



# KRC TIMES

## STAY-ENRICHED



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### PERSPECTIVE

#### One mistake and everyone judges you.

#### APSC exams to be conducted in both English and Assamese languages

GUWAHATI

The Assam Public Service Commission will now conduct its Combined Competitive Preliminary Examination in both English and Assamese languages, following cabinet approval aimed at removing language barriers for rural and vernacular medium candidates.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the decision would make the competitive examination more accessible to candidates from diverse linguistic backgrounds, particularly those from rural areas who may be more comfortable with Assamese.

However, the Comprehension section of General Studies Paper-II will continue to be set only in English, maintaining certain standardisation requirements for the examination process.

The move is expected to increase participation in civil service examinations among candidates from vernacular medium schools and rural constituencies who previously faced language-related challenges in accessing these opportunities.

#### WHO SAID WHAT



In view of the forthcoming Durga Puja, the State Government has decided to release the salary for September 2025 in advance. Accordingly, salaries will be disbursed from tomorrow, instead of the scheduled date of 1st October 2025. The Treasury will start receiving salary bills from tomorrow. ~ Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM Assam

## PM Modi unveils infra projects worth over Rs 5,100 crore in Arunachal



ITANAGAR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled infrastructure projects worth Rs 5,125.37 crore in Arunachal Pradesh on Monday.

From a function at the Indira Gandhi Park in Itanagar, he virtually laid the foundation stones for two major hydropower projects in Shi Yomi district, and a convention

centre in Tawang.

The Tato-I project, with a capacity of 186 mw, will be developed jointly by the Arunachal Pradesh government and the North Eastern Electric Power Corporation Limited (NEEPCO) at Rs 1,750 crore.

It is expected to generate around 802 million units of electricity annually.

The 240-mw Heo project will

also be developed by the state government and NEEPCO at Rs 1,939 crore. It is expected to produce 1,000 million units of electricity each year.

These projects, to be developed on the Yarjep river, are part of a larger effort to expand Arunachal Pradesh's hydroelectric capacity, contributing significantly to regional energy security, officials said. Modi also laid the foundation stone for a convention centre in Tawang, to be built under the PM-DevINE scheme at Rs 145.37 crore.

With a capacity to host over 1,500 people, it will meet global standards and support the tourism and cultural potential of the region, they said. The PM also launched several other infrastructure projects worth over Rs 1,290 crore, catering to various sectors, including connectivity, health and fire safety, they said.

Governor KT Parnaik, Chief Minister Pema Khandu and Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju were present at the programme.

## BTC ELECTION 2025: Kokrajhar records nearly 54% voter turnout



KOKRAJHAR

The Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) elections witnessed brisk polling on Monday, with Kokrajhar district recording an overall voter turnout of 53.98% till 1:30 PM, according to official estimates.

Among the constituencies, Parbatjhora (60.96%), Jamduar (60.03%), and Kachugaon (60.01%) reported the highest turnout, crossing the 60% mark by early afternoon. Close behind were Srirampur (58.32%) and Soraibil (54.50%), reflecting active participation from voters.

On the other hand, Guma (44.30%) reported the lowest turnout so far, while Fakiragram (48.76%) also remained below the 50% mark. The constituencies of Dotma (52.49%), Banargaon (54.33%), Debargaon (51.66%), Baukhungri (53.27%), and Salakati (52.17%) reported moderate voting trends.

Officials said polling has been peaceful so far, with voters turning up steadily across booths. The Election Commission has deployed adequate security personnel to ensure free and fair voting in the politically significant BTC elections.

## No VIP culture at Zubeen's tribute, fans come first: Himanta Biswa Sarma



GUWAHATI

Ashes of late music legend Zubeen Garg will be taken to Jorhat after the cremation at Sarusajai, where his final resting place will be established. Officials confirmed that his mortal remains will not be transported to Jorhat.

Meanwhile, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has emphasized that the tribute at Sarusajai should remain free from VIP

interference. "I have noticed that some ministers and MLAs entered through the back gates of Sarusajai, creating a VIP culture. I will never allow that. Only Zubeen Garg's fans can enter there. From tomorrow, everyone will have to queue like ordinary people," he stated.

On the investigation into the circumstances surrounding Garg's death, the chief minister said, "We have received the death certificate of Zubeen Garg, which will be sent to the CID. However, we are still awaiting the post-mortem certificate and hope it arrives soon."

The singer's family has maintained that the cremation and final rites are their foremost concern at this stage. Both Shyamkanu Mahanta and Siddharth Sharma, who are currently outside Assam, will not be involved in the proceedings. "There is no need to involve Siddharth Sharma at the moment. Therefore, we are not taking any action regarding them for now," clarified Garima Saikia Garg, Zubeen's wife. The government has also announced that all schools, colleges, and offices will function normally from tomorrow, following the completion of the period of state mourning.

## Healthcare Services Hit in Manipur as Doctors Protest Assault on RIMS Doctor

IMPHAL

A large-scale doctors' strike in Manipur on Monday left hundreds of patients struggling to access essential healthcare services, following the violent assault of a senior doctor at the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Imphal.

Members of the Teachers' and Medical Officers' Association (TAMOA), RIMS launched the strike in protest, immediately shutting down all services, including the Outpatient Department (OPD), emergency care, routine operations (OT), and Periodic Medical Examination (PME).

The association announced that services would remain suspended until authorities identify, arrest, and punish the individuals responsible for the attack, and ensure a safe working environment for healthcare professionals.

In a press release, TAMOA clarified that while services remain suspended, doctors will continue diagnosis and treatment for patients already admitted at RIMS.

The association also announced plans to file an FIR and pursue legal action against the perpetrators.



The Indian Medical Association (IMA) Manipur State Branch, AHPI Manipur (Association for Health Care Providers of India), IOGS (Imphal Obstetrics and Gynaecology Society), and other medical bodies extended their support.

These groups announced a 24-hour suspension of all routine OPDs, elective surgeries, and diagnostic services, including those in private hospitals, government facilities, and individual clinics, from 6 am on September 23 to 6 am on September 24.

The strike followed reports

that angry relatives of two deceased patients assaulted a senior doctor and vandalized hospital property on Sunday, sparking chaos within RIMS and drawing condemnation from the medical community.

Meanwhile, several civil society organisations, including the Youth Forum for Protection of Human Rights (YFPHR) and the World Meitei Organisation (WMO) Women Wing, issued separate statements condemning alleged medical negligence at RIMS.

These groups claimed that five preventable deaths occurred in recent days due to negligence and called for accountability and transparency in the medical system.

The organisations urged the Manipur Medical Council (MMC) to form an independent inquiry committee and release its findings within a fixed timeline.

They further demanded that the MMC, the State Government, and RIMS authorities take strict disciplinary measures, including medical license suspension and criminal prosecution, against any doctors, administrators, or senior officials found guilty of misconduct or negligence.

## Busan Asian Project Market Picks Meghalaya-Set Psychological Drama Moon

SHILLONG

Shillong-based filmmaker Pradip Kurbah's latest feature, Moon, will be showcased at the Asian Project Market (APM) during the ongoing Busan International Film Festival.

The film, produced by Shankar Lal Goenka alongside multiple production partners, highlights Kurbah's continued focus on stories rooted in Meghalaya.

Moon is a psychological drama exploring memory, guilt, and the quiet fractures within families. Set between the misty hills of Meghalaya and the bustling streets of Delhi, the narrative follows two individuals returning to their hometowns after traumatic experiences.

A man comes back to his village haunted by past violence, while a woman confronts the aftermath of



abuse before returning to a family that raised her as a boy. Their paths intersect in rain-soaked landscapes, revealing fragile connections amid unresolved trauma.

Kurbah told reporters that the film draws inspiration from the "everyday grief and unfinished lives" he witnessed in Megha-

laya. "I wanted to tell a story where silences speak, where the past sits heavy, but small moments of love and memory still exist," he said. He emphasised the importance of landscape in the film: "The rain is more than weather — it mirrors the characters' emotions. The mist, forest, and grey sky move with the story, showing feelings that words cannot." APM, Asia's first investment and co-production market, introduces promising film projects at planning, development, or production stages to potential collaborators, according to the festival's website.

