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PERSPECTIVE

Marry someone who multiplies your focus, not your stress.

Legendary singer Zubeen Garg passes away after accident in Singapore

GUWAHATI



Celebrated Assamese singer and music icon Zubeen Garg, best known nationally for his hit song "Ya Ali" from the film Gangster, has tragically passed away following a scuba diving accident in Singapore.

According to reports, Singapore police rescued him from the sea and rushed him to a nearby hospital. Despite being placed under intensive medical care, doctors could not save him.

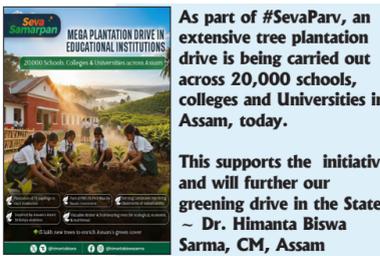
Zubeen was in Singapore to attend the North East Festival, where he was scheduled to perform today. His sudden demise has shocked fans and the entire Assamese community, leaving a deep void in India's music industry.

Tributes and condolences have been pouring in from across Assam, the Northeast, and beyond as people mourn the loss of one of the region's most loved artists.

WHO SAID WHAT

As part of #SevaParv, an extensive tree plantation drive is being carried out across 20,000 schools, colleges and Universities in Assam, today.

This supports the initiative and will further our greening drive in the State.
~ Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM, Assam



Assam CM Declares: Migrants Who Arrived Before 1971 Are 100% Indian

Only 25,000 doubtful voters in courts out of 2 lakh Bengali Hindus

BAKSA

The number of Bengali Hindus marked as D-voters (doubtful voters) in Assam has fallen sharply from 200,000 to 25,000 over the past five years, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced Wednesday.

Speaking on the longstanding citizenship verification issue that has affected the community for years, Sarma indicated the problem could be "nearly resolved by next year" if current trends continue.

The significant decline comes as most Bengali Hindus are now successfully challenging their cases in court by establishing their refugee status through 1971 refugee camp certificates, according to the Chief Minister.

"From what I have seen in the tribunals, I haven't come across any Bengali Hindu being declared a foreigner recently," Sarma stated. "Earlier the situation was different but now the courts have clearly stated: Anyone who came



before 1971 is 100% Indian." The D-voter classification has been a source of uncertainty for thousands of families in Assam, potentially affecting their voting rights and citizenship status. The

category was created to identify individuals whose citizenship was considered questionable during electoral roll preparations.

The Bengali Hindus marked as doubtful voters (D-voters) in As-

sam have reduced from two lakhs to 25,000 in court records, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma claimed.

Speaking to reporters on Thursday, the Assam CM said that the Supreme Court recognises people residing in Assam before 1971, the cut-off year in the Assam Accord, as "100 per cent Indians".

He said, "There is an issue with D-voters. In Assam, there were two lakh Bengali Hindus, but now only 25 thousand remain in court records. Nearly two lakh people have been almost wiped out in five years." He added that the upcoming Assembly elections in Assam, due in 2026, would be "interesting" amid Bengali Hindus being pulled out of the D-voters' category.

"The next election might be much more interesting because most Bengali Hindus are winning in court. They have only been issued 1971 refugee certificates; otherwise, they were given camper certificates."

"I have seen the tribunal order stating that no Bengali Hindu peo-

ple have been declared foreigners, because everyone was very doubtful before. The Supreme Court has confirmed that the residence before 1971 makes these people 100 per cent Indian," he added.

Doubtful voters are an ongoing issue in Assam for years, and the cases regarding this are heard in the Foreigner Tribunals.

Meanwhile, Himanta Biswa Sarma held rallies in Baksa, Tamulpur and Udalguri ahead of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) polls on September 22.

"Extremely strong support across various constituencies in Baksa, Tamulpur and Udalguri today. @BJP4Assam is a strong contender in the #BTCPolls this time, and the on-ground feedback I am receiving is very encouraging. Come 22nd, the people will decisively vote for the BJP," the Assam CM wrote on X.

According to the State Election Commission, the polling will take place in the 40 General Council Constituencies of the Bodoland Territorial Council.

Manipur Conflict Survivors Press Govt for Right to Return Home, Not Relocation



IMPHAL

The Meitei Society of Churachandpur has urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the authorities to take a clear and unequivocal stance on the resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs), insisting that they must be allowed to return to their original homes rather than to vaguely termed "appropriate places."

Addressing a press conference at the Manipur Press Club today, Irom Abung Meitei, Assistant Secretary (Information and Publicity) of the society, welcomed the Prime Minister's long-awaited visit to Manipur after more than 28 months of conflict. However, he expressed disappointment

and confusion over the PM's speech, particularly the assurance of resettling displaced people at "appropriate places."

"The word 'appropriate' carries double meanings. Does it mean prefabricated shelters or new settlements, or does it mean our original homes? We would have greatly appreciated it if the Hon'ble Prime Minister had clearly and unequivocally promised to resettle the displaced at their original places as soon as possible," he said.

The society highlighted the sufferings endured by IDPs since the onset of the crisis and demanded that all displaced persons—whether from the hills or valley—be resettled in their original homes as they existed before May 3, 2023.

They also laid out specific demands, including the reconstruction of demolished houses before resettlement, monetary compensation to every affected household, and a central government job for at least one member of each displaced family.

The Meitei Society expressed disappointment that the Prime Minister did not announce any concrete policy or programme for the rehabilitation and welfare of IDPs, calling it "very unfortunate."

Nonetheless, they reiterated their optimism about peace returning to Manipur soon and pledged full cooperation in efforts to restore normalcy. "We sincerely urge all concerned to make Manipur the epitome of peace, progress, and prosperity," the appeal concluded.

Guwahati Police Fix Decibel Limits for Puja: 55 dB by Day, 45 dB by Night, check dos and don'ts

GUWAHATI

The Police Commissionerate of Guwahati has issued a comprehensive set of guidelines to ensure the smooth, safe, and environmentally responsible celebration of Durga Puja 2025 in the city.

The advisory, released in public interest, outlines both mandatory "Dos" and prohibited "Don'ts" for Puja Committees, organizers, and devotees.

The directives emphasize public safety, crowd control, eco-friendly practices, and respect for communal harmony. Organizers have been instructed to obtain prior permission for Puja pandals, maintain necessary fitness certificates for electrical and sound systems, and install CCTV cameras for surveillance. Proper lighting, barricades for crowd management, and volunteer lists coordinated with police are also mandatory.

Noise levels must remain within permissible limits—55 dB (A) from 6 AM to 10 PM and 45 dB (A) from 10 PM to 6 AM. The use of loudspeakers beyond 10 PM has been strictly prohibited to protect the privacy and comfort of residents, particularly students and senior citizens.

The advisory also stresses environmental responsibility. Committees have been directed to use only biodegradable materials for pandal decorations and



idols, avoid non-eco-friendly substances like plastic, and ensure immersion processes follow district administration guidelines. Pollution of water bodies has been strictly banned, with police urging eco-friendly immersion practices. To prevent accidents, the use of inflammable materials within pandals and bursting of firecrackers during immersion processions have been barred. Parking within 100 meters of pandals will not be allowed, and any unauthorized procession or forceful collection of donations has been declared illegal.

The Police Commissionerate has also highlighted the importance of public harmony. Organizers and devotees have been urged

to avoid any activity that could hurt the sentiments of different communities. Special instructions include setting up medical teams, emergency areas, public safety announcements against pickpocketing, and establishing 24x7 help desks at major pandals.

For emergencies, the advisory lists dedicated contact numbers of the District Administration, Fire and Emergency Services, GMC Control Room, and various Deputy Commissioners of Police.

The Guwahati Police has appealed to all Puja committees, volunteers, and the public to extend full cooperation in ensuring Durga Puja 2025 remains a peaceful, inclusive, and joyous celebration.

SC panel recommends Rs 150 Cr penalty on USTM, seeks land restoration

GUWAHATI

The Central Empowered Committee (CEC) of the Supreme Court on Wednesday submitted its report on the alleged illegal mining and hill cutting in Ri Bhoi and East Khasi Hills districts of Meghalaya to the apex court, with a number of recommendations, including restoration of the entire area occupied by University of Science and Technology Meghalaya (USTM) and surrounding buildings, and a minimum fine of Rs 150 crore on the varsity for violation of forest laws.

