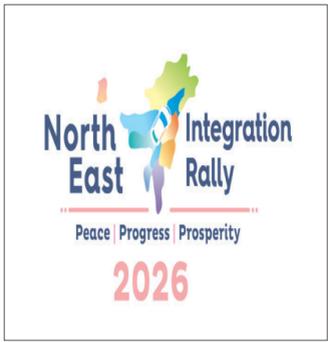




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PERSPECTIVE

Growth needs two things: courage to break old patterns, and discipline to build new ones.
~ Harsh Goenka, Chairman, RPG Enterprises

HOLIDAY NOTICE

The offices of KRC TIMES will remain closed on Wednesday, 17th September 2025 on account of Biswakarma Puja. Accordingly, there will be no publication of the newspaper on Wednesday. Normal publication will resume from the following day. We wish our readers a very happy Biswakarma Puja.

— The Editor

NIT Silchar suspends five Bangladeshi students after hostel violence

SHILLONG
Five Bangladeshi students studying at the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Silchar have been suspended for their role in a violent clash on campus and will be deported, officials confirmed on September 15. The students, enrolled under Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) scholarships, were also allegedly found in possession of narcotics during a search of their hostel rooms. "We have enough evidence to establish that they were actively involved in campus violence and have been suspended for two semesters," NIT Director Dilip Kumar Baidya said. He added that the students would be sent back to Bangladesh. The incident took place on September 8 when a group of third-year students allegedly attacked their compatriots inside the hostel. Witnesses claimed the attackers were under the influence of drugs and carried rods, knives and screwdrivers. "They were armed with rods, knives and screwdrivers, and targeted Bangladeshi students from the final year, causing serious injuries in an attack that lasted nearly 30 minutes," said one student.

WHO SAID WHAT

In Delhi two prominent leaders from Assam have a road named after them. One is Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi and the other is Bodofa Upendranath Brahma.
~ Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, Assam CM

Kuki-Zo Council Denies Plans to Reopen NH-2 After PM's Assam Visit

IMPHAL

Just two days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Manipur and emphasized the need to strengthen ties between the hills and the valley, the Kuki-Zo Council (KZC) pushed back against reports suggesting the reopening of National Highway 2 (Imphal-Dimapur) for unrestricted movement.

In a strongly worded statement issued Monday, the KZC denied granting permission for free passage along NH-2.

The council warned individuals from both the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities not to cross the buffer zone, citing the absence of any agreement in the ongoing ethnic conflict. The KZC emphasized the sensitivity of security along the highway and stated, "We have not permitted any free movement."

The council also reiterated its demand for unconditional respect of the buffer zone and warned that any breach would trigger serious consequences and further destabilize the region's fragile peace.

Although the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) had announced on September 4 that NH-2 would be open and instructed security forces to facilitate safe movement, the KZC clarified that it had only asked



residents of Kangpokpi to cooperate with those forces.

"We never declared the highway open for unrestricted public use," the council said, distancing itself from the Centre's interpretation.

The council further accused unnamed groups of distorting its earlier messages, claiming that such misrepresentations have fueled confusion and mistrust during a particularly sensitive period.

The buffer zone, which security forces established after the outbreak of ethnic violence in May 2023, serves as a de facto boundary separating Meitei-majority valley areas from the Kuki-Zo tribal hill districts.

Armed forces patrol this corridor across key conflict-prone areas in Imphal West, Kangpokpi, Bishnupur, and Churachandpur, while police monitor it through outposts.

While authorities designed the buffer zone to reduce the risk of fresh violence, several Meitei groups argue that it has instead institutionalized division and made reconciliation more difficult.

They have expressed concerns that the arrangement infringes on their constitutional right to freedom of movement, especially along NH-2, which passes through the Kuki-dominated district of Kangpokpi.

Although Manipur Police previously denied the existence of any officially designated buffer zones, they acknowledged the deployment of security personnel in fringe and sensitive areas to maintain law and order.

Tensions escalated further late Sunday night when unidentified individuals allegedly set fire to the home of Calvin Aikhenthang, a senior leader of the Kuki National Organisation (KNO) and a key signatory of the September 4 Suspension of Operations (SoO) extension pact with the MHA.

In a separate incident, assailants targeted the home of Ginza Vualzong, spokesperson for both the Kuki-Zo Council and the Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF).

Officials reported that locals had intervened before the attack caused significant damage.

All Schools, Colleges Closed in Manipur Following Flood, Landslide Crisis



IMPHAL

All educational institutions across Manipur will remain closed on September 16, as heavy rainfall continues to trigger flooding and landslides in multiple districts of the northeastern state.

The state government issued two separate orders on September 15, with the Directorate of Education ordering closure of all schools while the Directorate of University and Higher Education shutting down colleges in valley districts.

Ng. Bhogendra Meitei, Di-

rector of Education, announced that all schools across the state - including government, central government, private, aided and unaided institutions - will remain closed on Tuesday due to prevailing weather conditions that have caused floods and landslides across various districts.

Meanwhile, L. Radhakanta, Director of University and Higher Education, specifically ordered closure of colleges in five valley districts - Imphal West, Imphal East, Bishnupur, Kakching and Thoubal - citing incessant rain over the past few days and subsequent flooding in different parts of these areas.

The comprehensive shutdown affects thousands of students from primary level to higher education across the state. The decision underlines the severity of the weather situation, with authorities taking a precautionary approach to ensure safety of students and staff. Educational authorities are monitoring the situation closely and are expected to announce resumption of classes once weather conditions improve and safety can be ensured for the academic community.

Eight Meghalaya ministers resign ahead of cabinet reshuffle



SHILLONG

In a major political development ahead of a cabinet reshuffle, eight ministers in the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) government tendered their resignations on Tuesday, paving the way for the induction of a new council of ministers.

Chief Minister Conrad K

Sangma, who leads the NPP-led coalition, called on Governor C H Vijayashankar at Raj Bhavan and submitted the resignations. Officials confirmed that the new ministers will be sworn in at 5 pm on Tuesday at Raj Bhavan.

Among those who stepped down are prominent figures, including Health Minister AL Hek of the BJP, Tourism Minister Paul Lyngdoh of the UDP, and Social Welfare Minister Ampareen Lyngdoh of the NPP.

Others who resigned include Comingone Ymbon, Rakam A Sangma, and Abu Taher Mondal of the NPP, Kyrmen Shylla of the UDP, and Shakliar Warjri of the HSPDP.