Producer Goenka noted that support for Moon has already come from Hello Meghalaya, a government-backed streaming platform, and the strategy is to gain visibility through international festivals first. "Our goal is to connect with co-producers, sales agents,

and distributors who understand the value of regional cinema," he said.

Kurbah's earlier works include Market (2019), which offered a grounded portrait of Shillong's street life, and The Elysian Field (Ha Lyngkha Bneng), which won best film and director at the 47th Moscow International Film Festival, highlighting his growing global recognition.

With its blend of regional specificity and universal emotion, Moon aims to bring the landscapes and stories of Meghalaya to an international audience. "The story is honest and deeply rooted in its land, yet it speaks to emotions that anyone can connect with. That makes me confident it will stand out on the festival circuit," Goenka said.

The 30th Busan International Film Festival continues in Busan and will conclude on September 26.

AGARTALA

Agartala's Maharaja Bir Bikram (MBB) Airport may soon see direct international flights, with the Tripura government formally requesting the Union Civil Aviation Ministry to begin services to Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand.

Transport Minister Sushanta Chowdhury announced the move on September 21 during a uniform distribution programme for pre-paid taxi and auto drivers at the airport. He said the demand had been placed at a recent Civil Aviation Ministry meeting in Itanagar.

"Flights to Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand from Agartala will not only boost tourism but also pave the way for immigration services at MBB Airport. We have already submitted the proposal and are hopeful of approval," Chowdhury said.

The minister also highlight-

ed infrastructure upgrades at the airport. Until last year, MBB lacked an Instrument Landing System (ILS), which caused difficulties during heavy fog. With ILS now operational, flights can land safely in poor visibility.

On funding support, Chowdhury revealed that a viability gap fund of Rs 15 crore has been sanctioned to the Airport Authority of India. Additionally, Rs 3 crore in advance funds was allocated for the Agartala-Chitragong route, though political unrest in Bangladesh has delayed its launch.

Chowdhury urged pre-paid drivers to uphold service standards, stressing their role in shaping visitors' first impressions of the state. "Every tourist is our guest, and you are the first point of interaction. Ensure every passenger gets a ride. Drivers can leave only after the last flight has landed and all passengers have departed," he told them.



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## SRI LANKA: YEAR OF CHANGE, MANY HILLS TO CLIMB

Exactly a year ago, Sri Lankans wrote political history by decisively bringing traditional two-party politics to an end by elevating a party that was not expected to rule. Their radical choice: Anura Kumara Dissanayake, a neo-leftist and leader of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front).

For the JVP, it had not been a cakewalk. For decades, it has struggled to overcome a debilitating three percent vote, which permanently confined them to the opposition ranks. Despite radical appeal, political power had continuously eluded them until Sri Lanka hit an economic nadir in 2022. A simmering governance crisis, combined with an economic crisis, provided a potent formula for seismic political change, and Dissanayake soon emerged as a beacon of hope for a nation tired of corrupt regimes and family rule.

Despite his popularity, Dissanayake's meteoric rise was the culmination of the 2022 'Aragalaya' protest movement, which forced the then President, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, to resign amid massive public protests. Opinion polls showed Dissanayake as the country's most trusted politician at the time, as public sentiment strongly opposed the traditional ruling class—amidst allegations of largescale corruption, kleptocracy, nepotism, and a mismanaged financial crisis.

Despite the political upheaval, Sri Lankans also demonstrated political prudence and patience by holding elections and by ensuring a smooth transition of power. When selecting a successor, JVP's own violent history and the responsibility of two uprisings in the South did not deter voters from electing Dissanayake as their president.

A year on, public expectations remain high, and Dissanayake and his government's delivery remains a mixed bag. Among the key changes expected was to reset the economic policy. However, Sri Lanka has already signed up for the IMF's formula for debt restructuring to weather the economic storm. Ultimately, Dissanayake chose economic pragmatism, opting to honour the commitments made while managing domestic priorities—a difficult balancing act.

The government has begun to liquidate identified non-performing public institutions, and the spiralling cost of living is creating public irritation; however, there appears to be a dogged determination within the government to go through the painful process. This brings no praise for Dissanayake, who is criticised for following a Western economic formula, once the topic of acid criticism by the JVP. There is unhappiness about the government's failure to prosecute the country's corrupt elite, another lofty election promise.

The NPP, meanwhile, claims to have taken measures to contain the budget deficit and sustain economic growth, while also trying to attract foreign direct investment. Presenting his first budget in February 2025, President Dissanayake informed parliament that four major Port City projects, worth \$1.4 billion, are underway. The government also initiated public sector salary reforms to be implemented in phases through 2027, aiming to increase salaries and reduce wage disparities.

Beyond its shores, Sri Lanka is also required to deal with the competing geostrategic interests of both China and India. A member of the Official Creditors' Committee, India's bilateral debt to Sri Lanka is approximately \$1.74 billion, whereas debt owed to China is primarily for infrastructure projects, totalling \$4.9 billion.

To win New Delhi's favour, Dissanayake had to put in some work. The JVP has a publicly declared anti-India stance and had played a pivotal role in driving the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) from Sri Lankan soil through violent protests in 1987-89. The new administration has been strategically moving forward to strengthen bilateral ties. Symbolic of this shift was the conferring of the highest civilian award, Sri Lanka Mitra Vibhushana, on visiting Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi this April. The administration has failed to ease the economic burden in a tangible way, and the public continues to reel under the skyrocketing cost of living. Recently, the government has scrapped perks from former presidents, a move that has generated mixed reactions, with only some claiming this would not save state funds. Beyond such optics, people pin hopes on a systemic overhaul, particularly in curbing corruption and holding the political elite accountable. A month ago, former president Ranil Wickremesinghe was arrested by the Criminal Investigations Department for allegedly misusing state funds. It was also the first time a Sri Lankan president had been arrested on any charge. Wickremesinghe, now out on bail, marked the 79th anniversary of the United National Party (UNP) on September 20 in Colombo, where he referred to the current administration as a 'constitutional dictatorship'. For those fast losing patience with the government, Wickremesinghe's arrest was the spark they were looking for. For his part, Wickremesinghe has used it to send out a rallying call for all anti-JVP/NPP forces to come together. Then there are the unmistakable aspirations of the island's North, where the people overwhelmingly voted in favour of the NPP last November. They broke tradition and placed their faith in a southern politician to deliver justice and bring closure. There are many unresolved issues in the former conflict zones—missing persons, displacement, landlessness, and absence of justice for atrocities committed during years of war. The list is endless, and the people are waiting for the government to start moving. Dissanayake will do well to remember the northern mandate and to honour that fragile faith—one that is not easily given to a southern political leader. As Dissanayake completes his first year, the nation watches him with cautious optimism. The next four years will prove crucial, not only for the government but also for his presidency, amidst increasing public scrutiny. It is not unusual that the public is restless and is looking for quick fixes. This electoral victory had taken 50 long years to achieve, and it cannot be squandered. Then there are South Asian political lessons offering a clear warning to all governments, which started with Sri Lanka itself in 2022.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

Laughter is not at all a bad beginning for a friendship, and it is far the best ending for one.  
- Oscar Wilde  
The writings of Oscar Wilde... (ed. 1907)

# RIYADH- ISLAMABAD DEFENSE AGREEMENT

MAJ GEN SANJEEV DOGRA (RETD)

In the grand, slow-moving theater of global politics, genuine tectonic shifts are rare. More often, change is a gradual process of incremental adjustments and silent recalibrations. But history is also punctuated by moments where a single signature on a document, a crisis in a strategic waterway, or an attack on a border redraws the map of international power overnight. The signing of the Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement (SMDA) between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia on September 17, 2025, is one such defining moment. This pact is far more than a bilateral upgrade; it is a seismic shockwave radiating from the Persian Gulf to the Himalayas, systematically dismantling decades-old assumptions and forcing nations, especially China and a rising India, to confront a new and profoundly uncertain reality.

The agreement's core clause is as simple as it is revolutionary: both nations commit to treating any act of aggression against one as an aggression against both. In an unprecedented move, Pakistani officials have boldly suggested this mutual defense guarantee could extend to the realm of its nuclear deterrent. This instantly transforms Pakistan from a regional actor fixated on its existential rivalry with a regional power India into a credible security guarantor for the spiritual and economic heart of the Muslim world. For Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, this is a masterstroke: a historic hedge against a resurgent Iran and a stark, unambiguous signal that the era of relying solely on an American security umbrella is conclusively over.