It also recommended – in view of rampant large-scale illegal mining in Ri Bhoi – suspension of all mining, quarrying, and crushing activities in the district until a multi-disciplinary committee headed by the Additional Director General of Forests (Forest Conservation), Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF-CC) conducts a comprehensive review of all permissions, including certificates of forest/non-forest land, status of encroachment, muck disposal practices, and compliance

with approved mining plans and environmental safeguards.

The CEC report concerns IA No. 125603 & 125604 of 2025 (filed in WPC) No. 202 of 1995 (TN Godavari man vs Union of India and others) by Jitil Deka regarding alleged illegal mining and hill cutting and the consequent rampant environmental degradation in the two districts of Meghalaya and its trans-boundary impact on Assam, particularly Guwahati city and the Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary.

The CEC also asked the Meghalaya government to constitute an expert committee within one month to re-examine and harmonize the criteria for identification of 'forests' under the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (Management and Control of Forests) Act, 1958 and the Meghalaya Forest Regulation (Amendment) Act, 2012, in conformity with the principles laid down by the Supreme Court.

"All mining lease holders in the State of Meghalaya must, within 30 days, submit digital maps showing their lease boundaries,

transport roads, waste-dump areas, and desilting pits. In case they fail to do so, their mining work shall be stopped automatically until the details are submitted and all records verified thereafter," the CEC observed in its report, adding that to strengthen environmental safeguards, the SEIAA, Meghalaya, shall immediately re-assess all environmental clearances granted earlier by the DEIAA for mining in Ri Bhoi within a period of 30 days, failing which all such mines shall close automatically.

"In all hill districts, the State of Meghalaya shall impose a seasonal moratorium from May 1 to September 30 on land-cutting, mining, levelling, and major earthworks, with emergency works permitted only on prior approval of the State Government.

All land-filling and development sites shall be required to construct boulder retaining walls of at least 2 metres, progressive bunding and desilting sumps, ensure re-grassing/soil conservation before the monsoon, and maintain a minimum 5-metre greenbelt; in

the case of high-impact sites such as stone crushers and quarry zones, a plantation buffer of at least 1 hectare shall be created and maintained," the CEC recommended.

Asking the Meghalaya government to finalize the definition of 'forest' within six months, the CEC stated that "upon finalization, the State of Meghalaya shall file an affidavit before this Hon'ble Court setting out in detail the methodology to be employed for such identification, including tree enumeration, cadastral and forest maps, and expert analysis. In cases where tree enumeration is not possible on account of levelling or prior disturbance, the State shall rely on geospatial and historical imagery, and such lands shall be treated as recorded forest pending final verification. All areas so identified shall be entered into a Central Digital Registry maintained by the Forest Department of Meghalaya, which shall be publicly accessible and contain scanned primary records, KML polygons, and a verifiable audit trail."

On the violations by USTM, the CEC observed that the univer-

sity encroached upon and utilized forestland without obtaining prior approval of the Central government under Section 2 of the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980.

"The land has been diverted for the establishment of a university campus and allied projects, which are non-site-specific activities falling under the category expressly prohibited for diversion of forestland. In view of these violations, all non-forestry activities carried out on the encroached forest land shall be stopped forthwith.

The entire area occupied by USTM and surrounding buildings shall be fully restored back to a normal forest within one year," it said.

The CEC further recommended that in view of the rampant large-scale mining/hill cutting over more than 400 ha area in the areas in question, a restoration plan for the Basistha-Bahini and Dighalpani watersheds be put in place. "The Restoration Plan shall be implemented under the supervision of the MoEF&CC in a time-bound manner," it added.

Gunmen Ambush Assam Rifles Convoy in Bishnupur, 2 Killed



IMPHAL

In a deadly ambush, unidentified gunmen opened fire on a convoy of the 33 Assam rifles (AR) at Nambol Sabal Leikai under Nambol police station in Bishnupur district on Thursday evening.

The attack took place around 5:50 pm when a tata 407 vehicle carrying AR personnel was moving from Imphal towards Bishnupur. Reports said the assailants launched a sudden assault, killing two personnel on the spot and leaving four others injured. The injured have been shifted to hospital for treatment.

Following the incident, security forces cordoned off the area and launched a search operation to track down the attackers.

According to a release by PRO, Ministry of Defence from Kohima it is stated that on 19 September 2025, at around 5:50 PM, a vehicle-based

column of an Assam Rifles unit, was moving on NH-2, during hours of darkness through the built-up area of Nambol Sabal Leikai in Bishnupur district of Manipur. The column was ambushed by unidentified terrorists on the Highway, in the denotified area. In the ensuing action, two personnel of the Assam Rifles are martyred and five are injured. The injured have been evacuated to RIMS, Imphal and are currently stable. As of now, no group has claimed responsibility for the incident. Search operations have been launched to nab the terrorists responsible for the incident.



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DELAY IN MSME PURCHASE POLICY

One year ago, the J&K Trade Promotion Organisation drafted what was touted as a breakthrough—the J&K Procurement Preference Policy for Micro and Small Enterprises (MSMEs), 2024. It promised to reshape the industrial landscape of the Union Territory, finally providing local entrepreneurs a level playing field against outside competitors. On paper, it was bold and ambitious: 30% mandatory procurement from J&K-based units, removal of barriers like Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) and tender fees, preference margins for pricing, and targeted support for SC/ST and women-owned enterprises. Yet, twelve months later, the draft remains buried in files, awaiting approval from the Industries and Commerce Department. This delay is not just administrative—it is existential. For J&K's MSMEs, survival has always been a fragile equation, balanced between geography, security challenges, and lack of access to central markets. The absence of a notified policy means that every passing day is another lost opportunity, another contract bagged by suppliers from outside the region, and another blow to struggling enterprises that are already operating on the margins.

Unlike MSMEs in other parts of India, J&K entrepreneurs operate under compounded constraints. The region lies at the farthest end of the country, physically distant from large consumer hubs. Add to this the fragile logistics caused by frequent road closures, power outages, and disruptions from natural disasters such as floods and landslides. Even in stable times, transporting goods in and out of J&K is far costlier than in mainland states. Security issues further reduce predictability for investors and buyers alike. While the central and UT Governments have rolled out industrial schemes, the harsh reality remains that very few large industries have set up units in J&K. Local enterprises find themselves as late entrants to national markets, with limited penetration and negligible brand visibility. In an economy where bulk production ensures competitive pricing, J&K industries face a double handicap: small production runs coupled with limited buyers. Without institutional support, their cost structures can never compete with large suppliers from outside the region.

It was against this backdrop that the Procurement Preference Policy was conceived. The Trade Promotion Organisation (TPO) understood that unless local units were given a preferential space in Government procurement, their survival would remain in question. The draft policy offered not charity, but a structured framework rooted in competitiveness and fairness—relaxations in EMD, assured procurement quotas, transparent bidding, and an emphasis on inclusivity. Had it been notified last year, many struggling units could have sustained themselves through assured orders from Government departments, aided institutions, and PSUs. Instead, the file continues to gather dust despite the fact that similar preferential policies exist in almost every other state.

The Government's silence is proving costlier than inaction. Drafting a policy, putting it in the public domain for stakeholder comments, and then failing to act undermines the credibility of governance itself. Entrepreneurs were led to believe that support was around the corner, only to discover that promises remained confined to press notes. This lingering inaction also perpetuates the cycle of industrial underdevelopment in the UT. Moreover, the timing of this delay is especially damaging. The second half of the financial year when Government departments typically undertake maximum procurement is about to begin. If MSMEs are not integrated into this procurement cycle, another year will be lost. Transparency in industrial policy must be the first principle of governance. If the Government cannot finalise a policy even after a year of consultations, it owes entrepreneurs an explanation. Local MSMEs are asking for an enabling framework to survive their infancy and compete on merit. Every delay pushes them with more constraints, leaving behind unemployed youth and wasted investments. At this tough juncture, bureaucratic indecision is the last thing they can afford. The Government must recognise that MSMEs are not just businesses—they are employment generators, value creators, and stabilisers of the local economy. Once operational, it will signal to the business community that the Government values and supports local enterprises. J&K cannot afford to let this policy become another case study in broken promises. The stakes are high, and the timing is critical.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Necessity is cruel, but it is the only test of inward strength. Every fool may live according to his own likings.
- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

PM MODI, THE CHAMPION OF TECHNOLOGY

ASHWINI VAISHNAW

Remember when getting a government document was a whole saga? Multiple trips, long queues, random fees? Now it's literally in your phone. This transformation didn't happen by accident.

Prime Minister Modi turned technology into India's greatest equalizer. A street vendor in Mumbai uses the same UPI payment system as a corporate executive. Technology, in his vision, knows no hierarchy.