The resignations are being seen as part of a planned exercise by the MDA government to refresh the cabinet midway through its term. Sources indicated that the reshuffle aims to balance representation among coalition partners and strengthen the government ahead of upcoming political challenges.

With the fresh inductions set to take place later in the day, political observers in Shillong are closely watching the reshuffle, which is expected to redefine the power equations within the ruling alliance.

If We Study Bengal's History, Tripura's Must Be Taught Too: Pradyot Debbarma



AGARTALA

Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma, founder of the Tipra Motha Party and descendant of Tripura's royal family, has demanded parity in historical education, arguing that Tripura's children deserve to learn about their own heritage with the same emphasis given to other states' histories.

Speaking at a public gathering on September 15, Debbarma announced plans for the Tripura

Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) to establish cultural complex centres statewide, serving all indigenous communities, including Chakma, Mog, Hrangkhawal, and Ranglong peoples.

Debbarma highlighted a significant educational gap, pointing out that while Tripura students study the histories of Bengal, Bihar and other states, they receive minimal instruction about their own region's past. "Nobody tells them who constructed the Mata

Tripura Sundari Temple or what Maharajas Amar Krishna, Birendra Kishore, and Bir Bikram Manikya contributed," Debbarma said. "Instead, we only learn about what political leaders have done."

His remarks underscore growing concerns about cultural preservation among indigenous communities in the northeastern state. Debbarma emphasised that protecting tribal identity requires deliberate educational initiatives that connect young people with their ancestral heritage.

"If we are expected to learn about Bengal's history, then they should also learn about Tripura's history," he stated.

"If we need to listen to their stories, then they must listen to ours as well."

The royal scion framed his argument within India's democratic framework, asserting equal representation as a fundamental right. "India is for everyone. If anyone reacts, I will also react—because this is my democratic right," he declared.

Debbarma also urged tribal communities to move beyond political divisions. "We should not think only about politics but also about our own community," he said. "The time has come for Tripura people to be united."

Former Manipur MP Switches to NPP in Drive to Bolster Northeast Cohesion

SHILLONG

Dr Lorho S. Pfoze, former Lok Sabha member representing Outer Manipur, officially joined the National People's Party at the organisation's Shillong headquarters on September 16, marking a significant political development for the regional party's expansion efforts.

The addition of Dr Pfoze represents a strategic move for NPP as it seeks to consolidate its presence across northeastern states. Meghalaya Chief Minister and NPP National President Conrad K Sangma emphasised the importance of this recruitment during the formal welcome ceremony.

"Dr Lorho brings to the party his experience, wisdom, and support base from the State of Manipur. We are confident that Dr Lorho will be an asset to the party and will work closely to further NPP's mantra of One Voice, One North East," Sangma said.

The NPP chief highlight-



ed Pfoze's unique position in Manipur's complex political landscape, describing him as "a figure widely accepted by different communities in Manipur" and praising his reputation as "a very soft-spoken, honest, and transparent politician."

Sangma positioned the re-

ruitment within NPP's broader regional ambitions, stating that despite facing multiple challenges, the party has successfully expanded its reach. "The party has built trust and is viewed as the actual platform where the people of the North East can come together and

raise their voice, which can be heard," he explained.

The ceremony underlined NPP's commitment to fulfilling the vision of its late founder, Purno Agitok Sangma, who established the party to serve as a unified voice for northeastern interests. Current leadership

emphasised this legacy as central to their continued expansion strategy.

Pfoze expressed his commitment to the party's inclusive approach during his remarks. "We, as indigenous communities, should work together in the region. The vision of late Purno Agitok Sangma is an inspiration for us all. His views were to reach out to all communities in this great nation," he said.

The new NPP member outlined his vision for the party's future role: "NPP should become the party for everyone in the North East, the indigenous people, and all the tribal communities."

The joining ceremony drew attendance from key party figures, including NPP National Working President James K. Sangma, Meghalaya Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong, state ministers, MLAs from Manipur, and other senior party officials.



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BEYOND THE BOUNDARY

On September 14th, the Indian and Pakistani cricket teams walked onto the field in Dubai. For broadcasters, it was the pinnacle of the sporting calendar, a guaranteed ratings bonanza. For countless fans, it was a thrilling contest. Yet, for a nation still processing the grief of the tragic terrorist attack in Pahalgam months earlier, the event triggered a complex and uncomfortable national conversation. This juxtaposition presents a critical opportunity to move beyond reactive sentiment and examine the intricate challenge of reconciling raw public emotion with the sustained, rational demands of statecraft.

The national response to the Pahalgam attack was profound and unified. There was a palpable, justified sense of outrage. The political rhetoric across the spectrum was unequivocal, speaking of a halt to engagement. This public sentiment, a natural and necessary expression of solidarity with the victims, created an expectation of a prolonged period of disengagement. The subsequent decision to participate in a sporting event, particularly one as emotionally charged as a cricket match against Pakistan, therefore created a perceptible gap between public expectation and state action. This gap is not a failure of intent but rather a symptom of a larger, recurring dynamic that merits dispassionate analysis.

This cycle of attack, outrage, rhetorical ultimatums, and eventual recalibration is a recognizable feature of the India-Pakistan relationship. It highlights a tension that all modern democracies navigate: the powerful, immediate force of public emotion versus the patient, often pragmatic, and long-term calculations of foreign and security policy. This situation underscores the inherent tension governments face: balancing the public's legitimate emotional response with the complex, long-term calculations of strategic diplomacy, which must account for multilateral commitments and potential back-channel necessities.

The core of the public's disillusionment lies less in the specific decision to play cricket and more in the perception of a disjointed process. When maximalist rhetoric establishes a certain public expectation, a subsequent policy decision that appears to contradict it can be perceived as a lack of resolve, even if that decision is rooted in a different, more strategic calculus. This disconnect can erode trust in public institutions over time. The challenge, therefore, is institutional: how can a state manage public expectations with greater clarity and consistency without being boxed into foreign policy positions that may not serve the national interest in the long run?

This cycle also invites us to examine the ecosystem that amplifies emotion. The 24/7 media landscape, driven by metrics of engagement, often prioritizes amplifying outrage over fostering nuanced debate. Complex issues of national security and diplomacy are frequently distilled into binary choices: hawk or dove, boycott or betrayal. This framing does a disservice to the citizenry, simplifying incredibly complex decisions into emotional litmus tests. The responsibility of all stakeholders be it media, political leaders or the civil society is to elevate the discourse, providing context and fostering a public understanding that strategic national interests are often advanced through means more subtle and enduring than symbolic boycotts.