A New Doctrine: From Washington to Riyadh

The agreement's core clause is bold: both nations pledge to treat aggression against one as aggression against both. Pakistani officials have even hinted this could extend to their nuclear deterrent, an unprecedented step. This elevates Pakistan from a state preoccupied with its rivalry with India into a notional security guarantor for the Gulf. For Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, it is a hedge against Iran and a signal that Riyadh seeks greater security autonomy.

The pact invites comparison with the Carter Doctrine of 1980, under which President Jimmy Carter declared that the US would repel any outside attempt to control the Persian Gulf. Then, it was Washington asserting primacy; now, it is two regional actors, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan crafting an indigenous security framework.

But another actor looms in the background: China. Beijing views Pakistan as a convenient proxy to extend influence into the Persian Gulf, a region central to its energy security. While the US remains deeply embedded in Gulf security through bases, arms sales, and intelligence, the pact reflects an emerging multipolarity where American dominance must coexist with regional assertiveness and Chinese ambition.

India's Strategic Landscape: Emerging Challenges and Opportunities

For India, the pact introduces new complexities. It is not a strategic collapse but a reminder that New Delhi must adapt with foresight.

Diplomatic Realignment, Not Collapse. India's long-standing strategy of exposing Pakistan's role in terrorism has weakened Islamabad's global standing. Now, with Riyadh's symbolic endorsement, Pakistan may appear more confident. Yet its economic fragility and political volatility remain constraints. India retains wide credibility with the US, Europe, Japan, ASEAN, and Africa. Going forward, New Delhi must deepen bilateral ties with Gulf states individually, strengthen personal equations with leaders, and project itself as a partner in their modernization and diversification agendas.

Military Calculus: Preparing Without Panic. The pact introduces uncertainty into India's security planning. A crisis with Pakistan might now draw Saudi diplomatic or economic pressure. But Riyadh's reliance on Indian markets, manpower, and energy ties makes direct military involvement unlikely. India's priority is to strengthen deterrence, modernize rapidly, and prepare for mul-



ti-front contingencies without assuming the worst. Expanded naval presence in the Arabian Sea, closer ties with Oman and the UAE, and robust intelligence cooperation with friendly Gulf states will reduce risks.

Connectivity: A Setback, Not the Endgame. The US decision to revoke sanctions waivers on Iran's Chabahar port complicates India's access to Afghanistan and Central Asia. Yet alternatives exist: the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) through Russia and the Caucasus, enhanced maritime linkages with Oman and the UAE, and joint connectivity initiatives with Japan and the EU. Rather than crippling India's outreach, the setback highlights the need for diversification and creative diplomacy.

The Human Dimension: Interdependence, Not Vulnerability. Over 2.5 million Indians live and work in Saudi Arabia, sending billions in remittances home. While political strain could affect their welfare, the relationship is reciprocal. Saudi Arabia depends heavily on Indian professionals and workers to realize its Vision 2030 reforms. Proactive dialogue, labor agreements, and use of India's soft power like education, healthcare and IT can ensure this diaspora remains a strategic strength.

Regional Security: Stability or Escalation? The pact could cut both ways for regional stability. On one hand, it may deter aggression. A mutual defense guarantee, even one backed rhetorically by nuclear capability might discourage Iran or others from military adventurism.

On the other hand, introducing Pakistan's nuclear posture into Gulf security is destabilizing. It could provoke Iran to accelerate its nuclear program and embolden Israel to act preemptively against perceived threats. This risks polarizing the Middle East into two camps: a Saudi-Pakistan axis, tacitly supported by the US and Israel, versus an Iran-Russia-China bloc. Smaller Gulf states like Qatar, Kuwait, and the UAE will be pressured to choose sides, potentially weakening GCC cohesion.

Economics and Trade: A Cushion of Interdependence

Despite strategic turbulence, the economic reality offers reassurance. Saudi Arabia

has invested over \$10 billion in India, into Reliance, Paytm, OYO, and others. Saudi Aramco remains central to India's energy security, and India is one of Riyadh's largest markets. This interdependence is a powerful stabilizer.

That said, ambitious initiatives such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) may face delays amid hardened geopolitical divides. Yet both India and Saudi Arabia have strong incentives to compartmentalize economic cooperation from political differences. Riyadh's need to diversify beyond oil aligns with India's growth trajectory—an alignment neither side can afford to jeopardize.

The Prospect of an Islamic Security Alliance

The most far-reaching implication of the pact may be symbolic. It raises the prospect of (though still distant) an "Islamic Security Alliance." By pairing Saudi Arabia, the custodian of Islam's holiest sites, with Pakistan, the Muslim world's only nuclear-armed state, it sends a message of solidarity. Whether this symbolism translates into a durable alliance remains uncertain, given intra-Gulf rivalries and competing national interests.

For the United States, this is less the twilight of influence than a call to recalibrate. Washington remains indispensable to Gulf security but must now manage a more crowded strategic space. For India, the development is also an opening. By presenting itself as a bridge between the West and the Gulf, New Delhi can reinforce its image as a constructive, stabilizing power.

Conclusion: India's Response in a Changing Strategic Landscape

The Saudi-Pakistan pact is significant, but it is not a decisive shift against India. Its weight lies more in symbolism than substance. For New Delhi, it underscores the need for foresight rather than fear.

India today combines economic weight, trusted partnerships, and expanding defense ties with Gulf states. These strengths give the government the tools to ensure India remains an indispensable stakeholder in West Asia. The task is to avoid alarmism and pursue clarity by strengthening partnerships with Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, and Doha while deepening

ing convergences with Washington, Tokyo, Paris, and Brussels.

Foreign policy challenges are inevitable in a shifting global order. Yet India has shown it can navigate turbulence by balancing ties with the US and Russia, managing competition with China, and constructively engaging the Gulf during crises. The government's approach of strategic autonomy with multiple alignments is the right framework for this moment.

Going forward, India must accelerate military modernization, diversify connectivity, protect its diaspora, and invest in technology-driven resilience. At the same time, patient diplomacy and sustained economic engagement can turn uncertainty into opportunity.

This pact, therefore, is not a setback but a reminder. In a multipolar world, India has the weight, credibility, and vision to shape outcomes, not merely adjust to them.

(The author is a motivational speaker and an expert in Decision Sciences)

### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

**Tomorrow, 22nd September, is a very important day for the development of the Northeast. During a programme in Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh, will launch key projects linked to energy, connectivity, healthcare and more. The foundation stone would be laid for two mega hydropower projects. Later, in Udaipur, Tripura, will inaugurate development works at the Mata Tripura Sundari Temple Complex.**

~ Narendra Modi, PM



## GODDESS DURGA: SLAYER OF DARKNESS

RENUKA NARAYANAN

Sharad Navaratri begins today, commemorating the battle fought by the Goddess Durga against the titan Mahishasura, a shape-shifter long before the advent of the Harry Potter books. He was half-man, half-buffalo, and kept changing his form in the fight until he was finally killed when Durga plunged a trident into his chest.

Mahishasura had gained a boon from Agni that no man could kill him. So, it had to be a woman, a possibility he found too absurd to remotely consider. He went on a rampage, terrorising the three worlds with his brutality. The celestials, led by Indra, were unable to vanquish Mahishasura. So, they strategised. They assembled in the mountains and decided to transfer their combined divine energies into the goddess Durga. Suitably armed, she set forth to challenge Mahishasura.

At first, he laughed at her, confident of his brute strength against a mere 'woman', failing to recognise her power as the Parashakti, or Supreme Goddess, for had he not beaten all the celestials soundly? When she didn't back down, he tried frightening her with threatening moves. Durga did not budge, only looked at him with calm contempt. Finally, he was forced to attack head-on, unable to believe that a feminine entity had the strength and skill to withstand him. In desperation, he tried to change from his

original form, which was halfman, half-buffalo. In turn, he became a charging buffalo, a lion, a man and an elephant, before finally being killed. He returned in his dying throes to his original half-and-half form.