This transformation reflects his core philosophy of antyodaya – reaching the last person in the queue. Every digital initiative aims to democratize technology for all. What began as experiments in Gujarat became the foundation for India's digital revolution.

Gujarat: From where it started
As Chief Minister, Modi ji transformed Gujarat through the use of technology and innovation. The Jyotigram scheme launched in 2003 used feeder separation technology. Rural industries revelled with 24x7 power while groundwater depletion slowed through scheduled farm electricity.

Women could study at night and small businesses flourished, reducing rural-urban migration. According to one study, the Rs 1,115 crore investment recovered in just 2.5 years.

He decided to install solar panels on the Narmada canal in 2012. This project generated 16 million units annually, enough for 16,000 households. It also slowed the rate of evaporation which ultimately increased the availability of water.

This dual-benefit approach showcases PM Modi's vision for technology. Through a single intervention it solved multiple problems. Generating clean energy while conserving water. It demonstrated efficiency and impact far beyond standalone solutions.

The global adoption by USA and Spain adds credibility to the innovation's effectiveness. The e-Dhara system digitized land records. SWAGAT allowed citizens to meet the Chief Minister through video conferencing. Online tenders eliminated corruption.

These initiatives reduced corruption and improved the ease of accessing government service. He restored the trust of people in governance which is reflected in the big back to back electoral success achieved in Gujarat.

National canvas
In 2014, he brought the experience and learning of Gujarat to Delhi. But the scale was different.

Under his leadership, India Stack, the world's most inclusive digital public infrastructure, to shape. The JAM trinity formed its foundation.

Jan Dhan accounts brought more than 53 crore people into the banking system. This brought the hitherto financially excluded into the formal economy for the first time.

Street vendors, daily wage workers, and rural families who lived entirely in cash now have bank accounts. This enabled them to save securely, receive government benefits directly, and access credit.

Aadhaar gave the citizens a digital identity with 142 crore registrations done so far. Accessing government services became easier instead of requiring multiple document verifications.

Direct Benefit Transfer eliminated middlemen and reduced leakages. The savings from the usage of DBT has been over Rs 4.3 lakh crore so far. The savings are used for building more schools, hospitals, and infrastructure projects.

Previously, customer verification was a complex process. It required physical document checks, manual processes, and multiple touchpoints. This used to cost service providers hundreds of rupees per verification.

Aadhaar-based e-KYC reduced this to just Rs 5 per authentication. Now even the smallest transactions have become economically viable.

UPI has transformed how India pays. Over 55 crore users have transacted since its launch. In August 2025 alone, over 20 billion transactions worth ₹24.85 lakh crore took place.

Money transfer has changed from being a multi-hour bank ordeal to a less than a 2-second phone scan. Bank visits, queues, and paperwork have almost become obsolete. Now, replaced by instant QR code payments.

Today, India handles half the world's real-time digital payments. A decade ago, India was largely cash-dependent. Prime Minister Modi's vision gave the final shape to JAM trinity and UPI infrastructure.

When COVID struck and he urged digital transactions, the ecosystem delivered. Result, UPI now processes more transactions than Visa globally. A humble mobile phone is now a bank, a payment gateway, and a service center.

PRAGATI transformed governance accountability. The platform brings the Prime Minister directly into project monitoring through monthly video conferences. When officials know the Prime Minister will review their work on live video, accountability becomes automatic.

For eg, a delayed highway project gets immediate attention during PRAGATI reviews. The officials have to explain the delays. This ensures swifter course correction, ultimately benefiting the citizens.

Technology for All
Technology transformed agriculture and healthcare fundamentally. Take Jagdev Singh, a farmer in Haryana who now uses AI apps to make crop decisions. He receives real-time weather updates and soil health data on his phone.

The PM-KISAN scheme delivers direct income support to 11 crore farmers digitally.

DigiLocker now has over 57 crore users with 967 crore documents stored digitally. Your driving license, degree certificates, Aadhaar, and other official documents live securely in your phone.

Police checks no longer require fumbling for physical papers while on road. Just show your digital license from DigiLocker. Filing income tax returns have become seamless with instant Aadhaar authentication.

What once meant carrying folders of documents now fits in your pocket.

Space and Innovation
India achieved what seemed impossible. Reaching Mars on the first attempt and that too with a budget smaller than a Hollywood movie. The Mars Orbiter Mission cost just ₹450 crore, proving Indian engineering delivers world-class results.

Chandrayaan-3 made India the fourth country to achieve a soft lunar landing and the first to land on the Moon's South Pole.

ISRO launched 104 satellites in a single mission, setting a world record. Indian rockets now carry satellites for 34 countries. The Gaganyaan mission will make India the fourth nation to send humans to space using indigenous technology.

Prime Minister Modi stood shoulder to shoulder with our scientists and put 100% trust in their capabilities.

Global Leadership
When COVID-19 struck, the world struggled with vaccine distribution chaos. India responded through its strength.

The CoWIN platform was built in record time – a comprehensive digital solution for the world's largest vaccination drive. The platform managed 200 crore vaccine doses with digital precision. No black market, no favoritism, just transparent allocation.

Dynamic allocation prevented wastage – unused vaccines were redirected instantly to areas with higher demand. This achievement demonstrated how technology, when driven by political will, can deliver at a massive scale and with fairness.

Manufacturing Revolution

Here's the thing about building stuff—you can't just jump to making chips without mastering the basics. It's like learning to code; you start with "Hello World" before building apps.

Electronics production follows the same direction. Countries first master assembly, then move to sub-modules, components & equipments. India's journey reflects this progression.

Under the Prime Minister's vision, our strong base in electronics production is now enabling the leap into advanced semiconductor manufacturing.

India has long been a hub for design talent, with over 20% of global chip designers based here. India now has design capabilities for advanced 2nm, 3nm, and 7nm chips. These are being designed in India for the world.

The current focus on building fabs and packaging facilities represents natural evolution. But the approach extends beyond manufacturing. The chemicals, gases, and specialized materials that feed semiconductor production are also being supported.

This creates an entire ecosystem, not just isolated factories.

The rise in these sectors has been made possible by Prime Minister Modi's clear understanding of value chains. Build capabilities step by step and ensure every stage of the value chain is strengthened before moving to the next.

Infrastructure with Intelligence
The PM Gati Shakti portal uses GIS technology on an unprecedented scale. Every infrastructure project gets mapped digitally. Roads, railways, airports, and ports are planned together. No more working in silos. No more delays due to poor coordination.

Through the IndiaAI Mission, over 38,000 GPUs are available at one-third global cost. This has given startups, researchers, and students Silicon Valley-level computing at avg rate of ₹67 per hour.

The AIKosh platform hosts 2,000+ datasets, ranging from weather to soil health. These can power indigenous LLMs developed for India's languages, laws, health systems, and finance.

PM Modi's understanding of technology is also reflected in India's unique AI regulation approach. Unlike the market-oriented model or state-controlled approach, he envisions a unique techno-legal framework.

Instead of rigid regulations that could stifle innovation, the government invests in technological safeguards. Universities and IITs develop AI-driven tools to tackle deepfakes, privacy concerns, and cybersecurity threats. This approach fosters innovation while ensuring responsible deployment.

Technology for infrastructure
The Statue of Unity at Kevadia stands 182 meters tall, the world's tallest statue. Built using 3D modeling and bronze cladding technology, it attracts 58 lakh visitors annually. The project created thousands of jobs and transformed Kevadia into a tourism hub.

The Chenab bridge, 359 meters high, connects Kashmir to the rest of India. The Aizawl railway line uses the innovative Himalayan Tunnelling Method, passing through tunnels and bridges in a very tough terrain. The new Pamban bridge replaces a century-old structure with modern engineering.

These are not just engineering marvels. They represent PM Modi's vision of connecting India through technology and determination.

The Human connect
PM Modi understands technology, but he understands people even better. His vision of antyodaya drives every digital initiative. UPI works in multiple languages. The poorest farmer has the same digital identity as the richest industrialist.

Countries from Singapore to France are integrated with the UPI. The G20 endorsed Digital Public Infrastructure as essential for inclusive growth. Japan has granted a patent for this. What started as India's solution became

the world's template for digital democracy. From his early experiments in Gujarat to the launch of Digital India, the journey showcases technology's power to transform lives. He has made technology the grammar of governance. He has shown that when leaders embrace technology with humanity, entire nations can leapfrog into the future.

The author is Union Minister for Railways, Electronics & Information Technology, and Information & Broadcasting.