There is a crucial distinction to be made here between nationalism and patriotism. The former can be reactive, fueled by immediate emotion and a desire for symbolic gestures. The latter is a steadier, more profound commitment to the nation's long-term health, expressed through informed debate, rational policy-making, and a commitment to justice that outlasts news cycles. A mature democracy must strive to cultivate the latter, ensuring that the nation's response to crises is built on a bedrock of principle and strategy, not just passion.

The question posed by the families of the Pahalgam victims, "how can we cheer when our mourning is not yet over?" is profoundly legitimate and deserves a serious answer. That answer cannot be found in a single sporting event. It must be found in the unwavering, long-term demonstration that their sacrifice is the nation's foremost priority. This demonstration is not primarily symbolic. It is institutional, manifested in robust security apparatus, unwavering support for the armed forces, comprehensive care for the families of victims, and a diplomatic corps empowered to relentlessly pursue the nation's security objectives on the global stage. These are the pillars of meaningful solidarity; they operate silently but with far greater impact than any temporary gesture.

The commercial dimension of such a high-profile event is an unavoidable reality of modern global sport. The massive financial ecosystem surrounding an India-Pakistan match, from broadcasting rights to advertising is a neutral force; it is neither inherently good nor bad. However, it creates a powerful incentive structure. The risk is that the sheer volume of this commercial activity can inadvertently drown out more subdued but more important voices, such as those of the grieving. A responsible society acknowledges this tension and consciously creates space for those voices, ensuring that commerce does not eclipse compassion.

The experience of other democracies offers valuable lessons. Many nations grapple with balancing public sentiment against strategic imperatives. The key differentiator is often the presence of established, transparent frameworks. For instance, a clear, publicly communicated policy that outlines India's stance on bilateral sporting ties following acts of terrorism would manage public expectation effectively. Such a framework could include provisions for multilateral obligations, explaining why participation in Asia Cup is distinct from a bilateral series. This is not a sign of weakness but of confidence and clarity. It signals that the nation's policies are driven by considered doctrine, not by the fluctuating tides of sentiment. It assures citizens and the international community that India speaks with a consistent and principled voice.

Furthermore, the role of institutions like Parliament is vital. A bipartisan consultation aimed at forging a broad consensus on the principles guiding cultural and sporting engagements with nations that sponsor terrorism could be immensely beneficial. This would depoliticize individual decisions and anchor them in a larger strategic framework that enjoys cross-party support, insulating foreign policy from the most volatile swings of political rhetoric.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Don't compare yourself with anyone in this world. If you do so, you are insulting yourself" - Bill Gates

GST 2.0: A FESTIVAL OF RELIEF AND RENEWAL FOR INDIA AND J&K



TARESH GUPTA

When the Goods and Services Tax (GST) came into effect in July 2017, it was billed as a revolution—"one nation, one tax." It replaced a messy patchwork of central and state levies with a unified system. But what followed was more complicated. Multiple rate slabs, endless disputes over classification, and heavy compliance burdens soon turned the "good and simple tax" into something more confusing.

Now, with GST 2.0, the most sweeping reform since its launch, the government has attempted to fix those flaws. From September 22, 2025, Indians will live under a simpler structure: just two broad slabs—5% for essentials and 18% for most other goods and services—alongside a special 40% rate for luxury and sin items like tobacco, pan masala, and premium cars.

This is not just technical tinkering. It's a realignment that touches households, businesses, and governments alike. For families in Jammu, Srinagar, or Sopore, it shows up directly at the grocery counter. For artisans in Pampore or hoteliers in Gulmarg, it changes the way they price their goods and services. For policymakers, it offers both relief and risk: lower prices and stronger demand, but also concerns about revenue.

Relief at the Household Level
The most immediate impact of GST 2.0 will be felt by families. Essentials—milk, paneer, medicines, daily-use personal care items, agricultural machinery, and insurance premiums—are all taxed at the lighter 5% rate. For middle-class households, even bigger-ticket items like refrigerators, washing machines, two-wheelers, and small cars will now fall into the more affordable bracket.

Take a household in Jammu city. Their monthly expenses on groceries, medicines, and utilities could fall by several hundred rupees. That money doesn't vanish—it gets spent elsewhere, whether on children's education, savings, or small luxuries that were earlier postponed. In Baramulla or Anantnag, a farming family will save on equipment and insurance, easing their cost of cultivation.

For regions like J&K, where inflation has been felt keenly in the past two years, this relief is not abstract. It is tangible, visible, and timely.

Tourism: A Sector Ready to Bounce Back
Perhaps no industry stands to benefit more in J&K than tourism. Once taxed at 12%, hotel stays now attract just 5% GST. That simple change could be transformative.

Tourism in the Valley has always been sensitive to politics, security, and global trends. After the recent Pahalgam attack, visitor numbers dipped, leaving hotels and guesthouses worried

about their survival. The rate cut comes as a lifeline. Cheaper stays can lure back domestic tourists, especially families from Delhi, Punjab, and Maharashtra who weigh costs closely when planning holidays.

Imagine a family booking a week-long stay in Srinagar. A 7% saving on room tariffs may sound small, but multiplied over hundreds of bookings, it makes a big difference to hoteliers and travel operators. Local guides, taxi drivers, shikara boatmen, and handicraft sellers—who all rely on the tourist ecosystem—stand to benefit indirectly.

Handicrafts and SMEs: A Heritage Revived
Kashmir's identity is tied to its crafts: Pashmina shawls, carpets, papier-mâché art, walnut wood furniture. These are not just products but legacies passed through generations. Yet artisans have struggled with rising input costs and stiff competition from machine-made substitutes.

Lower GST on raw materials, combined with a simpler two-slab system, reduces costs and clears up classification disputes that once plagued traders. A shawl weaver in downtown Srinagar or a carpet seller in Budgam can now price their goods more competitively in domestic and export markets.

For small and medium enterprises (SMEs) across Jammu's industrial hubs—whether in Gangyal, Bari Brahmana, Samba or Kathua—simpler taxation means more than just lower costs. It means fewer arguments with tax officers, less time spent on paperwork, and more energy focused on production and sales. SMEs form the backbone of employment in J&K, and giving them breathing space is key to sustainable growth.

Agriculture and Horticulture: The Rural Backbone
Agriculture remains J&K's largest employer, and horticulture—particularly apples, walnuts, and saffron—is its pride. Lower GST rates on farm machinery and crop insurance are a direct incentive for farmers to invest in productivity.