At a symbolic level, Mahishasura represents arrogance, cruelty and ignorance, the dark forces that repeatedly threaten the smooth functioning of life. But they can be overcome by the bright, sincere strength that the goddess represents. That is the underlying message of the festival, with its fasts and its holdbacks from meat and drink—that the recommended physical detox should enable a process of mental detox. That we should ask ourselves honest questions without excuses or deflections, and without transferring blame. That we should pray for the strength and wisdom to identify whatever we may be doing that is harmful to others and to ourselves, and resolve to fix it. This is the greatest gift that the festival wants to give people—an annual calendar opportunity to update our software and give ourselves new beginnings, the chance to positively refresh both our thinking and our doing.

The central text of the Sharad Navaratri is the Devi Mahatmyaham, meaning 'The Glory of the Goddess'. It is part of the Markandeya Purana, Chapters 81 to 93. Some scholars suggest that it dates back to the fifth century, while others propose the seventh. It is also known as the Durga Saptasati, or 'Seven Hundred

Verses for Durga', which are arranged into thirteen chapters. However, while wrapped in a powerful story and beautiful verses of praise that begin 'Ya Devi' (Hail, Goddess), the Devi Mahatmyaham is essentially a philosophical text on the reality of the human condition and the nature of life.

The frame story of the Devi Mahatmyaham concerns a dispossessed king called Suratha, who has lost his kingdom, and a merchant named Samadhi, who is betrayed by his own family. Both men have been evicted from their respective homes. Shattered by these events, they decide to renounce the world and retreat to the forest ashram of a famous sage of their era, Rishi Medhas. They meet in the forest and discover each other's unhappy stories. What troubles them most is that despite the betrayals and being kicked out of their home, they still yearn for their families. They find Rishi Medhas and pour out their woes.

The rishi's teachings lead them out of their misery into a state of better understanding. The sage tells them about Mahamaya, an epithet of the Parashakti, who is both the Creatrix and the cause of the world's delusion. It is she who creates attachments to keep the world going, and it is our job as frail humans who are nevertheless blessed with intelligence to realise that nothing is permanent, and learn to detach from too much attachment.

The Devi appears in many different ways,

explains the sage, and her most famous form is that of Mahishasura Mardini, the Slayer of the Buffalo Demon. As we further know, this legend is widely known among modern Indians, and it has been depicted in paintings and sculptures across various regions and eras.

The sage then tells the king and merchant several stories of the Devi's manifestations, which were taken to fight a succession of demons. The explicit message here is that the fight against darkness, both external and within ourselves, never ends and must be faced with fortitude. The sage advises the king and the merchant to take refuge in the Devi to be free of delusion. They undertake penance, and the Devi grants them a vision of herself. She gives the king back his kingdom, as he knows no other trade, and, intriguingly, grants the merchant wisdom so that he can work off his karma and attain moksha.

It turns out, although not mentioned in the Devi Mahatmyaham, that Suratha, the restored king, became a legendary ruler of ancient Kalinga, which is now modern Odisha. It is he who is credited with having initiated the tradition of Durga Puja. Fascinating, is it not, how the supernatural and historical coexist seamlessly in our heritage?

In sum, like the Bhagavad Gita, the Devi Mahatmyaham is a philosophical battle plan expressed through Navaratri rituals, for winning our life wars.

## Papon pays tearful tribute to Zubeen, admits he can never fill the legendary singer's void

GUWAHATI

Singer Papon arrived in Assam late September 21 night and went directly to Sarusajai Stadium in Guwahati, where he paid his final respects to legendary Assamese singer Zubeen Garg, who died at age 52 in Singapore waters on September 19.

The 52-year-old music icon, best known for his hit song "Ya Ali," had travelled to Singapore to participate in the North East Festival when tragedy struck. He was found unconscious in Singapore waters and rushed to a local hospital, but doctors were unable to save his life.

A visibly emotional Papon was spotted standing near Zubeen's widow, Garima Saikia, as thousands of mourners gathered at the stadium to bid farewell to Assam's beloved cultural ambassador.

The state government declared three days of official mourning beginning September 20, continuing today, with the final cremation scheduled for tomorrow, September 23, at Sonapur's



Kamarkuchi.

The funeral procession has drawn what could potentially be the world's fourth-largest gathering for a celebrity's final journey, with record-breaking numbers of mourners participating in the rally across Assam.

Speaking to reporters with visible grief, Papon said he would never be able to fill the vacuum left by Zubeen in Assam. He expressed that while he would continue singing and performing, he could never be like his departed colleague.

The singer also addressed criticism

he has faced for building his career outside Assam, acknowledging the different paths he and Zubeen had chosen. He told media persons that he understood people's anger about his absence from Assam, living and performing outside the state. Papon acknowledged that while people viewed Zubeen as the brother who gave his all to Assam, he himself had been away, but emphasised that they had followed different career paths. Zubeen Garg's sudden death has sent shockwaves through the music industry and devastated fans across India. Markets shut down in parts of As-

sam as news of his passing spread, with fans gathering in large numbers despite scorching heat to pay their respects at Sarusajai Stadium.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma personally travelled to Delhi to receive Zubeen's mortal remains and oversee arrangements for the public tribute. The singer's body was displayed in a glass casket surrounded by traditional Assamese gamosa, allowing thousands of admirers to bid their final farewell. In a poignant reminder of his connection with fans, Zubeen had once expressed his wish that when he died, he wanted people to sing "Mayabini" for him - a request that has taken on profound meaning as mourners honour his memory. Zubeen Garg, born Zubeen Borthakur on November 18, 1972, was a versatile artiste who sang in over 40 languages and made significant contributions to Assamese music and culture. His untimely death marks the end of an era for Assamese music, leaving behind a legacy that fellow artistes like Papon acknowledge will be impossible to replicate.

## Hagrama Mohilary casts vote in Debagraon, confident of BPF's return to power



KOKRAJHAR

Bodoland People's Front (BPF) chief and former Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) chief executive member, Hagrama Mohilary, exercised

his franchise today at the Debagraon Higher Secondary School polling station in Kokrajhar district during the ongoing BTC elections. He was accompanied by his family members.

Speaking to reporters after casting his vote, Mohilary exuded confidence in his party's performance, asserting that the BPF would secure a clear majority and return to power in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).

"The people of BTR have faith in the leadership and vision of the BPF. We are confident of forming the next government," Mohilary said.

He also welcomed the enthusiastic participation of voters across constituencies, highlighting the high voter turnout as a reflection of people's trust in the democratic process.

Meanwhile, polling across the BTR continued peacefully under a heavy security blanket, with no major incidents reported so far.

## Arunachal Congress leader accuses BJP of turning PM's Itanagar visit into party event

ITANAGAR

Arunachal Congress leader Takam Sanjoy has alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's official visit to Itanagar on September 22 has been reduced to a political rally by the Bharatiya Janata Party. He claimed government machinery is being used to project the programme as a BJP event, calling it a violation of constitutional norms and democratic protocols. Sanjoy, a former MP from Arunachal Pradesh, warned that instead of welcoming the Prime Minister with the national flag, the city has been lined with BJP flags. He described the move as "a murder of democracy" and said no state government in Arunachal had ever attempted such a "mischievous adventure."

The criticism comes ahead of Modi's high-profile visit, where he is set to launch development projects worth over Rs 5,100 crore. The initiatives include two major hydropower projects valued at more than Rs 3,700 crore, aimed at tapping into Arunachal Pradesh's hydroelectric capacity. The Prime Minister will also lay the foundation stone for a convention centre in Tawang, expected to host international conferences and cultural festivals. Other projects include new infrastructure in healthcare, housing for working women, and improved connectivity, with a combined investment of around Rs 1,290 crore. While officials say the projects will boost the economy, improve the quality of life, and promote tourism, Sanjoy cautioned that the political overtones surrounding the visit could cause "unprecedented democratic trauma" in a state known for its peace.

## Assam announces 20 per cent bonus for tea garden workers ahead of Durga Puja

GUWAHATI

The Assam government has announced a 20 per cent bonus for workers employed at tea gardens under the Assam Tea Corporation, providing much-needed financial relief ahead of the Durga Puja celebrations.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma revealed the decision following a cabinet meeting held on September 22, highlighting the government's focus on supporting the state's tea industry workforce during the festive season.

The bonus comes as a significant boost for tea garden workers, who form a crucial part of Assam's economy and have been seeking better working conditions and compensation in recent years.