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

After years of complaining about cancel culture, the current administration has taken it to a new and dangerous level by routinely threatening regulatory action against media companies unless they muzzle or fire reporters and commentators it doesn't like.

~ Barack Obama, Former President of USA



AMERICA'S SHADOW WAR

SWATI SUMAN

In the shadow of the Himalayas, Nepal's streets are smoldering. What began as a Gen Z-led protest against corruption and a social media ban has erupted into the deadliest unrest in decades, claiming at least 50 lives, torching the parliament, and forcing Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli to resign on September 9, 2025. Young demonstrators, fueled by hashtags like #NepoBabies, defied curfews to raze symbols of elite excess, government buildings, politicians' homes, even the Supreme Court. The Nepal Army now patrols Kathmandu's choked avenues, while escaped prisoners roam the chaos, and the nation grapples with an interim leadership vacuum. This isn't just a spontaneous youth uprising; it's the latest chapter in a pattern of engineered instability sweeping South Asia, where the US, under the guise of promoting democracy, has systematically undermined governments that dare to chart independent paths and deny US' bullying. The fingerprints of Washington are unmistakable. The National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a US funded entity often dubbed a "second CIA" for its regime-change playbook, poured over \$1.6 million into Nepal in 2024 alone.

This cash flow wasn't for schools or hospitals, it funded journalist training to amplify corruption narratives and workshops for Gen Z activists in "political organizing."

Coincidentally, the protests exploded over exactly those themes, triggered by a modest government push for social media registration, echoing China's sovereign internet model. Although the issues were genuine but reaction was planted. The government was pro-China but the reaction planted was 100% anti-Nepal. The disturbance created left a huge scar on national infrastructure and the image of the peaceful Nepalese population.

Nepal's leaders, eyeing the global success of TikTok and Aliexpress, sought digital independence to foster homegrown innovation. But as an NED report warned earlier this year, such moves would be a "win for China," threatening US narrative dominance. The result? A "color revolution" straight out of the NED's manual, leaving Nepal's fragile democracy in tatters.

This isn't isolated folly; it's a calculated strategy to destabilize South Asia, encircling Bharat, the region's economic powerhouse and a counterweight to Chinese influence with a "ring of fire."

From the Arabian Sea to the Bay of Bengal, US has weaponized economic woes, student protests, and ethnic tensions to topple pro-Bharat regimes, install pliable puppets, and secure military footholds. The goal is to fracture regional unity, amplify chaos, and pivot the subcontinent toward American hegemony in the Indo-Pacific. Consider Pakistan, the perennial flashpoint. Since the 2022 ouster of Prime Minister Imran Khan, often framed as an anti-corruption drive but widely seen as payback for his neutral stance on Ukraine, the US has deepened ties with Islamabad's mil-

itary brass. Khan's sin? Cozying up to China via the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. US Assistant Secretary of State Donald Lu, who met Pakistani opposition leaders pre-coup, later visited Dhaka to push the Indo-Pacific Strategy. Now, with Pakistan's economy in freefall and border skirmishes escalating, 26 dead in a Pahalgam attack in April 2025 the stage is set for another crisis. Declassified US intelligence from the 1990s already flagged nuclear risks in Bharat-Pakistan flare-ups; today's drone incursions and ceasefire violations feel like a rehearsal for Armageddon, all while Washington sells arms to both sides.

Sri Lanka's 2022 economic implosion offers a textbook case. As debt ballooned from Belt and Road loans, US backed NGOs amplified protests against the Rajapaksa government, portraying it as corrupt and pro-China. The "Aragalaya" movement, ostensibly about fuel shortages, toppled President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, paving the way for an IMF bailout laced with US strings.

Colombo's strategic ports, once eyed by Beijing, now flirt with American basing rights. Analysts note how domestic fragility exacerbated by targeted media campaigns allowed external actors to recalibrate the island's foreign policy, shifting it from Bharat's orbit toward a US led "soft balancing."

Myanmar's civil war, raging since the 2021 coup, fits the mold. US sanctions and support for ethnic militias have prolonged the junta's isolation, creating a refugee crisis that spills into

Bangladesh and Bharat. Washington's narrative frames it as a democracy crusade, but the real play is denying China access to the Bharat Ocean via Kyaukpadaung port. With over a million Rohingya displaced and smuggling networks thriving, the chaos weakens Bharat's northeastern flank, echoing US intelligence scenarios of "destabilizing assets" in South Asia.

Bangladesh's 2024 upheaval was the most brazen. Student quotas sparked riots that ousted Sheikh Hasina, a staunch Bharat ally, in August. Accusations flew US regime-change ops, funneled through Lu's visits and NED grants, targeted Hasina's resistance to American basing on Saint Martin's Island. Her "disappearance" to Bharat strained ties with the interim Yunus regime, now tilting toward China and Pakistan. Hasina had warned of plots to carve a "Christian state" from Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Bharat using Kuki-Chin insurgents and Western NGOs. The fallout? Heightened anti-Bharat rhetoric, disrupted trade, and a "ring of fire" tightening around Delhi's "chicken neck" corridor. These aren't coincidences; they're a symphony of subversion.

The US Indo-Pacific Strategy, declassified in 2025, explicitly seeks to "counter Chinese influence" by keeping Bharat "preeminent" in South Asia while sowing discord to prevent any unified bloc.

Arms sales surged amid Bharat-Pakistan tensions in May 2025, with Washington trying to showcase himself as mediator to extract concessions.

Grand Durga Puja celebrations in Agartala: Clubs unveil unique themes, CM to grace inaugurations

AGARTALA

Durga Puja, once regarded as the greatest festival of the Hindu Bengali community, has now become a universal celebration across Tripura. However, the largest and most vibrant festivities continue to take place in the Agartala Municipal Corporation (AMC) area, where a total of 806 pujas are being organised this year.

Among the highlights are the creative themes showcased by renowned clubs. Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Club has chosen "Tribute" as this year's theme, paying homage to the brave soldiers of India who sacrificed their lives for the nation.

From the Kargil War to Operation Sindoor, every martyr is being remembered. The club has recreated the Red Fort (Lal Qila), where a spectacular light display will narrate this story of sacrifice. In past years, the club drew huge crowds with themes like the Burj Khalifa.

Flowers Club will present a replica of the Tirupati Temple to offer Tripura



residents an opportunity to witness the grandeur of a shrine that many cannot visit in person. Last year, the club recreated the Ram Temple, which attracted an overwhelming response.

This year's inauguration will be attended by Chief Minister Manik Saha, Member of Parliament Rajib Bhattacharjee, and AMC Mayor Dipak Majumder. Former Chief Minister Biplab Kumar

Deb and other dignitaries will also be invited.

"Our Sanghati Club is one of the oldest clubs in Tripura, and Durga Puja has been celebrated here for many years. This year, our theme is centred around children. The idea is to showcase various aspects related to children, conveying a single message to our visitors—providing opportunities for de-

veloping and enriching young minds," Mayor Dipak Majumder told.

Majumder said that the puja celebrations will also highlight the vision of building a drug-free Tripura, as well as the importance of cleanliness. "The puja will be held from 28th September to 4th October, during which several cultural programs will take place. We aim to present the diverse cultures of India, which will be showcased beautifully within the pandal itself. This year, our Durga Puja budget is set at 40 lakh," he said. With over 400 idols immersed annually, the Joynagar immersion ghat remains the largest in North Tripura. The AMC bears the responsibility of maintaining cleanliness, easing traffic congestion, and ensuring a pollution-free environment during the festive days. Unlike earlier times, even the remote areas of Agartala now host Durga Puja with enthusiasm, with the Chief Minister personally visiting and offering anjali.

This year's Durga Puja is expected to be celebrated with greater spirit, grandeur, and harmony than ever before.

Nagaland police roll out apps for tenant and hotel ILP registrations



KOHIMA

In a major step towards digitising Inner Line Permit (ILP) compliance, the Nagaland Police have launched two mobile applications – Tenant Registration App and Hotel Registration App – to streamline the verification and certification process for tenants and hotel guests.

Developed in line with the state government's notification dated August 14, 2025, the apps use OTP-based verification to ensure transparency. Landlords renting out houses can now register tenants via the Tenant Registration App, while tenants

must secure OTPs from their landlords to complete the process. The app also allows co-tenant details to be added, with landlords responsible for updating records whenever changes occur.

The Hotel Registration App mandates guest verification across hotels, guest houses, homestays, and resorts. Owners must register guest details through OTP-based authentication for submission. All landlords, tenants, and hotel operators have been asked to complete registrations by September 21, 2025. The apps can be downloaded from the Nagaland Police website <https://police.nagaland.gov.in> and will soon be available on the Google Play Store. Police personnel at the station level have been trained to assist users.