An apple grower in Sopore investing in better cold storage, or a saffron farmer in Pampore insuring his crop against unpredictable weather, will now pay less in taxes. The result is better margins and greater security. Over time, these savings can translate into higher quality produce and more competitive exports, cementing J&K's reputation in national and global markets.

A Fairer Tax System
At the heart of GST 2.0 is a principle of fairness. Essentials are taxed lightly, luxuries heavily. This creates a system that feels just and equitable. Families struggling with daily

expenses are shielded, while those who can afford luxury cars or premium products contribute more. This balancing act is particularly important in J&K, where income disparities are wide. By ensuring that the burden is not placed on essential consumption, the reform protects vulnerable households and strengthens the social contract between taxpayers and the state.

The Revenue Question
The cheer does come with a caveat. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has warned that J&K could face a 10-12% shortfall in GST collections, roughly ₹1,000 crore annually. For a Union Territory already dependent on central transfers, this is no small figure.

Business associations like the ICC Jammu have echoed this concern, pointing out that revenue losses could limit the administration's ability to invest in public services and infrastructure. A reduction in inflows, they argue, risks widening the fiscal deficit.

Yet history shows that lower taxes and simpler compliance often broaden the tax base. As more transactions come into the formal economy, and as demand expands, revenues tend to stabilize. J&K's real opportunity lies in using GST 2.0 to expand its economic activity—attract more tourists, revive handicrafts, and boost agriculture—so that the pie itself grows larger.

Why Optimism Outweighs Anxiety
There is reason to be optimistic. Analysts expect GST 2.0 to shave 0.5 to 1.1 percentage points off inflation nationwide. Consumption is set to rise, particularly during the festive season. For J&K, where demand is often linked to tourist arrivals and agricultural cycles, this timing is critical.

Revenue concerns are genuine, but manageable. The Centre, which has already budgeted for a national revenue cost of ₹48,000 crore, has both the fiscal space and the political incentive to support revenue-deficit regions like J&K through transitional aid. What matters more is how local industries seize this opportunity.

A Chance to Rebuild Confidence
Beyond economics, reforms like GST 2.0 build confidence. They show citizens that government policy can adjust, correct, and deliver relief. For J&K, which has lived through political turbulence and economic uncertainty, confidence is not a small thing. It is the foundation of recovery.

A Srinagar shopkeeper who sees his monthly filings simplified, a Jammu family that saves on groceries, a Baramulla farmer who invests in better machinery—all of them are reassured that the system is working with them, not against them. That reassurance matters as much as the rupees saved.

Celebrating the Step Forward

Floods in North India – A Man-Made Ecological Crisis

SHUBHAM SHARMA

In recent years, North India—particularly Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Punjab—has faced recurrent flood disasters. While intense monsoon rainfall triggered by climate variability is the immediate cause, the deeper roots lie in unsustainable human interventions. Reckless deforestation, illegal sand mining, destruction of grasslands, and encroachment on floodplains have destabilised the fragile Himalayan ecosystem, turning natural hydrological processes into man-made ecological crises.

Key Causes of Flood Vulnerability
1. Deforestation and Road Expansion
Large-scale road widening, hydropower projects, and construction have led to massive tree felling in the Himalayas. Old, deep-rooted trees that stabilised slopes are being replaced by saplings that cannot provide the same soil-binding strength. This accelerates landslides and slope failures, causing rivers to swell with debris.

Fact: The Forest Survey of India (2022) reported that Himachal Pradesh lost over 1,000 hectares of forest cover in a decade, much of it due to road expansion.

2. Loss of Meadows and Grasslands
Meadows and alpine pastures act as natural sponges, absorbing rainfall and releasing it slowly into aquifers. However, urbanisation,

hydropower projects, and overgrazing have degraded these ecosystems. Without meadows, rainwater rushes downhill unchecked, creating flash floods and destroying settlements in valleys.

3. Illegal Sand Mining
Unregulated mining in rivers like the Beas, Sutlej, Ravi, and Chenab has destabilised riverbeds and altered fluvial geomorphology. This weakens river channels, making them prone to sudden shifts during heavy rains.

Fact: The Central Water Commission (2020) warned that rampant sand mining increases bank erosion and channel instability, intensifying downstream flood risks in South Jammu and Punjab's floodplains.

4. Encroachment on Floodplains
Rapid urbanisation has led to illegal construction on riverbanks, wetlands, and drainage channels, reducing their natural carrying capacity. Even moderate rainfall now causes inundation.

The 2014 Kashmir floods, which displaced nearly 500,000 people, were worsened by encroachment on the Jhelum floodplains. Experts from the National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM) have emphasised that reclaiming floodplains is critical for future resilience.

Impacts of Floods
Humanitarian Crisis: Thousands dis-

placed, homes destroyed, lives lost.

Economic Losses: Infrastructure damage runs into thousands of crores annually.

Agricultural Impact: Floodwaters erode fertile soil and damage crops.

Ecological Consequences: Landslides, habitat loss, and reduced groundwater recharge worsen long-term ecological balance.

Fact: According to the IMD, the Himalayan region recorded over 270 extreme rainfall events in 2023 alone, nearly double the long-term average.

Solutions and Way Forward
1. Sustainable Infrastructure Development
Adopt eco-engineering methods like slope terracing, retaining walls, and bioengineering with native species.

Limit tree felling and prefer greenfield bypasses over reckless widening of existing roads.

Make Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) mandatory for large projects.

2. Protecting Meadows and Grasslands
Regulate overgrazing through community-based management.

Restore degraded meadows and wetlands as eco-hydrological reserves.

Expand urban green spaces to enhance infiltration and reduce runoff.

3. Regulating Sand Mining
Deploy drones and GPS-tracking systems

GST 2.0 is not the final word on tax reform. There will be further adjustments, and challenges remain. But it is a bold step in the right direction.

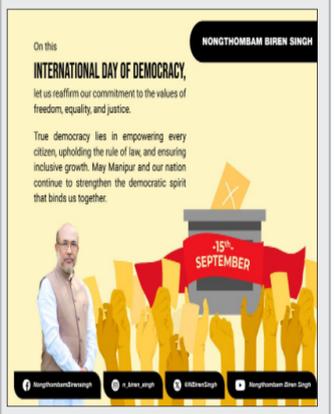
For India as a whole, it promises lower prices, higher demand, and simpler compliance. For Jammu and Kashmir, it promises revival of tourism, of handicrafts, of agriculture, and of household confidence. Yes, revenue will need to be managed, but optimism outweighs anxiety. If paired with central support and smart local policies, the reform can transform J&K's economy in ways that go beyond numbers. In households across the Union Territory, relief is already being felt. In businesses large and small, hope is returning. That is the spirit of GST 2.0: not just a tax change, but a festival of relief and renewal.

