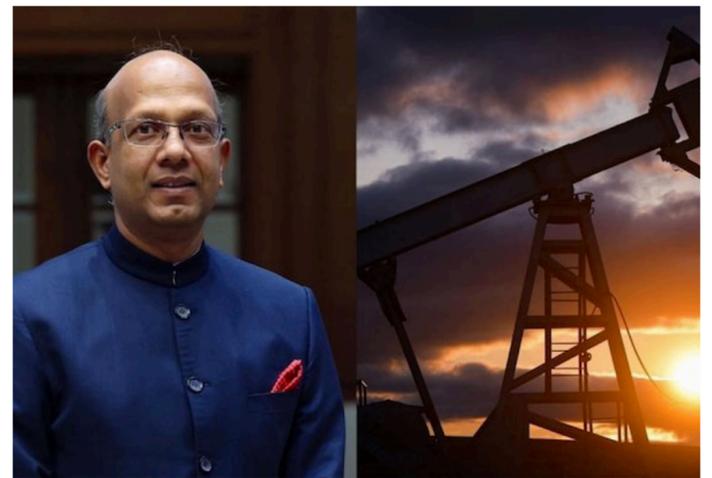
The violence that uprooted him still rages across the border, and Rohingya militants working with the Myanmar junta have tried to recruit refugees, according to camp residents, UN reports and analysts.

"We civilians have been continuously betrayed," Kaisar said bitterly. "Every side has used us as pawns."

For now, the father's appeal is simple: that Dhaka eases restrictions on education, to allow Rohingya children to attend regular Bangladeshi schools.

"At least allow our children to attend school," he said. "If they can stand on their own, maybe their future won't be as hopeless as ours."

India will buy oil where it gets 'best deal': Indian envoy to Russia



MOSCOW

India will continue to buy oil from the most competitive sources to safeguard its energy security, Indian Ambassador to Russia Vinay Kumar has said, reaffirming New Delhi's commitment to protecting its national interests amid mounting U.S. pressure over its imports of Russian crude.

In an interview with Russia's state-run TASS news agency, Kumar emphasized that India's energy policy is driven by market dynamics and the needs of its 1.4 billion citizens.

"Indian companies will continue buying from wherever they get the best deal. That's what the current situation is," he said.

His remarks come as the U.S. steps up criticism of India's purchase of discounted Russian oil, alleging the revenue supports Russia's military operations in Ukraine, a claim New Delhi has repeatedly rejected.

Ambassador Kumar underlined that India's energy cooperation with Russia, among other global partners, contributes to global oil market stability. "We have clearly stated that our objective is energy security for 1.4 billion people. Our cooperation with Russia, like with several other countries, has played a role in ensuring that," he said.

His comments come in the backdrop of the Donald Trump administration doubling tariffs on Indian goods to a whopping 50 per cent, including a 25 per cent additional duty for India's purchase of Russian crude oil.

The US has alleged that India's purchases of Russian crude oil are funding Moscow's war in Ukraine, a charge strongly rejected by India.

Calling Washington's decision "unfair, unreasonable and unjustified", Kumar said that the Indian government "will continue taking measures which will protect the national interest of the country".

India has been maintain-

ing that its energy procurement, including from Russia, is driven by national interest and market dynamics.

Kumar said that trade between India and Russia is based on mutual interests and market factors, and added that it is done with the "overall objective of ensuring the energy security of 1.4 billion people of India".

"There are other countries including the US itself and in Europe trading with Russia," he said.

On Saturday, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, responding to a question on the US criticism of India on the crude oil issue, said, "It's funny to have people who work for a pro-business American administration accusing other people of doing business."

That's really curious. If you have a problem buying oil or refined products from India, don't buy it. Nobody forces you to buy it. But Europe buys, America buys, so you don't like it, don't buy it," he said.

The Organic Illusion: Why India's Farmers Still Struggle Despite the Promise of Chemical-Free Cultivation

Sikkim's success story offers lessons-but market access, certification hurdles, and consumer misconceptions keep organic farming out of reach for many growers.