Authorities clarified that there are no fees for using these apps. Landlords, tenants, and hoteliers can also approach local police stations to obtain the apps or APK files.

Meitei Heritage Society condemns alleged sexual assault at Assam Down Town University

IMPHAL

The Meitei Heritage Society has strongly condemned the alleged sexual assault of a student from Tripura at Assam Down Town University, terming it a heinous crime that demands immediate and exemplary punishment.

In a statement issued on Thursday, the society said the alleged involvement of students from Manipur in the assault has brought shame to the state, which has long been known for its tradition of respecting and empowering women.

"Targeting the modesty of a woman is an unforgivable act that needs exemplary action. Such violence has no place in our society," the statement read.

Society expressed concern that several such cases had emerged during the ongoing crisis but were often hushed up under the guise of customary settlements, while a few were selectively publicised for propaganda. It warned that silence and fear only embolden perpetrators while denying justice to survivors.

Condemning attempts to communalise the incident, the society stressed that a criminal act by individuals should not be weaponised to target an entire community. It urged an end to selective outrage and the misuse of gender-based violence as a political tool. Reiterating its demand for justice, the Meitei Heritage Society called for the culprits to be punished with severely, sending a clear message that violence against women will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

Nearly 50,000 people affected as Assam faces second wave of floods



GUWAHATI

Assam has been hit by the second wave of floods this year, with nearly 50,000 people affected across five districts following heavy rainfall, according to the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA).

Golaghat, Cachar, Sonitpur, Nagaon and Bishwanath districts have been inundated, with Golaghat emerging as the worst-affected, where 32,217 people are reeling under floodwaters. Sonitpur has reported 13,409 affected, while other districts have also

been hit severely.

Several rivers are flowing above the danger mark, including the Dikhou in Sivasagar, Dhansiri in Golaghat, Barak in Cachar and Kushiara in Sribhumi.

Authorities have set up 29 relief camps across the affected districts, sheltering 8,131 people. In addition, 19,162 relief distribution centres are operational to provide aid.

While no loss of life has been reported in this current wave, floods have already claimed 32 lives in the state this year. Meanwhile, 4,632 hectares of cropland are submerged, and over 14,861 animals have been affected by the deluge.

The latest flood situation has once again underlined the recurring vulnerability of Assam to seasonal floods, disrupting lives, livelihoods and agriculture across vast stretches of the state.

Suspicious death of Dhubri teacher in Silchar sparks outcry, family alleges foul play

SILCHAR

The mysterious death of a teacher from Dhubri has triggered widespread shock and outrage, with his family members alleging foul play and demanding a high-level investigation.

The deceased, identified as Arindam Kundu, a resident of IG Road in Dhubri, was found dead on a railway track in Silchar on Thursday. Kundu, who was employed as a teacher in Silchar, had recently drawn attention with a Facebook Live video in which he accused the Assam Government's education sector of being plagued by corruption.

In the video, he claimed that "no work is implemented, only money has been syphoned, corruption at its highest," further alleging



that malpractice was rampant "from top to bottom."

He had also named several individuals whom he held

responsible.

The sudden recovery of his body has intensified suspicions, with his family rejecting the possibility of suicide or accident. Instead, they described the incident as a "cold-blooded eviction" and called for immediate intervention by the Chief Minister to ensure a fair and impartial probe. The family expressed fears that without a high-level inquiry, the true circumstances behind Kundu's death may remain hidden. The incident has also renewed concerns about the risks faced by whistleblowers who raise their voices against corruption.

The family's plea for justice has struck a chord with the public, further amplifying scrutiny over corruption in the education sector and demanding accountability from the authorities.

'BTC CEM must be from BJP,' says CM; vows to streamline administration in 1 year

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, on Thursday, expressed confidence that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will emerge as the most favoured political force in the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

Speaking to the press at a campaign rally in Darrangajuli, Sarma stressed that BJP's support base is steadily increasing and the people are "recognising the party's role in ensuring stability and development."

"We are witnessing that BJP will emerge as the most favoured party. We, the BPF, UPPL and BJP, are contesting the BTC polls independently, but all are part of the NDA. We are playing together as one team," Sarma said.



Assuring improved governance in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) if voted to power, Sarma promised an end to bureaucratic delays.

"We will provide an effortless, streamlined delivery of services to the people of BTC, just like we are doing across Assam. I believe the Chief Executive Member (CEM) in BTC should be from the BJP. I will clear everything within one year and streamline the adminis-

tration," he asserted.

Responding to questions about social hierarchies in the region, Sarma dismissed the notion that Bodo Kacharis were being treated as "second-class citizens".

"I believe people who don't get the benefits of government schemes are second-class citizens; not caste-wise, but scheme-wise. I don't classify citizens by caste; I classify them by whether they are included in schemes," he said. On the issue of the National Register of Citizens (NRC), Sarma criticised those questioning the inclusion of names.

"The NRC has not yet been finalised and published. How can anyone say a name is not there? Who knows, it may be listed later," he remarked.

He also highlighted discrepan-

cies in the 'D-voter' issue, pointing out the drastic reduction of registered Bengali Hindus.

"At one time, Bengali Hindus numbered around 2 lakh; now in five years, it has reduced to 25,000. It will reduce further. But many Bengali Hindus have won cases in court by producing proper documents such as the 1971 refugee certificate or camp certificate. Whatever cases I saw in the tribunal, none were declared foreigners," he added.

On the upcoming BTC elections, Sarma exuded optimism about a fair and peaceful contest. "The BTAD elections will go well with all political parties contesting peacefully. As for minority votes, the maximum share will go to Congress," he said, taking a jibe at the Grand Old Party.

CPI(M) to raise alarm over unemployment, law and order in Tripura assembly



AGARTALA

Unemployment is expected to dominate the upcoming two-day Tripura Assembly session beginning September 19, with the CPI(M) preparing to bring the matter to the floor.

The Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI), the CPI(M)'s youth wing, met Leader of Opposition Jitendra Chaudhury on September 18 to push for raising the demand.

DYFI state secretary Nabanub Deb told reporters after the meeting that nearly 15,000 government posts were left vacant despite interviews being completed during the Left Front's tenure in 2016-17.

"The interview process was completed and only distribution of appointment letters based on the merit list was left. By this time, the BJP-led government came to power. It had cancelled all the interview process in the name of preparing a fresh recruitment policy," Deb alleged.

He added, "We urged the LOP to raise the issue in the Assembly in the interest of the unemployed youth."

Chaudhury confirmed that the CPI(M) will highlight unemployment, along with concerns over law and order, the state of national highways, and corruption.

The Congress is also preparing to press its own issues. Party legislature leader Birajit Sinha said, "I will specifically seek the minister's statement on corruption in Tripura State Minority Corporation as students have been deprived of scholarship for many months."

On the legislative agenda, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Ratan Lal Nath said three private member resolutions will be taken up—two from BJP MLAs Rampada Jamatia and Dipak Majumder, and one from a CPI(M) member.

Assam government introduces dual caste certificates for tea garden communities

GUWAHATI

In a landmark move aimed at empowering marginalized sections, the Assam government has announced the introduction of dual caste certificates for Tea Garden Labourers, Tea Garden Tribes, Ex-Tea Garden Labourers, and Ex-Tea Garden Tribes.

The initiative was officially announced on Thursday by Assam BJP Minister Pijush Hazarika, who emphasized that the measure reflects the government's commitment to safeguarding the rights and interests of tea garden communities.

"Through this step, the government seeks to ensure social justice and recognition for the Tea Garden communities. The provision of dual caste certificates will help protect their identity and strengthen their rightful claim to welfare benefits," Hazarika said.

Under the new system, applicants will be able to obtain caste certificates in two forms:

As per existing norms, listing their caste or community recognized as Other Backward Class (OBC) or



More Other Backward Class (MOBC) by the state government.

As per the sub-caste recognition, which will also fall under the OBC or MOBC category.

To ensure transparency, a

three-member district-level committee will be constituted in every district. The committee will include one representative of a community organization nominated by the Guardian Minister and two social workers also

nominated by the Guardian Minister. Following the committee's recommendations, the District Commissioner or Certificate Issuing Authority will issue the certificate through the Sewa Setu Portal, designed to simplify and digitize the process.

Officials highlighted that the move will provide long-awaited recognition to members of tea garden communities, many of whom have faced challenges in securing official documentation. The initiative is also seen as part of Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma's vision of empowering marginalized groups and strengthening their social and economic rights.