(The author is a Chartered Accountant)

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

On this International Day of Democracy, let us reaffirm our commitment to the principles of equality, justice, and freedom. Together, we will strengthen democratic values and ensure that the voices of every citizen continue to shape the future of Manipur and our great nation.

~ N. Biren Singh, Former CM, Manipur



to monitor mining in real time.

Establish Quick Response Teams (QRTs) to curb mafia-led illegal mining.

Encourage sustainable alternatives like manufactured sand (M-sand).

4. Preventing Encroachment and Planning Land Use
Strictly enforce no-construction zones in floodplains.

Rehabilitate wetlands and riverbanks with multi-layered vegetation (grasses, shrubs, riparian trees).

Use GIS-based flood-risk mapping in urban master plans.

The flood crisis in North India is less a natural calamity and more a human-made ecological disaster.

Deforestation, sand mining, encroachment, and grassland destruction have weakened the Himalayan ecosystem, making it extremely vulnerable to extreme weather events.

As the Himalayas are a young fold mountain system, they are naturally fragile. But reckless human interventions have worsened their instability.

The way forward lies in shifting from reactive disaster relief to proactive ecological conservation. By restoring forests, protecting meadows, regulating mining, and enforcing scientific land-use planning, North India can build long-term resilience.

BJP government in BTR key to sustaining peace and development: Sarbananda Sonowal

GUWAHATI

Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal on Monday underscored the importance of a BJP-led government in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), saying it is crucial to safeguard the peace and stability achieved in recent years.

Addressing a rally at Fatemabad Tea Estate under Salbari constituency in Baksa district, Sonowal recalled the troubled past of Bodoland, once synonymous with unrest and insecurity. "For decades, people here lived under fear and neglect. It was only under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah that the Bodo Accord was implemented with sincerity, transforming Bodoland into a land of peace, brotherhood, and development," he said.

The Union Minister credited the Modi government's "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas" approach for instilling trust and inclusivity among communities in BTR. He stressed that peace must be nurtured through trans-



parent governance, empowerment of local people, and equal opportunities for all. Launching a scathing attack on

Congress, Sonowal alleged that successive governments ignored the region, leaving generations in poverty and uncertainty. "Congress pushed BTR into darkness. In contrast, under Modi ji, not only has peace been restored in sensitive areas, but India has also emerged as a strong global voice," he remarked.

Highlighting India's economic rise, Sonowal noted that the country has moved from the world's 11th largest economy in 2014 to the 4th largest today. He further asserted that by 2029, India will become the 3rd largest economy, and by 2047, among the most developed nations — a growth journey in which BTR must be an integral part.

Promising clean and accountable governance, the Minister said that only a corruption-free system can bring justice and prosperity. Urging people to support BJP candidate Chakradhar Das in the upcoming BTR elections, Sonowal said, "This is a fight to protect the peace we achieved together. Only a BJP government can safeguard BTR's future and ensure every citizen prospers in unity and dignity."

India, Thailand conclude joint military exercise in Meghalaya

SHILLONG

The Indian Army and the Royal Thai Army wrapped up their two-week joint military exercise Maitree-XIV with a closing ceremony at the Foreign Training Node in Umroi Cantonment, Meghalaya, on September 14.

The exercise, conducted under a United Nations mandate, focused on enhancing interoperability between the two forces and familiarising troops with each other's operational procedures and combat drills.

The final phase featured a 48-hour validation exercise, where soldiers carried out complex operations including the creation of a temporary operating base, intelligence and surveillance tasks, village isolation drills, helicopter missions, raids, and hostage rescue. Both sides also demonstrated the use of new-generation equipment during the drills.

The ceremony concluded with felicitation of outstanding soldiers and cultural exchanges that highlighted the heritage of both nations. Friendly matches of volleyball, basketball,



and tug of war added to the camaraderie built during the exercise.

Military officials noted that the joint training not only strengthened operational cooperation but also reinforced defense ties between India and Thailand.

Meghalaya police warn against sharing videos, photos of deceased child, cite legal consequences

SHILLONG

East Khasi Hills SP, Vivek Syiem, has strongly condemned the circulation of videos and photographs of the deceased minor from Nongrah, whose body was recovered on Monday, September 15.

Authorities have urged social media users, including content creators, not to upload or share such material, citing the severe emotional impact on the victim's family and the wider community.

"Such thoughtless acts show a complete lack of respect for the victim and her family," SP Syiem said in an advisory. He warned that individuals or groups failing to comply could face serious legal consequences.

The advisory follows the discovery of four-year-old Insaphira Lyngdoh Mawnai, who went missing on Sunday, September 14. Her body was found inside an under-construction house near her home in Nongrah Nonglum, submerged in a waterlogged pit with a rock placed on top. Police have described the circumstances as suspicious and are treating the case as potentially criminal.

Forensic experts have been called to assist with investigations, and a post-mortem examination will determine the exact cause of death. SP Syiem emphasised that the police are taking the matter very seriously, with a thorough investigation underway.

Residents of Nongrah remain shaken by the tragic incident, which unfolded after the child disappeared while playing in her home's courtyard early Sunday morning. The SP's advisory urges the public to respect the family's privacy and remove any related content from social media platforms immediately.

Assam Rifles conducts Agniveer pre-recruitment training in Assam's Dima Hasao

DIMA HASAO

The Assam Rifles conducted Agniveer pre-recruitment training at Haflong in Assam's Dima Hasao district on Monday.

The training covers physical conditioning, written test preparation, medical awareness, personality development, and guidance. 53 enthusiastic youth, including 15 girls and 38 boys from the district, have enrolled in the first batch, said Assam Rifles in a release.

"The overwhelming response reflects the zeal of the local population to serve the nation and highlights the Assam Rifles' role in fostering trust, confidence, and opportunities in the far-flung region," said the release.

Earlier this month, Assam Rifles organised an Ex-Servicemen Interaction Meet at Udaipur Training Node to strengthen bonds with its veterans and reaffirm commitment to their welfare.

The event provided a meaningful platform for ex-servicemen to share their insights, experiences and prob-

lems. During the session, grievances relating to medical facilities, welfare claims, and dependent support were highlighted, said the press release.

Each grievance was carefully documented with an assurance that appropriate measures would be initiated in a time-bound manner to solve the problem.