Among other major decisions, the cabinet sanctioned the establishment of the state's 10th police battalion at Sonapur near Guwahati, marking a significant expansion

of Assam's security infrastructure with an investment of Rs 260 crore. The new battalion represents a major addition to the state's police force structure, which has been gradually expanding to address security challenges in the northeastern region.

The government also authorised the Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra Society to operate the 5,000-capacity Jyoti Bishnu Auditorium in Guwahati, transferring management of the cultural venue to the organisation dedicated to preserving Assamese heritage. Additionally, the cabinet enhanced benefits for 65 Science and Mathematics Facilitators working under the Assam Science, Technology and Environment Council, approving improved remuneration packages, better leave entitlements, and the implementation of an annual appraisal system to evaluate their performance.

## Zubeen Garg's death certificate lists drowning as cause; Assam CM seeks post-mortem report

GUWAHATI

The death certificate of acclaimed Assamese singer Zubeen Garg, issued by the Singapore High Commission, lists "drowning" as the official cause of death.

However, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has confirmed that the government is still awaiting the official post-mortem report, which differs from the death certificate.

Speaking to the media, the Chief Minister clarified, "The Singapore High Commission sent us Zubeen Garg's death certificate, and it mentions drowning as the cause of death. However, this is not the post-mortem report."

He added that the state government has already reached out to the Singapore authorities and is working through diplomatic channels to secure the post-mortem findings at the



earliest.

"The Chief Secretary of Assam is in touch with the Singapore Ambassador, and once we receive all the documents, we will forward them to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) for further examination," Sarma stated.

Zubeen Garg's Final Moments and Medical Response Zubeen Garg tragically passed away on September 19 while scuba diving in Singa-

pore, where he was attending the Northeast India Festival. According to a statement from the event organisers, the singer experienced breathing difficulties underwater and lost consciousness. Rescuers administered immediate CPR before rushing him to Singapore General Hospital. Despite medical intervention, doctors declared him dead in the ICU around 2:30 PM IST.

After completing formal-

ities in Singapore, officials transported Zubeen's mortal remains to New Delhi, and then by commercial flight to Guwahati, where the plane landed on Sunday morning.

Thousands of grieving fans gathered at the Arjun Bhogeshwar Baruah Sports Complex in Guwahati to offer their final tributes. Authorities placed the singer's body at the complex for public homage, allowing admirers and well-wishers to pay their respects before the funeral. Chief Minister Sarma announced that Zubeen Garg's final rites will take place on Tuesday, September 23, at Kamarkuchi village, his ancestral home.

"We will begin the final journey from Arjun Bhogeshwar Baruah Sports Complex at around 8 am and proceed to Kamarkuchi, where the last rites will be performed with full state funeral honours," Sarma said.

## HITO demands Conrad Sangma to relinquish CM chair for Khasi-Jaintia leader in second half of term

SHILLONG

In an open letter, the Hymnietrep Integrated Territorial Organisation (HITO) urged Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma to consider stepping down in the second half of the government's term to make way for a leader from the Khasi-Jaintia region.

The organisation acknowledged the recent cabinet reshuffle, which Conrad justified as part of an unwritten 2023 understanding with coalition partners to share ministerial berths midway through the term.

However, HITO said it was "ironic" that in a matriarchal society like Meghalaya, the exit of Dr. Amparen Lyngdoh has left the cabinet without a single woman representative.

Raising the larger issue of fair-



ness in leadership, HITO argued that the principle of rotational responsibility should also extend to the Chief Minister's chair. Citing

the 1988 precedent of former leaders P.A. Sangma and B.B. Lyngdoh, who agreed to a 50:50 power-sharing arrangement, the group said Conrad could take a "statesmanlike step" by handing over the CM's post for the remainder of the term.

"Today, leadership at the four highest constitutional positions — Chief Minister, Leader of Opposition, Speaker and Deputy Speaker — rests with leaders from the Garo community," HITO wrote. "For the second half of the term, it would be only just and proportionate that the Chief Ministership be entrusted to a leader from the Khasi-Jaintia region."

The letter suggested names of senior leaders, including Deputy Chief Ministers Prestone Tynsong and Sniawhalang Dhar, and UDP chief Metbah Lyngdoh, arguing that each has the legitimacy and expe-

rience to lead.

HITO emphasised that none of the outgoing ministers were removed on grounds of corruption or inefficiency, but purely to accommodate others. "By the same reasoning, fairness demands that the Chief Minister too should not be beyond the principle of rotational responsibility," it said.

Concluding the letter, HITO reminded Conrad of his repeated emphasis on balance and inclusivity, urging him to emulate the legacy of his late father, P.A. Sangma. "Just as the bold decision of 1998 is remembered with reverence, so too would this act be seen as a defining moment of your political career," the organisation stated.

The letter, signed by HITO president Donbok Dkhar, has also been shared with the media for public circulation.

## NEIR Pays Tribute to Zubeen Garg, Calls Him a Voice of Unity for Northeast India



SILCHAR

The organising committee members of North East Integration Rally (NEIR) have expressed deep grief at the sudden demise of legendary singer Zubeen Garg, describing him as a cultural force who gave voice to the idea of unity in the region.

NEIR founder and CEO Biswadeep Gupta said the organising committee has decided to dedicate its upcoming events in Garg's memory. "Zubeen was very vocal about the integration of Northeast India. With more than 38,000 songs in nearly 40 languages, his contribution to society and culture is enormous, and many may not even realise the scale of it," Gupta said.

In a Facebook post, Gupta

wrote, "Today God must be crying watching the tears on Earth," while sharing one of Garg's last songs, performed in Singapore. He also posted a tribute poem by Guwahati-based Gitanjali Goswami, a member of the NEIR 2026 team.

Professor (Dr) Sukamal Deb from Ahmedabad called Garg a true artist whose creativity, empathy, and large-heartedness embodied unity and humanity. "With his departure, a void is created.

The loss is ours, especially in a time when fellow feeling has taken a back seat," he wrote, adding that Garg's songs reflected his deep love for humanity.

Meghalaya MLA and former minister Alexander Laloo Hek also conduced the loss. "The sudden demise of Zubeen Garg is a big loss to all the people of the Northeast, and Assam in particular. I convey my deepest condolences to his family, near and dear ones. It is also a great loss to the singers' fraternity, music lovers, and his countless fans," Hek said.

The NEIR has resolved to celebrate Garg's contributions during its upcoming rally, describing him as not only a celebrated singer but also a unifying voice for the entire region.

## Cherrapunjee braces for driest monsoon in decades; rainfall 45% below normal:IMD

SHILLONG

The climate crisis is unfolding more vividly in the rain capital of the world - Cherrapunjee. Once the wettest place on Earth, the most sought-after tourist destination in Meghalaya appears to be bracing for the driest ever monsoon this year.

With less than two weeks left for the curtains to come down on the monsoon season, Cherrapunjee (called Sohra now) is unlikely to make up the 45 per cent deficit rains it has recorded so far.

The Sohra IMD station has recorded 4,369 mm rainfall till date - 55 per cent of the normal. Interestingly, several stations in Karnataka crossed the 6,000-mm monsoon rainfall mark on August 31 itself, with Hulikal topping at 7,005 mm.

The lowest ever rainfall recorded during the monsoon season (June-September) in Sohra was in 2013 (5,093 mm) followed by 1962 (5,401 mm).

It will need more than 700 mm rainfall by the end of this month to cross that record low mark, which though not impossible appears unlikely. Rain



forecast is there for the next few days, but is expected to decrease again.

The average monsoon rainfall in the area is 8,131.9 mm.

In June and July this season, Sohra

got just 40 per cent of the normal rainfall. August rainfall was normal, but September again went into deficit.

The highest one-day rainfall in Cherrapunjee this year is 196 mm

on August 4, at a place where 400-600 mm rainfall is not rare. The highest recorded 24-hour rainfall at the place was 1,563.3 mm on June 16, 1995 (highest one-day rainfall ever in India), and then 973.8 mm on June 5, 1956, according to IMD data.

However, between July 27 to August 11 this year, there were only 13 heavy rainfall events, out of which 8 were 100 mm and above. Overall, from June to September (till date) there were only 13 days with 100 mm-plus rainfall.