District commissioners, administrative departments, and related authorities have already been directed to implement the decision at the earliest. Notices have also been sent to key organizations, including the All Assam OBC Association, Chah Janajati Jatiya Sanmilani, and the All Assam Adivasi Students' Union, to help spread awareness among eligible beneficiaries.

The Sewa Setu Portal is expected to play a crucial role in eliminating delays, reducing errors, and ensuring greater accessibility. Officials have assured that support and guidance will be extended to applicants while grievances will be promptly addressed to ensure smooth and transparent implementation.

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“Rahul Gandhi wants to instigate civil war in India...” Nishikant Dubey

NEW DELHI

Bharatiya Janata Party MP Nishikant Dubey slammed Rahul Gandhi's Gen Z post, which claimed vote theft on Friday.

Speaking to ANI, Dubey claimed that the leader of the opposition, Rahul Gandhi, is looking to instigate civil war in India. He further claimed that Gandhi is working with the Soros Foundation to divide the nation.

“Rahul Gandhi wants to instigate civil war in India... He is working with the Soros Foundation to divide the nation...” Dubey told.

Recalling incidents like the Anna Hazare movement and the Nirbhaya protests, the BJP MP emphasised that Gen Z in India has changed the country's fate many times.

“Gen Z means the next generation, the youth and how they want to decide about their nation and change the government. The Gen Z had already done this in India. The Anna and Arvind Kejriwal movement was a result of Gen Z... During the Nirbhaya case, one lakh people were on the streets in 2013,” argued Dubey.

Moreover, he severely criticised the leader of the opposition for allegedly associating himself with the Bangladesh and Nepal protests. “Rahul Gandhi wants to associate himself with what happened in Nepal and Bangladesh. At both places, the Gen Z was against nepotism and ‘Pariwarvaad’... Where is the ‘Pariwarvaad’?...”

It has been in the Gandhi family for decades... If he wants to provoke Gen Z, then I am with Rahul Gandhi; the entire Congress party will have to abscond from the country... In Nepal and Bangladesh, the Gen Z were against corruption... All the scams have been done by the Congress. We have no allegation of a scam in the last 11 years,” said Dubey.

Dubey also announced that if another Gen Z movement happens again in India, the BJP will support the movement in throwing out nepotistic leaders. Dubey also stated that the Prime Minister has emphasised the participation of youth in Indian politics.

“... We are with the Gen Z movement. We are not talking about stopping it. No one in the BJP is afraid. Kejriwal came to power because of the Gen Z movement. Later, he compromised with the corrupt Congress, Lalu Prasad Yadav and Stalin, and contested Lok Sabha elections with the UPA... During the Nirbhaya incident, Gen Z agitation took place. If Gen Z agitation happens again, the BJP will support that movement.”

These corrupt, nepotistic leaders do not see anyone other than their own family among the 1.4 billion people... There is an entire campaign on the Nammo app for the last 15 years, and the PM has been saying that we want to bring educated youth into politics and be political activists,” he said. Dubey also announced that the party will not make

the mistake of choosing to support previous Gen Z protests in future.

“We will give this movement a boost; all these people, Rahul Gandhi, Akhilesh, Stalin, Mamata, Lalu Prasad, or Tejashwi Yadav, will be seen leaving the country... This time, the BJP will not repeat its mistake of not supporting Gen Z agitation, like we did during Arvind Kejriwal's movement and the Nirbhaya case movement. This time, the BJP will openly support Gen Z and will send entire nepotism out...”

Meanwhile, another Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader, Amit Malviya, on Friday called Congress MP Rahul Gandhi “dangerous” and “delusional”, accusing him of spreading lies that aimed to “unravel India”.

In a post on X, the BJP leader said that the Congress MP's statements had threatened the country's “democratic system”. Malviya wrote that the opposition leaders' remarks were not about winning elections but about destabilising the nation. Earlier in a social media post on X, Gandhi claimed that within 36 seconds, the government deleted the names of two voters and described it as a standard process of vote theft. “Wake up at 4 AM. Delete 2 voters in 36 seconds. Then go back to sleep - that's how the vote theft happened! The election watchdog stayed awake, kept watching the theft, kept protecting the thieves,” wrote Gandhi.

‘India hasn’t been fortunate with neighbours, but shaped its own destiny’: Rajnath Singh lauds Op Sindoor, salutes 1965 war veterans

NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday lauded Prime Minister Narendra Modi for Operation Sindoor during an interaction with the veterans of the 1965 war between India and Pakistan.

With reference to the four major wars against Pakistan and one against China, the Defence Minister noted that India has not been “fortunate” with its neighbours, but it has shaped its own destiny.

“Since independence, India hasn't been fortunate with its neighbours, but we haven't accepted these challenges as fate; we've shaped our own destiny. We saw an example of this in Operation Sindoor. That incident leaves us heavy-hearted and filled with anger, but it didn't break our morale. Our Prime Minister took a pledge, and we've demonstrated for decades that victory has become our habit, one we must maintain,” Rajnath Singh said at the event in the South Block.

Rajnath Singh hailed the war veterans for their bravery and sacrifice, saying, “I was wondering what is the feeling that inspires us to sacrifice everything. The feeling of self-respect is the greatest feeling. If foreign powers dare to look at us with an evil eye, we sacrifice everything to protect them.”

“The bravery you displayed in 1965 is incomparable. On behalf of a grateful nation, I salute you. We will not allow the integrity of the country to be compromised in any way,” he added.

He added that the experiences shared by the war veterans are beyond what has been noted in history books. He said, “There are many books on



the 1965 war, but when Nambiar Sahib and Bedi Sahib spoke today, I felt that not everything was written in books. The nights spent in tanks... Every veteran sitting here today must be remembering those who were martyred, but that martyrdom will not go in vain. I salute their memory.”

Remembering Param Vir Chakra Company Quartermaster Havildar Abdul Hamid's sacrifice during the 1965 war, he said that bravery is about “size of heart”. “The 1965 war was not easy for us. Pakistan carried out infiltration, but many battles took place during that time that were historic. The world's largest tank battle took place there. Our brave Abdul Hamid burned a line of tanks. He proved that bravery isn't just about the size of the weapon; it's about the size

of the heart,” he said. Rajnath Singh also lauded former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri for his “decisive decisions” during the war.

“A war isn't just fought on the battlefield; it's a collective effort by the entire nation. Shastri ji not only made decisive political decisions but also guided the nation,” he said. Lt Gen Manoj Katiyar, General Officer Commanding in Chief (GoC-in-C), Western Command, also addressed the event and recalled Western Command's contribution to the victory in the war.

Lt Gen Manoj Katiyar said, “Our Western Command played a crucial role from Ladakh to Rajasthan. However, the war began in Kutch. In August 1965, the enemy attempted to infiltrate Jammu and Kashmir under Operation

Gibraltar. The Indian Army and the people of Kashmir jointly repelled them. We captured important territory. Then, they attempted to capture Akhnoor, which we thwarted. Our leadership then made a decision, and we began advancing towards Lahore and Sialkot.”

“Fierce fighting ensued, and we captured key areas. Our forces destroyed a large number of enemy tanks. The 1965 war gave us great role models. Just three years after 1962, with that victory, we strengthened the confidence of India and its people. We also recently inflicted a crushing defeat on them in Operation Sindoor,” he added.

Starting on September 6, 1965, the Indo-Pak war concluded with the Tashkent Agreement of January 10, 1966.

INTERNATIONAL

US vetoes UN Security Council resolution demanding immediate Gaza ceasefire and hostage release

UNITED NATIONS

The United States once again vetoed a U.N. Security Council resolution Thursday that had demanded an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza and the release of hostages, saying that the effort did not go far enough in condemning Hamas.

The 14 other members of the United Nations' most powerful body voted in favor of the resolution, which described the humanitarian situation in Gaza as “catastrophic” and called on Israel to lift all restrictions on the delivery of aid to the 2.1 million Palestinians in the territory.

“US opposition to this resolution will come as no surprise,” Morgan Ortugas, a senior US policy adviser, said before the vote. “It fails to condemn Hamas or recognize Israel's right to defend itself, and it wrongly legitimizes the false narratives benefiting Hamas, which have sadly found currency in this council.”

She added that other council members “ignored” US warnings about the “unacceptable” language and instead adopted “performative action designed to draw a veto.”