The Many Faces of "Organic"

Few words in the modern food economy are as loaded-and as misunderstood-as organic. It is splashed across supermarket shelves, stamped on packets of rice and pulses, and proudly displayed on fruits and vegetables that promise health, purity, and sustainability. To the health-conscious urban consumer, "organic" conjures an idyllic vision: lush green fields, farmers working without chemicals, produce untouched by adulteration, and fruits and vegetables as pristine as nature intended.

But behind this glowing imagery lies a more complicated reality. For farmers on the ground, organic cultivation is not always the pathway to prosperity it appears to be. While the ecological benefits of organic farming are undeniable-improved soil health, biodiversity gains, and lower chemical dependence-economic realities often paint a harsher picture. High certification costs, poor market access, and misleading food labels erode both farmer confidence and consumer trust.

The journey of India's first fully organic state, Sikkim, reflects this duality: a remarkable achievement in policy and environmental restoration, yet riddled with challenges when it comes to livelihoods and markets.

Beyond Buzzwords: What Organic Farming Actually Means

Organic farming is not just about avoiding chemical fertilizers or pesticides. At its core, it is a philosophy of balance-working with the rhythms of soil, water, and biodiversity, rather than against them. Unlike monocropping systems that maximize yield at the cost of ecological health, organic farming emphasizes crop diversity, biological pest control, and the building of soil organic matter.

The benefits are both local and global. Richer soil retains water better and reduces the need for expensive inputs. Healthy soil microbes contribute to natural pest resistance. Carbon sequestration in organic systems helps mitigate climate change, creating long-term ecological resilience. In short, organic farming is less a production technique and more a toolkit for sustainability.

But sustainability comes at a cost. Organic produce rarely looks perfect. A mango may be smaller, a tomato may have blemishes, a cabbage might wilt sooner. Consumers conditioned by glossy supermarket standards sometimes mistake these imperfections as flaws rather than marks of authenticity.

The Green Revolution's Shadow

To understand why organic farming matters today, we need to revisit the past. The Green Revolution of the 1960s and 70s transformed India from a food-deficient nation into a grain-surplus country. High-yielding crop varieties, chemical fertilizers, and irrigation technology allowed India to feed its population and achieve self-sufficiency.

But the gains came with hidden costs. Over decades, excessive use of nitrogenous fertilizers degraded soil health, pesticide residues poisoned groundwater, and monocropping reduced biodiversity. The ecological balance tilted precariously, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions and long-term land degradation.

Organic farming, then, is less about nostalgia for traditional methods and more about correcting course-an attempt to restore equilibrium to farming landscapes and reconnect food systems to ecological sustainability.

Organic Isn't Perfect-And That's the Point

The myth of flawless organic produce has been carefully cultivated by advertising. Consumers expect their organic apples to gleam, their rice to be uniform, their vegetables to last long in refrigerators. In reality, genuine organic crops often look less appealing. They may spoil faster, lack uniformity,



ty, or display cosmetic blemishes.

Yet these "imperfections" are the evidence of authenticity. They reveal that crops grew under natural conditions, without chemical preservatives or pesticides. Educating consumers to see value in these irregularities-rather than rejecting them-remains one of the greatest challenges for organic advocates.

Certification: A Farmer's Biggest Hurdle

For a farmer, the road to becoming "organic certified" is long and expensive. The process typically requires a conversion period of 3-5 years during which chemical use must be phased out. During this transition, yields often decline, incomes drop, and farmers must shoulder the costs of certification audits.

Certification is not limited to farming alone-it extends to processing, packaging, transport, and marketing. In India, certification can be obtained through two main systems: NPOP (National Programme for Organic Production), aligned with global export standards.

PGS-India (Participatory Guarantee System), a more community-driven certification designed for smallholder farmers.

To protect consumers, the Food Safety and Standards (Organic Food) Regulations, 2017 introduced the Jaivik Bharat logo, distinguishing certified organic products from others.

Yet loopholes persist. Many companies exploit terms like "natural," "farm-fresh," or "eco-friendly" without undergoing formal certification, confusing consumers and diluting the value of genuine organic produce. Farmers, after investing time and money in certification, often find themselves competing unfairly with these pseudo-organic products.