The interaction reflected the organisation's continued endeavour to assist its veterans beyond active service. The meeting concluded with a pledge to prioritise veteran welfare, thereby strengthening the bridge between the serving and retired fraternity of the Force.

Earlier on August 13, in its ongoing efforts to reach out to veterans and reaffirm its enduring commitment to their welfare, the Indian Army conducted a series of programmes across Upper Assam, including Lekhapani, Digboi and Rupai. These initiatives stand as heartfelt tributes to the selfless service of ex-servicemen and Veer Naris, while addressing their key needs and concerns.

KOHIMA

Nagaland School Education Department addresses decade-long RMSA teacher pay dispute. Salary support reduced after RMSA merged into Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan. High Court ordered scale pay but funding ratio changes complicated matters.

The Nagaland School Education Department has issued a press release clarifying the long-standing matter concerning the RMSA Graduate Teachers of the 2016 batch, whose employment terms and pay scales have remained a contentious issue for nearly a decade.

According to the Department, the teachers were initially recruited in 2016 under the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) of the then Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. Recruitment was

carried out through an open process by the Nagaland Education Mission Society (NEMS). Upon selection, the teachers were appointed on a contractual basis with a fixed salary of ₹31,315 per month, after signing affidavits acknowledging that their tenure was co-terminus with the scheme and subject to annual fund releases by the Centre.

In 2018, following the integration of RMSA, SSA and Teacher Education into the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the Ministry of Education reduced its salary support to ₹25,000 per month. Consequently, the salaries of the RMSA teachers were slashed. This led to the aggrieved teachers to approach the Gauhati High Court, Kohima Bench. On May 20, 2020, the Court quashed the order reducing salaries but did not grant scale pay. Since then, the teachers have continued to

receive the earlier fixed pay of ₹31,315 per month, with partial funding from the Centre and the shortfall covered by the State Government.

In 2022, the teachers again approached the Court, demanding a pay band of ₹9,300-₹4,800 with Grade Pay of ₹4,200. On March 16, 2022, the High Court directed the State to grant scale pay.

The issue intensified as the funding pattern of the Centre changed, shifting from a 90:10 Centre-State ratio to 60:40, along with a 5% annual reduction in funding support. This has reduced Central assistance per teacher from ₹25,000 to ₹18,750 per month, significantly increasing the financial burden on Nagaland.

The State Government subsequently filed a Special Leave Petition (SLP) before the Supreme Court, which on May 20, 2025, upheld the High Court's

directive. A Review Petition was filed by the State on August 14, 2025.

To address the deadlock, a meeting was held on September 2 and 3, 2025, between government representatives and aggrieved teachers, urging them to resume classes while the Review Petition is under consideration. On September 11, 2025, a joint meeting chaired by the Commissioner & Secretary, School Education, along with representatives of the All Nagaland School Teachers' Association (ANSTA), RMSA 2016 batch, and department officials, assured the teachers that the Government will abide by the Supreme Court's final verdict.

The Department reiterated its request for teachers to resume their duties, emphasizing that the State remains committed to honouring the Court's judgment once the Review Petition is disposed of.

Nagaland government files review petition in Supreme Court over RMSA 2016 salary case

Tripura CM stresses engineers' role in state's development, targets 2047 vision

AGARTALA

Engineers are central to Tripura's push for growth, Chief Minister Manik Saha said on September 15 while addressing a program at Pragya Bhavan to mark the 58th Engineer's Day.

Paying tribute to Bharat Ratna M. Visvesvaraya, Saha said engineers are the backbone of progress, particularly in infrastructure. "The contribution of engineers is undeniable. Without them, progress is impossible," he noted.

Citing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's goal of making India a developed nation by 2047, Saha said Tripura has also aligned itself with



this vision. "Tripura too has

begun its journey towards becoming a developed state by 2047 and currently ranks fifth nationally," he said. The Chief Minister highlighted the presence of key institutions such as the Tripura Institute of Technology, NIT, IIIT, ICFAI University, and Techno India, saying these are shaping the state's technical workforce.

He pointed out that nearly Rs 7,000 crore has been allocated in the Union Budget for infrastructure, underlining the role of engineers in projects ranging from roads and bridges to digital systems. "With rapid technological advancement, the responsibilities of engineers have increased. In Tripura, e-offices have been

introduced across all levels of governance — from the cabinet to panchayats — through engineering expertise," Saha added. The state's entrepreneurial ecosystem was also in focus. Saha said around 2.1 lakh entrepreneurs are registered under MSMEs in Tripura and highlighted opportunities in emerging technologies. He stressed that drones and AI could play a significant role in areas like healthcare.

"On Engineer's Day, we should pledge to take Tripura forward. Engineers must focus on harnessing local resources to improve livelihoods, increase per capita income, and boost the state's GSDP," he said.

Himanta Biswa Sarma plotted to block Sonowal's CM bid in 2021, claims former AGP MLA

GUWAHATI

Former AGP MLA Satyabrata Kalita, who recently joined the Congress, has levelled explosive allegations against Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

Speaking exclusively to India Today NE, Kalita claimed that Sarma conspired to block then CM Sarbananda Sonowal from retaining the top post in 2021.

Kalita alleged that he was denied a ticket in the 2021 polls because of his opposition to the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and accused AGP of "double standards." "On one hand, AGP went to the Supreme Court against CAA, and on the other, Rajya Sabha MP Birendra Prasad voted in favour of it. I became the casualty of this hypocrisy," he said.

Defending his switch to Congress, Kalita argued that regional outfits like AJP and Rajgor Dal lacked grassroots presence in his Kamalpur constituency, while Congress offered a strong organisational base. He also brushed

aside protests from Congress workers over his induction, calling them "emotional reactions" that have now been resolved.

Turning his guns on Himanta Biswa Sarma, Kalita claimed: "To block Sonowal, Sarma wanted more MLAs. I became a victim of this conspiracy, while some from the 'dada brigade' were given tickets." He went on to allege that Sarma had been plotting against Sonowal since ticket distribution.

Kalita further said that had Sarma not been made CM, he would have prevented the BJP from forming a government, instead allying with AGP, AIUDF, and others to float an alternative front. "The 2021 mandate was for Sonowal, not Sarma. People voted because of Sonowal's face," he asserted. With Kalita's entry, Congress has gained not only a former MLA but also a fresh weapon to target the BJP government. His claims are expected to spark intense political debate in Assam ahead of the next polls.