In 1974, it had rained 24,555.3 mm at Cherrapunjee, which once was the highest recorded annual rainfall in any one place in any one year in the whole world. However, over the years, change in the rainfall pattern also moved the rainfall intensity and frequency to further west of the place to Mawsynram - about 15 km away - making it the wettest place on Earth by the late 1970s. In 1985, Mawsynram recorded rainfall of 26,000 mm.

Various studies conducted over the last few decades have indicated that Cherrapunjee's raining glory is waning by the day and the decrease is alarming. It was after a gap of 27 years that 24-hour rainfall in Cherrapunjee had crossed the 800-mm mark in 2022.

A study had revealed that Cherrapunjee has been losing 27.15 mm of annual rainfall every year over the last 42 years.

Quest!

70% of people enjoy old songs because of the memories they've attached to them.

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# Next-Gen GST reforms testament to Modi's resolve to serve poor, farmers: Amit Shah



NEW DELHI

'GSTBachatUtsav'.

The Next-Gen GST reforms are a testament to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's steely resolve to serve the poor, youth, farmers and women, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Monday as the new tax structure came into effect across the country.

Shah also said that the new reforms will move the wheel of India's growth even faster on the path of becoming the most prosperous country in the world.

"The #NextGenGSTReforms are a testament to PM Shri Narendra Modi Ji's steely resolve to serve the poor, youth, farmers, and women," he said in a series of posts on X in both English and Hindi with the hashtag

The home minister said the Modi government is increasing the income of the middle class by opening plenty of opportunities for them and ensuring that their savings rise constantly through the Next-Gen GST reforms.

He said the steep reduction in the GST rates of daily essentials, healthcare products, electronic appliances, and educational items will boost their disposable income and encourage them to save even more.

The home minister said the Next-Gen GST reforms is Modi government's gift to all the mothers and sisters of the country on the auspicious occasion of Navratri, which begins on Monday.

"PM Modi's promise to the countrymen regarding GST reform has been imple-

mented across the entire country starting today.

In this GST, historic reductions have been made in taxes on more than 390 goods," he said.

Shah said in areas such as food and household items, home building and materials, automobiles, agriculture, services, toys, sports and handicrafts, education, medical and health, insurance, etc.

He said making GST zero on many dairy products, or unprecedented reductions on everyday items like soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, hair oil, shampoo, the Next-Gen GST reforms has brought the gift of happiness to every home. "From zero GST on life insurance, health insurance, senior citizen policy, 33 life-saving drugs and diagnostic kits to minimal GST on oxygen, surgical instruments, medical, dental and veterinary devices, GST reform will bring historic growth in the savings of the countrymen," he said.

Shah said farmers are excited with the GST reduction on agriculture equipment and fertiliser sector, and now citizens won't have to think more for vehicle purchases either.

"This GST reform will also boost self-reliance. You too adopt indigenous products in daily use items," he said.

# Shun foreign goods, turn to Indian for country's prosperity: PM Modi



NEW DELHI

our sons and daughters are involved," Modi said in his address to the nation on the eve of the auspicious Navratri.

The PM's speech comes amid inconclusive trade talks with the US and a day after Washington introduced an unprecedented \$100,000 fee for H-1B visas.

Modi said homes and shops should become 'symbols of swadeshi', adding that it is a big step for aatmanirbhar Bharat. "Every shop has to be decorated with swadeshi products. Say with pride that this is Swadeshi, say with pride, I buy Swadeshi, I also sell Swadeshi goods... this should become the attitude of every Indian," he said.

Urging states to create a conducive atmosphere for investment, he said India can be self-reliant only if the states and the Centre work together.

With the new, reduced GST rates coming into effect on Monday, Modi said the reforms will enhance people's savings and give further momentum to the Swadeshi pitch.

Noting that everyday essentials are more affordable under the revised tax structure, he termed the GST reforms bachat utsav (savings festival), adding that each and everyone stands to benefit.

Recalling that India took its first steps towards GST reforms in 2017, Modi highlighted that for decades, citizens and traders were entangled in a complex web of taxes. "But now One Nation One Tax has been made through GST," he added.

The Union Government's comprehensive overhaul of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), referred to as 'GST 2.0', came into effect on Monday, coinciding with the onset of Navratri. The new regime introduces a simplified tax structure, featuring reduced rates on essential goods and steeper levies on luxury and demerit items.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in a message posted on X (formerly Twitter), described the rollout as the beginning of a 'GST Savings Festival', and framed it as a step towards economic self-reliance and the promotion of indigenous manufacturing.

"This Navratri is particularly special. With the GST Savings Festival, the mantra of Swadeshi (Made in India) will be further energised," PM Modi said. "Let us unite in our efforts towards the vision of a developed and self-reliant India."

The new tax regime, approved at the 56th meeting of the GST Council earlier this month, reduces the existing four-slab structure, 5%, 12%, 18%, and 28% to two primary slabs of 5% and 18%.

A separate 40% 'demerit rate' has been introduced for luxury items and so-called "sin goods" such as tobacco and high-end vehicles. The compensation cess applicable to such goods has

been subsumed under the new rate.

The revised structure will make several everyday essentials, including ghee, paneer, butter, dry fruits, jam, ketchup, snacks, coffee, and ice cream, more affordable.

Certain consumer durables such as televisions, washing machines, and air conditioners will also attract lower taxes, potentially reducing retail prices.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman stated that the revised GST regime could add Rs 2 lakh crore to the economy by increasing household savings and spurring consumption-led growth. The move, she said, was aimed at reducing compliance burdens for businesses while improving revenue buoyancy through enhanced compliance and widening of the tax base.

In a 19-minute televised address delivered on the eve of the rollout, PM Modi characterised the reforms as "next-generation GST" and a key component of the government's broader push for Aatmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India). "This is a double bonanza," PM Modi said, referring to the combined impact of lower indirect taxes and existing income tax exemptions.

"The poor, middle class, neo-middle class, youth, farmers, women, small traders and shopkeepers will benefit the most." He also urged State governments to increase local manufacturing under the twin banners of Aatmanirbhar Bharat and Swadeshi, underscoring the importance of domestic value addition in India's long-term economic trajectory.

The Opposition, however, dismissed the reforms as cosmetic and accused the Centre of deflecting responsibility for the economic hardship caused by the original GST framework.

Describing the new measures as a "band-aid on deep wounds," several Opposition leaders reiterated their demand for an apology for taxing essential goods in the first place.

# INTERNATIONAL

## UK, Australia and Canada recognise Palestinian state, prompting angry response from Israel

LONDON

The U.K., Australia and Canada formally recognised a Palestinian state on Sunday, prompting an angry response from Israel, which ruled out the prospect.

The coordinated initiative from the three Commonwealth nations and long-time allies reflects growing outrage at Israel's conduct of the war in Gaza and the steps taken by the Israeli government to thwart efforts to create a Palestinian state, including by the continued expansion of settlements in the West Bank.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who has faced pressure to take a harder line on Israel within his own governing Labour Party over the deteriorating situation in Gaza, said the U.K.'s move is intended "to revive the hope of peace for the Palestinians and Israelis." He insisted it wasn't a reward for Hamas, which was behind the attack on Oct. 7, 2023, in which the militants killed some 1,200 people and abducted 251 others.

"Today, to revive the hope of peace and a two-state solution, I state clearly as prime minister of this great country that the United Kingdom formally recognises the state of Palestine," Starmer said in a video message. "We recognised the state of Israel more than 75 years ago as a homeland for the Jewish people. Today we join over 150 countries who recognise a Palestinian state also."

The moves by the three countries prompted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to say that the establishment of a Palestinian state "will not happen."

The U.K. announcement was widely anticipated after Starmer said in July that the U.K. would recognise a Palestinian state unless Israel agreed to a ceasefire in Gaza, allowed the United Nations to bring in aid and took other steps toward long-term peace.

More countries are expected to join the list recognising a Palestinian state at the U.N. General Assembly this week, including France, which like the U.K., is



one of the five permanent members of the Security Council.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu blasted the three countries for proffering a "prize" to Hamas.

"It will not happen," he said. "A Palestinian state will not be established west of the Jordan River."

Netanyahu is set to give a speech to the General Assembly on Friday before heading to see U.S. President Donald Trump at the White House Monday week. Ahead of Sunday's announcement, Trump said he disapproved of the U.K.'s anticipated move.