The outcome further highlights US and Israeli isolation on the world stage over the nearly two-year war in Gaza. The vote came just days before the annual gathering of world leaders at the UN General Assembly, where Gaza will be a major topic and major US allies are expected to recognize an independent Palestinian state. It is a largely symbolic move vehemently opposed by Israel and the US, dividing the Trump administration from allies including the U.K. and France.

The latest resolution tied a ceasefire to the release of hostages.

The resolution, drafted by the council's 10 elected members who serve two-year terms, goes further than previous drafts to highlight what it calls the “deepening of suffering” of Palestinian



civilians.

“I can understand the anger and frustration and disappointment of the Palestinian people who might be watching this session of the Security Council, hoping that there is some help in the pipeline, and this nightmare could be brought to an end,” said Riyadh Mansour, the Palestinian ambassador to the UN. “I can imagine the anger and frustration that it did not happen.”

Algeria, one of the leaders of the resolution, also expressed dismay at another failed council action for Gaza, apologizing to Palestinians for not doing enough to save civilians' lives.

Despite the effort failing to pass, Algeria's UN ambassador, Amar Bendjama, said, “14 courageous members of this Security Council raised their voice. They have acted with conscience and in the cause of the international public opinion.”

Pakistan's ambassador called the vote, which took place during the 10,000th meeting of the Security Council, “a dark moment.”

Danny Danon, Israel's ambassador to the UN, blasted the new effort, saying it would “not release the hostages and will not bring security to the region.”

“Israel will continue to fight Hamas and protect its citizens, even if the Security Council prefers to turn a blind eye to terrorism,” he said in a statement.

The effort reiterated demands from previous versions, including the release of all hostages held by Hamas and other militant groups following their Oct. 7, 2023, surprise attack in southern Israel that launched the war in Gaza.

In opposing similar resolutions since November, the US had complained that the demands, including a ceasefire, were not directly linked to the unconditional release of hostages and would only

embolden Hamas militants.

The new resolution expressed “deep alarm” after a report released last month by the world's leading authority on food crises said Gaza City has become gripped by famine, and that it's likely to spread across the territory without a ceasefire and an end to restrictions on humanitarian aid.

Israeli forces have pressed on with a new ground offensive in Gaza City. The latest Israeli operation, which started Tuesday, further escalates a conflict that has roiled the Middle East and likely pushes any ceasefire further out of reach.

The Israeli military, which says it wants to “destroy Hamas' military infrastructure,” hasn't given a timeline for the offensive, but there were indications it could take months.

That same day, a team of independent experts commissioned by the UN Human Rights Council concluded that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza, issuing a report that called on the international community to end it and take steps to punish those responsible for it.

Last week, the UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to support a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict and urged Israel to commit to a Palestinian state.

The US veto of the resolution comes as about half of Americans say the Israeli military response in the Gaza Strip has “gone too far,” according to the survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. That's up from November 2023, when 40 per cent said Israel's military action had gone too far.

But at the same time, Americans overall, particularly Republicans, are less likely to say that negotiating a ceasefire should be a high priority for the US government than they were just a few months ago when the US was holding ceasefire talks with Hamas.

JUBA

At 14 months, Adut Duor should be walking. Instead, his spine juts through his skin and his legs dangle like sticks from his mother's lap in a South Sudan hospital. At half the size of a healthy baby his age, he is unable to walk.

Adut's mother, Ayan, couldn't breastfeed her fifth child, a struggle shared by the 1.1 million pregnant and lactating women who are malnourished in the east African country.

“If I had a blessed life and money to feed him, he would get better,” Ayan said at a state hospital in Bor, 200 kilometers (124 miles) from the capital, Juba.

A recent UN-backed report projects that about 2.3 million children under five in South Sudan now require treatment for acute malnutrition, with over 700,000 of those in severe condition. The report attributes the rising numbers to renewed conflict in the northern counties and reduced humanitarian assistance.

Independent since 2011, South Sudan has been crippled by violence and poor governance. United Nations investigators recently accused authorities of looting billions of dollars in public funds, as 9 million of South Sudan's almost 12 million people rely on humanitarian assistance. Now, funding cuts, renewed violence, climate change and entrenched corruption are converging to deepen the unfolding hunger crisis.

In the basic ward at the hospital in Bor, dozens of mothers cradle frail children. Malnutrition cases have more than doubled this year, a crisis worsened by recent staff cuts. Funding cuts this spring forced Save the Children to lay off 180 staff, including 15 nutrition workers who were withdrawn from Bor in May.

Funding cuts have also hit supplies of ready-to-use therapeutic food, RUTF, the peanut paste that has been a lifeline for millions of children around

the world. USAID once covered half global production, but Action Against Hunger's Country Director, Clement Papy Nkubizi warns stocks are now running dangerously low.

“22 per cent of children admitted for malnutrition at Juba's largest children's hospital have died of hunger,” Nkubizi said. “Triangulating this to the field... There are many children who are bound to die.”

He explains that families now walk for hours to reach support after the organization closed 28 malnutrition centers. UNICEF says more than 800 (86 per cent) of malnutrition sites nationwide report reduced staffing.

Violence in South Sudan's northern states has compounded the crisis, blocking humanitarian access and driving hundreds of thousands from their farmland.

Although a 2018 peace deal ended the country's five-year civil war, renewed clashes between the national army and militia groups raise fears of a return to large-scale conflict. In Upper Nile State, where the violence has resurged, malnutrition levels are the highest.

The UN said intensified fighting along the white Nile River meant no supplies reached the area for over a month in May, plunging more than 60,000 already malnourished children into deeper hunger.

In June, the South Sudanese government told The Associated Press it turned to US company Fogbow for airdrops to respond to needs in areas hit by violence. Although the company claims to be a humanitarian force, UN workers question the departure from the established system.

Global humanitarian group Action Against Hunger had to abandon warehouses and operations in Fangak, Jonglei State, after an aerial bombing of a Doctors Without Borders hospital left seven dead in May.

“Our sites in these locations are now also flooded, submerged as we speak,” said Nkubizi.

Around 1.6 million people are at risk of displacement from flooding, as submerged farmland and failed harvests compound hunger in the climate-vulnerable country.

“Malnutrition is not just about food insecurity — cholera outbreaks, malaria and poor sanitation compound the problem,” says Shaun Hughes, the World Food Program's regional emergency coordinator.

With more than 60 per cent of the population defecating in the open, flooding turns contaminated water into a major health threat.

At Maban County Hospital near the northern border with Sudan, 8-month-old Moussa Adil cries with hunger in his mother's arms.

Moussa's nutritionist, Butros Khalil, says there's no supplementary milk for the frail child that evening. The hospital received its last major consignment in March.

US funding cuts foreclosed international aid groups to reduce support to this hospital. Khalil and dozens of colleagues have not been paid for six months. “Now we are just eating leaves from the bush,” he says, describing how the exorbitant cost of living makes it impossible to feed his 20-person family.

The neighboring war in Sudan has disrupted trade and driven up the cost of basic goods. Combined with soaring inflation, the economic pressure means 92 per cent of South Sudanese live below the poverty line — a 12 per cent increase from last year, according to the African Development Bank.

“People pull their kids out of school, they sell their cattle just to make ends meet, then they become the hungry people,” says Hughes.

Action Against Hunger says it had to halt school feeding after US funding was withdrawn, raising fears of children slipping from moderate to dangerous hunger levels.

FROM DECLINE TO RENEWAL: THE ROADMAP FOR INDIA'S TEA COMEBACK

The story of Indian tea, particularly Assam tea, is inseparable from the story of India itself. More than a commodity, it is a way of life, a marker of cultural identity, and a source of livelihood for millions of workers and small growers. The tea gardens of Assam, stretching across the lush Brahmaputra Valley, are not just plantations but living communities where histories of migration, resilience, and struggle unfold daily.

It is into this layered world that Uddhab Chandra Sarmah steps with his monumental work, *Crises and Comeback: Future of India's Tea Industry*. A planter turned executive with decades of experience, Sarmah does not merely recount his personal journey; he offers an encyclopaedic account of the industry's crises and potential comebacks. With seventy-nine carefully crafted chapters, his book straddles history, economics, ecology, and social questions while presenting a roadmap for the future of this two-hundred-year-old legacy.

At its core, the book is not simply a narrative of decline or nostalgia. It is a call to action, a manifesto that both the Government of India and the Government of Assam cannot afford to ignore. Sarmah insists that the survival of the tea industry is critical not only for the economy but also for the dignity and livelihood of millions of workers who form the backbone of this sector.