The Consumer's Dilemma
Urban middle-class consumers are the largest buyers of organic products in India. They are drawn by health concerns-fear of pesticide residues, lifestyle diseases, or food adulteration. But not all are willing to pay the significant price premium that certified organic products demand.

A mismatch arises: consumers want affordability, farmers need profitability, and the gap between the two is often filled by middlemen and marketers rather than direct farmer-to-consumer channels.

This paradox has bred skepticism. When consumers encounter "organic" produce that looks no different-or worse, spoils faster-they question whether the higher price is justified. Some stop buying altogether, undermining the fragile trust needed for the organic sector to grow.

Sikkim: The Laboratory of Organic India

Sikkim's declaration as the world's first fully organic state in 2016 remains a landmark achievement. Over 75,000 hectares of farmland were converted to organic cultivation, and chemical inputs were phased out systematically. The transition was not accidental-it was the result of sustained political will, phased policy interventions,

and alignment with broader goals such as eco-tourism and biodiversity conservation.

The benefits were real. Farmers saw reduced input costs, healthier soils, and higher resilience to climate variability. The state attracted global recognition, boosting its image as an eco-friendly tourist destination.

But challenges soon emerged. Despite production gains, market access remained weak. Local farmers often could not find buyers willing to pay premium prices. Infrastructure gaps-lack of cold storage, inadequate processing units, limited transport networks-meant that Sikkimese farmers still struggled to sell their organic produce beyond local markets.

The lesson from Sikkim is sobering: policy success does not automatically translate into farmer prosperity. Scaling up organic farming across India will require not just conversion but also marketing, logistics, and consumer education.

The Broader Struggle Across India
Outside Sikkim, thousands of individual farmers and cooperatives attempt organic cultivation. Many are driven by ecological awareness, others by consumer demand, and still others by necessity when chemical inputs become unaffordable.

But their challenges mirror those of Sikkim:

" Certification costs discourage small farmers.

" Market penetration is limited to metros and niche consumer groups.

" Misinformation weakens consumer trust.

" Infrastructure gaps reduce shelf life and market reach.

" Policy fragmentation leaves farmers navigating a maze of schemes without cohesive support.

What Needs to Change

For organic farming to move from the margins to the mainstream, several interventions are essential:

1. Certification Support - Subsidies or government-funded certification could reduce costs for small farmers.

2. Market Infrastructure - Cold chains, farmer markets, and digital platforms could bridge the producer-consumer gap.

3. Price Assurance - Minimum support prices or procurement schemes for organic produce would stabilize farmer incomes.

4. Consumer Education - Campaigns to normalize blemished produce and highlight authenticity over appearance.

5. Labeling Enforcement - Strict penalties for misuse of terms like "natural" or "farm fresh."

6. Research and Innovation - Investments in bio-fertilizers, pest control, and soil regeneration tailored to Indian conditions.

The Role of Consumers and Policymakers

Organic farming is not just a farmer's battle-it is a societal responsibility. Consumers must scrutinize labels, demand certification, and support farmer cooperatives practicing genuine sustainability. Policymakers must align agricultural strategies with climate goals, offering infrastructure, subsidies, and price support.

In the long run, organic farming is not about premium niche markets but about mainstream food security-ensuring safe food, resilient soils, and sustainable livelihoods.

Are We Still on the Organic Path?

The promise of organic farming is both inspiring and incomplete. It offers an antidote to chemical dependency, a pathway to climate resilience, and a tool for ecological renewal. But until markets are fair, certification is accessible, and consumers are informed, the word "organic" risks remaining an illusion-a glossy label that hides as much as it reveals.

The true measure of organic farming will not be how many hectares are certified or how many logos are printed on packets, but whether it restores balance: between farmer and consumer, between soil and seed, between economy and ecology.

The question is not whether organic farming matters-it undoubtedly does. The question is whether India can reimagine organic agriculture not as a niche for the privileged, but as a mainstream solution for food, climate, and livelihoods.

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