Hamas hailed the decision, calling it a "rightful outcome of our people's struggle, steadfastness, and sacrifices on the path to liberation and return." The Islamic militant group, which is sworn to Israel's destruction, called on the world to isolate Israel.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas stressed that Sunday's moves constitute an important and necessary step toward achieving a just peace in accordance with international law.

As well as arguing that recognition is immoral, critics argue that it's an empty gesture given that the Palestinian people are divided into two territories—the

West Bank and the Gaza strip—and no recognised international capital.

The U.K., Australia and Canada confirmed Sunday that they are formally recognising a Palestinian state despite vociferous opposition from the U.S. and Israel.

The U.K. and France have a historic role in the politics of the Middle East over the past 100 years, having carved up the region following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I.

As part of that carve-up, the U.K. became the governing power of what was then Palestine. It was also author of the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which backed the establishment of a "national home for the Jewish people."

However, the second part of the declaration has been largely neglected over the decades. It noted "that nothing shall be done, nothing which may prejudice the civil and religious rights" of the Palestinian people.

"It's significant for France and the U.K. to recognise Palestine because of the legacy of these two countries' involvement in the Middle East," said Olivia O'Connell, senior research fellow for Middle East Security at London-based Royal United Services Institute. "But without

the United States coming on board with the idea of a Palestine, I think very little will change on the ground."

Husam Zomlot, the Palestinian head of mission in the U.K., told the BBC that recognition would right a colonial-era wrong. "The issue today is ending the denial of our existence that started 108 years ago, in 1917," he said. "And I think today, the British people should celebrate a day when history is being corrected, when wrongs are being righted, when recognition of the wrongs of the past are beginning to be corrected."

The U.K. has for decades supported an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel, but insisted recognition must come as part of a peace plan to achieve a two-state solution.

However, the government has become increasingly worried that such a solution is becoming all but impossible—and not only because of the razing of Gaza and displacement of most of its population during nearly two years of conflict, which has seen more than 65,000 people killed in Gaza, displaced around 90% of the population and caused a catastrophic humanitarian crisis.

Last week, independent experts commissioned by the U.N.'s Human Rights Council concluded that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza, a charge that Israel rejected as "distorted and false."

Also vexing the U.K. is Israel's government has been aggressively expanding settlements in the West Bank, land Palestinians want for their future state. Much of the world regards Israel's occupation of the West Bank, which is ostensibly run by the Palestinian Authority, as illegal.

## Japan's ruling party opens leadership race to choose Ishiba's successor

TOKYO

Outgoing Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba's ruling party opened official campaigning Monday to find his replacement who can restore political stability and voter support for the beleaguered Liberal Democrats.

Five candidates are vying for the Liberal Democratic Party's top job ahead of a highly unpredictable vote in early October. The race has a slogan: "Change, LDP." The winner must act quickly to address rising prices if the party is to have any chance of winning back support following devastating losses to both the LDP and its junior partner Komeito in the past year that deprived their coalition of a majority in either house of parliament.

Its new leader is still likely to be prime minister because the LDP remains the No. 1 party, while opposition groups are too splintered to form a coalition.

Whoever becomes the LDP leader must also gain cooperation from main opposition parties or risk facing constant no-confidence motions and a cycle of short-lived leadership.

The Oct. 4 vote is not open to the general public. It is limited to 285 LDP parliamentarians and 1 million dues-paying grassroots party members. That's less than 1% of Japan's eligible voters.

A candidate who secures a majority becomes a party leader. If nobody wins a majority, there will be a runoff between the top two candidates in the first round.

To be elected as prime minister, the new party leader will need votes from some opposition lawmakers in a parliamentary leadership vote, to be held within days.

Five serving and former ministers in the race. All five candidates are incumbent and former Cabinet ministers. They call themselves moderate conservatives as they emphasize their willingness to

work with opposition groups. Agriculture Minister Shinjiro Koizumi and former economic security minister Sanae Takaichi are considered the top contenders.

Shinjiro Koizumi, 44: The son of a popular former prime minister, Junichiro Koizumi, makes his second bid after running against Ishiba last year when he campaigned to reform the scandal-laden party. As agriculture minister for Ishiba, Koizumi released an emergency rice stockpile to lower prices and stabilize supply. Koizumi vowed to rebuild his party and listen to the people's voices more closely to address their concerns, such as rising prices, growing foreign population and public safety. If elected, he will be Japan's youngest leader since Hirobumi Ito, who in 1885 became the first Japanese premier at 44.

Sanae Takaichi, 64: A protégé of former prime minister Shinzo Abe, Takaichi lost to Ishiba last year in the runoff. A wartime history revisionist and China hawk, she regularly visits Yasukuni Shrine seen by Beijing and Seoul as a symbol of militarism. She supports more public spending and investment for growth and a strong military. She backs paternalistic family values and opposes a female emperor, as well as a revision to civil law to allow an option of keeping separate surnames for married couples — a change sought by rights groups so that women aren't pressured into abandoning their names.

Yoshimasa Hayashi, 64: Chief Cabinet secretary of Ishiba's government, Hayashi is a moderate who promises steady wage increases, a strong economy and defense. He has served in a number of other key Cabinet posts, including foreign, defense and education ministers. The Harvard-educated politician is fluent in English. He sings and

plays the guitar and piano in a pop band Glns, which he formed with three fellow parliamentarians to make politics approachable.

Toshimitsu Motegi, 69: Another Harvard graduate, Motegi has served in key posts including foreign and trade ministers and is known as a tough trade negotiator during U.S. President Donald Trump's first term. Motegi said the Japan-U.S. alliance is key to his country's diplomacy and that deepening the "relationship of trust" with Trump is essential.

Takayuki Kobayashi, 50: A former economic security minister who promises strong growth, defense and national unity, Kobayashi is ultra-conservative and may split votes with Takaichi. Nicknamed Koba-Hawk, he promises a tougher restrictions on foreign workers and says Japan's defense spending target of 2% of GDP is insufficient.

A first female prime minister? If elected, Takaichi, an ex-newscaster whose role model is former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, will be Japan's first female prime minister. The country ranks near the bottom internationally for gender equality, especially in politics.

Some experts worry that the hardline conservative would set back women's advancement. Others say her revisionist views of Japan's wartime history may complicate ties with Beijing and Seoul.

In a policy speech on Friday, Takaichi said she wants good ties with China, as an important neighbor and that her harsh comments about China are mostly related to economics. She did not say she would visit Yasukuni if she became prime minister, but stressed her "gratitude" for those who sacrificed their lives for the country and are enshrined at Yasukuni.

Cooperation with opposition is key

## Music Meant Zubeen for Me": Justice Ranjan Gogoi Remembers Assam's Beloved Icon



**O**n a quiet September afternoon in Guwahati, the former Chief Justice of India, Ranjan Gogoi, leaned back in his chair and spoke with the kind of voice that carried more memory than grief. His words flowed not with the formality of a courtroom pronouncement but with the gentleness of personal confession. He was speaking to India Today Magazine's Kaushik Deka, only two days after Assam's most beloved cultural icon, Zubeen Garg, breathed his last in a Singapore hospital.

What began as an interview about public loss slowly turned into something much more intimate: an exploration of the ways in which a voice—just a human voice carrying music—can weave itself so deeply into one's daily life that it becomes indistinguishable from memory, ritual, and even identity. "I listen to any three of Zubeen's songs every day," Justice Gogoi said softly. He paused for a moment, letting the words rest between them. "It has been my routine for years. Music, for me, means Zubeen. Nothing else quite compares."

It was not grief speaking, at least not entirely. It was the warmth of remembrance, the quiet gratitude one feels toward something that has kept them company through years of solitude, travel, and responsibility. To Gogoi, Zubeen was not just a singer. He was a companion.

Music as Memory  
For a man who has spent most of his life in the nation's corridors of law and power—whether in Guwahati, Delhi, or far beyond—Justice Gogoi's attachment to Zubeen's music was a reminder that even the most powerful figures carry within them private rituals that root them to their homeland.

When he was far from Assam, Zubeen's voice became the bridge across distances. Whether it played in his car during long commutes in Delhi or streamed through speakers in his study, the songs acted like invisible threads tying him back to the red earth of Assam, the monsoon-soaked air of Dibrugarh, the tea shop chatter, and the unhurried flow of the Brahmaputra.