Roots in History: The Birth of an Industry

Sarmah begins by anchoring his readers in the long historical arc of Assam tea. He recalls how Robert Bruce's encounter with the Singpho tribe in 1823 led to the discovery of indigenous tea plants that would later fuel a global industry. The subsequent colonial expansion saw forests cleared and plantations established, a process made possible by the sweat and sacrifice of Adivasi workers who were brought to Assam under exploitative conditions.

The book is unflinching in recognizing that while these communities remain the backbone of tea production, their socio-economic status has remained precarious even after two centuries. Their stories of migration and settlement are tales of resilience, but also of unfulfilled justice. By placing workers at the center of his narrative, Sarmah disrupts the conventional boardroom-centric accounts of the industry. He highlights the duality that defines Assam tea: global prestige on one hand, and persistent worker vulnerability on the other.

Climate Change: An Existential Threat

If history gives the industry its roots, climate change threatens to rip them apart. Sarmah devotes extensive attention to how erratic rainfall, rising temperatures, prolonged droughts, and sudden floods are destabilizing tea cultivation. These shifts are not abstract; they manifest in falling yields, declining quality, and increasing costs for both estates and small growers.

Drawing from scientific studies and field experience, Sarmah prescribes a range of adaptive strategies:

“Water management systems to conserve and efficiently use scarce resources.



The biggest communication problem is we do not listen to understand. We listen to reply.



“Crop rotation and mixed farming to restore soil fertility and reduce risk.

“Biological pest control to minimize reliance on harmful chemicals.

“Climate-resilient cultivars that can withstand stress.

“Digital weather tools to forecast patterns and guide farmers' decisions.

Importantly, he argues that adaptation cannot be left to individual planters or growers alone. Policymakers must institutionalize resilience through coordinated research, extension services, and financial incentives. Climate change, he insists, is not just an ecological issue but an economic and social one that requires systemic policy action.

Economic Challenges: Between Big Estates and Small Growers

Beyond climate change, the book examines the economic and structural problems afflicting the tea industry. Large estates face high operational costs, stagnant auction prices, and shrinking profitability. Meanwhile, the rise of small tea growers has dramatically transformed the production landscape. Today, smallholders contribute over half of India's total tea output, yet they remain some of the most vulnerable stakeholders.

Lacking bargaining power, direct market access, and price security, small growers are often at the mercy of middlemen and market volatility. Sarmah recognizes this paradigm shift but warns that without robust policies, smallholders will continue to face exploitation.

His proposals are far-reaching:

“Formation of cooperatives and producer organizations to enhance bargaining power.

“Expansion of credit facilities to enable investment in better cultivation practices.

“Training and extension services to modernize farming methods.

“Quality certification systems to improve market competitiveness.

“Direct market linkages to bypass exploitative intermediaries.

“Introduction of a minimum support price (MSP) and stabilization funds to shield growers from market shocks.

By addressing both estates and smallholders, Sarmah advocates for an inclusive economic framework that can stabilize the entire sector.

Social and Cultural Dimensions: Beyond Economics

One of the distinctive strengths of Sarmah's work is the way he integrates social and cultural dimensions into what might otherwise be

a purely economic discourse. He reminds us that tea is not just about exports or auctions; it is about people and communities.

He recalls, for instance, how the celebration of Bihu in tea planters' clubs often brought together workers, managers, and their families, temporarily dissolving social hierarchies. Such cultural practices highlight the industry's role in fostering community resilience and cultural continuity.

Equally striking is Sarmah's focus on women's empowerment. Women make up the majority of plantation workers, yet their contributions are often underappreciated. Sarmah insists that their empowerment-through skill development, healthcare, safe working conditions, and leadership opportunities-is not a matter of welfare but an imperative for the industry's sustainability. Empowered women, he argues, can be agents of both quality enhancement and social change.

Environmental Responsibility: Toward Sustainability

The environmental crisis occupies a central place in Sarmah's analysis. He critiques the indiscriminate use of fertilizers and pesticides that have degraded soil, harmed biodiversity, and tarnished India's global reputation due to pesticide residues in exports.

Sarmah's solutions are rooted in sustainability:

“Integrated nutrient management to balance soil health.

“Organic and regenerative practices that reduce chemical dependency.

“Strict compliance with residue limits to meet global food safety standards.

With global consumers becoming increasingly conscious of sustainability, Sarmah warns that quality and safety are now as important as quantity. Ignoring these imperatives could lead to trade barriers that would devastate India's export potential.

Innovation and Entrepreneurship: A New Frontier

Perhaps the most forward-looking sections of the book deal with innovation and entrepreneurship. Sarmah identifies opportunities in value addition and diversification, envisioning a tea industry that moves beyond bulk production toward niche markets and lifestyle products.

He points to possibilities such as:

“Specialty and organic teas.

“Tea-based foods, beverages, and cosmetics.

“Bio-materials derived from tea waste.

“Tea tourism, wellness branding, and heritage marketing.

For young entrepreneurs,

“Rationalization of taxes to reduce financial burden.

“Interest subventions and crop insurance schemes.

“Targeted subsidies for small growers.

“Transparent regulatory frameworks that encourage innovation rather than stifle it.

But perhaps his most important call is for a mindset shift. The industry, he argues, must no longer be seen as a relic of colonial extraction but as a dynamic sector capable of driving India's agricultural renaissance. Only when policymakers embrace this vision will tea receive the attention it deserves.

Sustainability as the Core Philosophy

Underlying Sarmah's narrative is the unifying theme of sustainability-ecological, economic, and social. From carbon credit systems that can create new revenue streams to human resource strategies that foster belonging among workers, from branding initiatives that secure global positioning to reforms that improve profitability, Sarmah weaves a comprehensive picture.

He reminds readers that sustainability is not a buzzword but the only viable path forward. Without it, the industry risks collapse; with it, tea can become a beacon of inclusive and resilient growth.

Personal Touch: A Life in Tea

What makes *Crises and Comeback* compelling is not only its breadth but also its personal touch. Sarmah's lived experience as a planter who rose through the ranks to become an executive director lends authenticity to his analysis. His anecdotes of daily life in tea gardens, his humility in

acknowledging the contributions of colleagues, workers, and family-all give the book a human dimension often missing in technical accounts.

Toward a Renaissance

In the end, Sarmah's book is not merely an analysis of crisis but a blueprint for renaissance. It documents the threats that could erode two centuries of legacy but also points to clear pathways of revival through inclusivity, innovation, and sustainability.

Tea, he reminds us, is more than a beverage. It is identity, employment, heritage, and future. For Assam and India, it is also a cultural bridge to the world.

If the recommendations laid out in *Crises and Comeback*-institutionalizing resilience, empowering small growers, ensuring quality, and promoting innovation-are heeded by policymakers in New Delhi and Dispur, the industry could script one of the most remarkable comeback stories in Indian agriculture. As Assam marks two hundred years of tea, Sarmah's voice rises as both a warning and an inspiration. His message is clear: the industry stands at a crossroads. Without urgent reform, it risks decline; with vision and coordinated action, it could emerge stronger than ever.

Crises and Comeback is, therefore, more than a book. It is a manifesto for renewal and a call to action for policymakers, planters, workers, and consumers alike. At a time when the world is rethinking sustainability, inclusivity, and heritage, Indian tea has the potential to lead by example.

In Sarmah's words and vision lies not just the story of tea, but the story of India's resilience itself.

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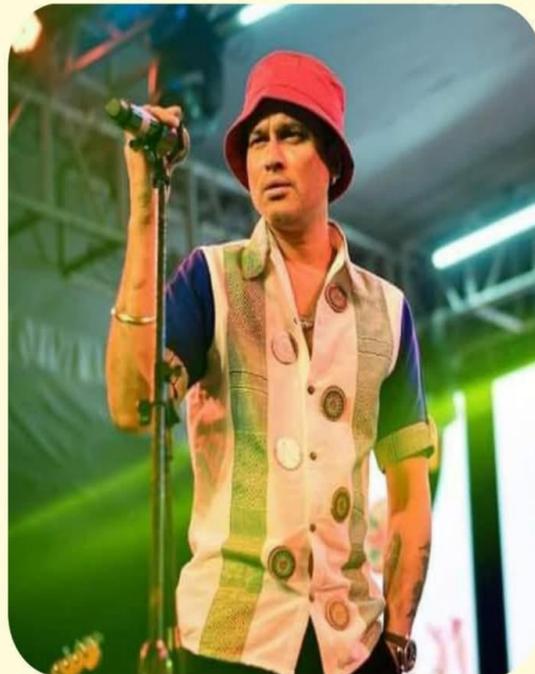


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