Pandu Port in Guwahati resonates with Bharat Ratna Bhupen Hazarika's 'Bistirna Parore' song

GUWAHATI

As part of the Inland Waterways Authority of India's centenary tribute to Bharat Ratna Dr Bhupen Hazarika's birthday, 'Bistirna Parore' (Bhupen da's song) — a musical voyage retracing the Bard's eternal bond with the Brahmaputra — anchored at Pandu Port in Guwahati on Monday evening.

Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal joined the event as Chief Guest, alongside members of Dr Hazarika's family, including his son Tej Hazarika and brother Samar Hazarika, along with cultural stalwarts, dignitaries and artists of Assam.

The voyage, which began on September 8 from Gujjan in Tinsukia on Dr Hazarika's birth anniversary, is traversing the Brahmaputra from Sadiya to Dhubri. The unique initiative combines music, culture and river-based travel to celebrate the life and work of Dr Hazarika while highlighting the Brahmaputra's vast untapped potential as a river cruise tourism destination.

At each stop along its journey — including Bogibeel, Neamatighat, Biswanath and Tezpur — the voyage has become a living canvas of Assamese culture. Children have engaged in art sessions inspired by Dr Haz-

arika's works, youth participated in quiz contests, and citizens spontaneously broke into song and dance alongside the travelling band.

Eminent artists and cultural leaders joined local communities to honour the Bard, whose music immortalised the Brahmaputra as both muse and metaphor.

At Pandu Port, in the backdrop of the historic Sarighat bridge, braving inclement weather, thousands gathered to witness an evening of performances — from Bhupendra Sangeet renditions and instrumental recitals to vibrant group dances by Karbi, Bodo and Tiwa communities. The presence of Dr Hazarika's family made the occasion deeply personal, underscoring the enduring connection between his music, the river and the people.

While celebrating Dr Hazarika's centenary, the Bistirna Parore voyage also serves a larger vision — to showcase the immense potential of River Cruise Tourism on the Brahmaputra, designated as National Waterway 2 (NW2).

Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal emphasised the dual significance of the initiative.

"This voyage is not only a tribute to Dr Bhupen Hazarika, who gave voice to the Brahmaputra, but also a step towards realising the river's promise as a cultural and economic lifeline. River cruise tourism can transform Assam's economy by creating jobs, drawing global visitors and integrating local communities into sustainable development," Sonowal said.

The Brahmaputra, one of the mightiest rivers of the world, offers a unique proposition for cruise tourism with its vast width, scenic

landscapes, rich biodiversity and thriving cultural heritage along its banks. Unlike rivers in Europe that are already saturated with cruise tourism, the Brahmaputra remains an unexplored frontier, offering unparalleled experiences — from wildlife sightings in Kaziranga and Majuli's Satras to tea garden landscapes, tribal traditions and urban hubs like Guwahati.

The "Bistirna Parore" initiative reflects IWAI's broader efforts to unlock this potential. By combining cultural celebration with river travel, the campaign is designed to build awareness and enthusiasm for cruise tourism within Assam and beyond.

The voyage has demonstrated how river tourism can bring together communities, showcase local art forms, and create platforms for cultural exchange while also strengthening local economies through tourism-driven demand. As more terminals are being developed by IWAI along the Brahmaputra — from Sadiya to Dhubri — the river is poised to become a major corridor for passenger and cargo movement, with cruise tourism as one of its most vibrant pillars.

"River cruise tourism on the Brahmaputra can become Assam's calling card to the world," Sonowal added.

"It offers the best of both worlds — breathtaking natural beauty and an unmatched cultural narrative. Through initiatives like Bistirna Parore, we want to position Assam on the global river cruise tourism map," he said.

As the ship sails onward to Joghigopa, the Bistirna Parore voyage continues to be both a cultural odyssey and a statement of intent. It

pays homage to Dr Hazarika's vision of unity and humanity while signalling Assam's ambition to unlock the Brahmaputra's promise as a hub of tourism, trade and culture.

The campaign has shown that, much like Dr Hazarika's songs, the river has the power to connect, inspire and sustain. By blending heritage with forward-looking initiatives, Bistirna Parore is charting a new course — one where music, memory and modern opportunity sail together on the Brahmaputra.

The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI), the nodal agency for the development of waterways in the country under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways (MoPSW), has been working tirelessly to rejuvenate the Brahmaputra, not just as a river of commerce but as a river of culture and community. From the historic Ganga Vilas river cruise, the world's longest ever river cruise from Varanasi to Dibrugarh, to the upcoming Ship Repair facility at Pandu, a dedicated road link to NH-27, modern IWT terminals at Joghigopa and Bogibeel, and tourism-cargo infrastructure across Dhubri, Bogibeel and beyond, IWAI is scripting a new chapter of connectivity and prosperity.

With projects like bank protection in Bogibeel, boundary walls for Bhutan cargo, and continuous fairway development through dredging along NW-2 and NW-16, the river is being prepared to host world-class river cruise tourism. This effort goes beyond infrastructure — it embodies the larger vision of humanity, brotherhood and love, values that Dr Bhupen Hazarika sang for all his life.

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Save Earth Mission appoints Dr. Sukamal Deb as National Project Director for North East India



NEW DELHI

Save Earth Mission, an international non-profit organisation working on environmental revival and climate action,

has appointed Dr. Sukamal Deb as its National Project Director for North East India. His appointment came into effect on July 25, 2025. Dr. Deb, who has long been

associated with rural development, entrepreneurship, and sustainability initiatives, will be responsible for leading the organisation's projects across all eight northeastern states. Save Earth Mission said his experience and leadership would be central to advancing its flagship campaigns in the region.

According to the organisation, Dr. Deb will spearhead large-scale environmental programs, including mass plantation drives under the initiative "Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam." He will also work with state governments, institutions, and local communities to promote sustainable livelihoods and rural innovation.

As part of his role, Dr. Deb is expected to represent Save Earth Mission in regional summits, policy forums, and strategic dialogues, while also monitoring and reporting on the progress of environmental campaigns in the Northeast.

Announcing the appointment, Save Earth Mission president Sandeep Choudhary said it would help strengthen the group's mission by bringing impactful regional leadership to the Northeast.

"Dr. Deb's leadership will be instrumental in empowering the northeastern states toward a greener and sustainable future," he said.

If only all cases are settled so expeditiously: Jairam Ramesh's dig after SC closes case against Vantara



NEW DELHI

A day after the Supreme Court closed a case against zoological rescue and rehabilitation centre Vantara following an SIT clean chit, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Tuesday said if only all cases were dealt with and settled so expeditiously and categorically.