"Zubeen's voice didn't need credentials or certificates," Gogoi explained with a smile. "It found you wherever you were—whether you were a tea vendor or a judge in the Supreme Court. His music reminded you of who you really are."

The remark captured something essential about Zubeen Garg's legacy: his music cut across class and geography. It was never bound by the trappings of education, profession, or privilege. It was equally at home in a crowded Guwahati café, in the villages of Upper Assam, or in the marble chambers of the nation's capital.

"No singer could ever, or will ever, sing like Zubeen," Gogoi reflected, his eyes momentarily brightening. "His voice was out of this world."

The Ritual of Listening  
Justice Gogoi's mornings, for years, began with Zubeen. He described those moments with a kind of quiet reverence. After waking, he would pick three songs—sometimes the evergreen "Ya Ali" that carried Zubeen beyond Assam into Bollywood, sometimes the soulful Assamese ballads that spoke of rivers and longing, sometimes devotional tracks steeped in bhakti.

With his eyes closed, the songs transported him back home. They were more than melodies—they were landscapes. Each note carried the fragrance of tea gardens, the sound of temple bells, the sight of bamboo groves, the taste of rice beer, the memory of a festival night in Assam.

"He was God's divine creation," Gogoi said finally. "It was not a statement of grief but one of awe, the same tone one might use to describe a sunset that never fails to stir the heart."

A Coincidence of Birthdays  
As the conversation deepened, a remarkable coincidence emerged. Gogoi, Zubeen, and the journalist Kaushik Deka all shared the same birthday: November 18.

Separated by years but bound by a date, the three men represented different callings shaped by the same soil. Gogoi brought constitutional wisdom to the nation. Kaushik chronicled the region's stories. And Zubeen gave Assam its eternal soundtrack.

"All November 18 babies," Gogoi said with a faint smile. "Perhaps more than coincidence—it feels like connection."

Yet the bond also carried a bittersweet note. Despite decades of listening, despite the silent companionship built through song, Gogoi had never actually met Zubeen. Not once.

"I have never met him in person," he admitted, his tone turning quiet. "And that is my biggest regret."

For a moment, silence filled the space. The irony was hard to ignore. Zubeen's music had felt like family, like a friend one could always return to, and yet the opportunity to sit together, to share stories of Assam, to speak as two sons of the same land, had never come.

A Farewell Unlike Any Other  
On that very day, far from their conversation, Assam was witnessing something extraordinary. Zubeen's body had just landed in Guwahati from Singapore. The scenes at the airport were unlike anything the state had ever experienced.

Airport staff wept openly. Police officers escorting the coffin struggled to contain their emotions. Crowds lined the streets, unafraid to let their tears flow. Assam, a land often divided by politics and ethnicity, seemed momentarily united in grief and gratitude.

The convoy carrying his remains moved slowly through Guwahati, and thousands followed on foot. Shopkeepers shut their shutters in respect. Buses stopped mid-route so passengers could step out to catch a glimpse. Old men folded their hands, mothers lifted their children onto their shoulders, and young people sang his songs aloud.

The final farewell was set for September 23, but in truth, the mourning had already begun writing itself into Assam's history. Many believed this procession would be remembered as one of the largest funeral gatherings the region—or even the country—had ever seen.

Zubeen's Assam  
Why did Zubeen's death strike so deeply? Perhaps because his music carried something no politics or policy could: an unfiltered Assam.

His repertoire was vast—Assamese modern songs, Hindi hits, devotional hymns, Bengali tracks, Nepali numbers, even English rock-inspired tunes. Yet no matter the language, he carried Assam within his voice. It was the timber of the land itself—fluid like its rivers, fiery like its protests, tender like its folk songs.

For Justice Gogoi, listening to Zubeen was not just listening to music. It was listening to home. It was memory in melody, belonging in rhythm.

More Than an Icon  
In Assam, icons are not many. There are political leaders, yes, and sports figures. But cultural icons who could unite all sections of society are rare. Bhupen Hazarika had once been such a figure, and



many saw in Zubeen his natural successor.

He was irreverent, unpredictable, often controversial, but always authentic. He spoke up on issues others avoided. He sang about love, longing, injustice, and faith with equal conviction. He was, in many ways, a mirror of Assam itself: restless, diverse, proud, wounded, and hopeful.

That is why the mourning felt personal. To lose Zubeen was not just to lose a singer. It was to lose a part of Assam's collective self.

Two Men Remember the Third  
Back in their conversation, Justice Gogoi and Kaushik found themselves

reflecting on this collective grief. Three men bound by a shared birthday, but now reduced to two, remembering the third.

They did not grieve in the formal sense. Instead, they celebrated. They celebrated a voice that had brightened mornings, lightened burdens, and strengthened connections to home. They celebrated the audacity of a man who lived as he pleased yet never abandoned his people. They celebrated the rare gift of coincidence that had tied their lives together, however loosely.

A Voice That Refuses to Fade

As Assam prepares for the final farewell, one truth is already clear: Zubeen's

voice will not fade. It will continue to echo in the homes of judges, journalists, shopkeepers, farmers, and students. It will be sung at weddings, played on old radios, and streamed on smartphones. It will remain the daily ritual for many, just as it was for Justice Gogoi.

Some connections are too deep for death to sever. Some coincidences are too perfect to be dismissed as chance. Zubeen was not just a singer. He was, as Gogoi said, "God's divine creation."

And divine creations do not end. They transform into memory, ritual, and song, carried forward by every voice that dares to sing them again.

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## BARAK FESTIVAL

JANUARY 10-12, 2025

**ACTIVITY PROGRAM**



**10 JAN**  
**NE Cultural Fest**  
 Any Form of Art and Cultural showcase can be showcased here.  
 The Top performances will be invited to perform in the Main Event.  
 Schools, Colleges, University Department, Individual & Group Competition.





**11 JAN**  
**Adventure Sports**  
 Trekking & Canoe, Obstacle Navigations, Sport Climbing, Disaster Management, Techniques, Water Sports, etc. will be a part of this with skills to face the challenges in life, increase confidence and sense of purpose in one's life and also connected with nature.



**11 JAN**  
**Barak Valley Conclave**  
 Potential Issues and Challenges of Barak Valley to be discussed by stakeholders.  
 Industry, NGOs, and Government can register for this platform. Awareness, awareness, awareness, and awareness through participation through invitation only. Different awards are provided.



## Barak Festival

Adventure Sports, Art & Culture Promotion



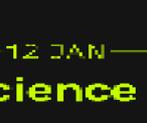
**JAN'25**  
**Online Global Fest**  
 All can participate online and send a video clip on Poems, Songs, and Dance Performances, Bengali, English, Hindi & Manipuri. Last Date: 31st December 2024.



**10 JAN**  
**Media Conclave**  
 Media Conclave (Media Conclave, Workshops, and the Fund, Talks and Conferences are part of the 'Barak Festival 2025'. Theme: 'One for All, All for One'.  
 Media Conclave (Workshops, Seminars, and Conferences) are sponsored by, sponsors, guides, speakers, members.



**11 JAN**  
**5E For Success Conclave**  
 The 4th Annual Success Conclave is going to be held on the theme: 'From School to Campus to Corporate'.  
 Schools, Educational Institutions and corporate houses can join the Conclave as sponsors.  
 Quiz and Group Discussion for Barak valley Schools & Colleges, Extension, Seminars, Public Speaking (College) & an online event where students of NE India Schools and Colleges can participate.



## Barak Festival

Band Night | 10 JAN  
Musical Night | 11 JAN



**10-12 JAN**  
**Science Studio**  
 Get a glimpse of Science to its new heights!  
 Class VI-XI | Teachers | Seniors, Administrators | Parents  
**Raw science out of textbooks into real-life experiences of students.**



**10-12 JAN**  
**E-Sports**  
 Full Blasted Demos | CASH PRIZES | Trophy



**DEC'24-JAN'25**  
**Photography**  
 Online Photography Contest  
 River Barak | NE India | Art & Culture of NE | NE Culture  
 Real-Time Photography Contest of 'Barak Festival 2025'



**11 JAN**  
**film festival**  
 Award-Giving Ceremony | Film from Mizoram  
 Short Films from Barak Valley, NE India, W & Media Talk | Exhibitions | Meet & Greet



**10-12 JAN**  
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