The Congress general secretary and former environment minister said that when it chooses to, the Indian judicial system, which is defined by long delays, moves with the greatest of speed.

"On August 25, 2025, the Supreme Court ordered an inquiry by a Special Investigation Team (SIT) into the affairs of Vantara, the wildlife rescue and rehabilitation centre established by the Reliance Foundation in Jammagar.

The SIT, comprising four distinguished members, was directed to submit its report by September 12, 2025," he said.

The SIT submitted its report in a "sealed cover", and on September 15, 2025, the Supreme Court accepted its recommendations and closed the case,

which had been triggered by a public interest litigation filed on August 7, 2025, he pointed out.

"If only all cases are dealt with and settled so expeditiously and categorically — of course, without this mysterious 'sealed cover' business!" Ramesh said.

The Supreme Court on Monday said there was "no contravention of law" while accepting a clean chit given by its special investigation team to Vantara.

A bench of Justices Pankaj Mishra and P B Varale took the SIT's report on record, besides noting the probe team's

satisfaction with the compliance and regulatory measures in Vantara.

The top court on August 25 constituted the four-member SIT headed by a former apex court judge while hearing two PILs alleging irregularities against Vantara on the basis of reports in the media and social media, besides complaints from NGOs and wildlife organisations.

It came on record that the SIT, after a thorough investigation in coordination with multiple agencies "clearly opined" and held no violation of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, Recognition of Zoo Rules, 2009, CZA guidelines, Customs Act, 1962, Foreign Trade (Regulation and development) Act, 1992, Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999, Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 or the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species of wild Fauna and Flora.

Vantara, Reliance Foundation's zoological rescue and rehabilitation centre, welcomed the Supreme Court-appointed SIT's clean chit to it and said the top court accepting its findings showed that the "doubts and allegations" raised against its animal welfare mission were without basis.

It said, "With utmost humility and gratitude, we welcome the findings of the Special Investigation Team (SIT), appointed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. The SIT's report and the Hon'ble Supreme Court's order have made it clear that the doubts and allegations raised against Vantara's animal welfare mission were without any basis.

"The validation of the truth by the distinguished and widely respected members of the SIT is not just a relief for everyone at Vantara but also a blessing, because it allows our work to speak for itself," Vantara added.

INTERNATIONAL

Israel committing genocide in Gaza, UN report says, calls for global action

GENEVA

A team of independent experts commissioned by the United Nations' Human Rights Council has concluded that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza, issuing a report Tuesday that calls on the international community to end the genocide and take steps to punish those responsible for it.

The deeply-documented findings by the three-member team are the latest accusations of genocide against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government by rights advocates as Israel carries on with its war against Hamas in Gaza that has killed tens of thousands of people. Israel rejected what it called a "distorted and false" report.

The Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel, which was created four years ago, has repeatedly documented alleged human rights abuses and violations both in Gaza since the deadly Oct. 7, 2023, attacks in Israel led by Hamas, and other Palestinian areas.

While neither the commission nor the 47-member-country council that it works for within the UN system can take action against a country, the findings could be used by prosecutors at the International Criminal Court or the UN's International Court of Justice.

The report also amounts to a final message from the team headed by former UN rights chief Navi Pillay. All three of its members announced in July that they would resign, citing personal reasons and a need for change.

The team was commissioned by the Human Rights Council, the UN's top human rights body, but it does not speak for the United Nations.



Israel has refused to cooperate with the commission and has accused it and the HRC of anti-Israel bias. Earlier this year, the Trump administration, a key Israeli ally, pulled the United States out of the council.

After a painstaking legal analysis, the commission said Israel had committed four of the five "genocidal acts" defined under an international convention adopted in 1948 known colloquially as the "Genocide Convention," three years after the end of World War II and the Holocaust.

"The Commission finds that Israel is responsible for the commission of genocide in Gaza," said Pillay, the commission chair.

"It is clear that there is an intent to destroy the Palestinians in Gaza through acts that meet the criteria set forth in the Genocide Convention."

Palestinians run for cover during an Israeli airstrike on a high-rise building in Gaza City, Friday, Sept. 5, 2025, after the Israeli army issued a warning.

The Gaza Genocide: Is Israel remaking the Middle East? Pillay,

a former UN human rights chief, said "responsibility for the atrocity crimes lies with Israeli authorities at the highest echelons" over the nearly two-year war.

Her commission concluded that Netanyahu, as well as Israeli President Isaac Herzog and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, had incited the commission of genocide. It hasn't assessed whether other Israeli leaders had done so too.

Israel, which was founded in the aftermath of the Holocaust, has adamantly rejected genocide allegations against it as an antisemitic "blood libel." Israel's Foreign Ministry issued an angry response Tuesday, saying it "categorically rejects this distorted and false report."

"Three individuals serving as Hamas proxies, notorious for their openly antisemitic positions — and whose horrific statements about Jews have been condemned worldwide — released today another fake 'report' about Gaza," it said.

Genocide accusations are especially sensitive in Israel, which was

founded as a haven for Jews in the wake of the Holocaust and where memories of Holocaust still play an important role in the country's national identity.

In coming to its conclusion of genocide, the commission said it pored over the conduct of Israeli security forces and "explicit statements" by Israeli civilian and military authorities, among other criteria.

In particular, the experts cited as factors the death toll, Israel's "total siege" of Gaza and blockade of humanitarian aid that has led to starvation, a policy of "systematically destroying" the health care system, and direct targeting of children. The commission urged other countries to halt weapons transfers to Israel and block individuals or companies from actions that could contribute to genocide in Gaza.

"The international community cannot stay silent on the genocidal campaign launched by Israel against the Palestinian people in Gaza," said Pillay, who is a South African jurist. "When clear signs and evidence of genocide emerge, the absence of action to stop it amounts to complicity."

The current UN high commissioner for human rights, Volker Türk, has decried Israel's conduct of the war in Gaza and spoken out forcefully against alleged crimes, but has not accused Israel of carrying out genocide. His office, alluding to international law, has argued that only an international court can make a final, formal determination of genocide. Critics counter that could take years and insist that thousands of people, many of them civilians, are being systematically killed in Gaza in the meantime.

Pashtun activist warns UN of human rights abuses, fake military operations in Pakistan



GENEVA

Pashtun political activist Fazal Ur Rehman Afridi has expressed serious concerns about what he termed continuous human rights abuses, state-sponsored militancy, and natural resource exploitation in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan.

Addressing the international community, Afridi accused the Pakistani military of carrying out false flag military operations under the pretence of combating terrorism, while targeting innocent civilians, particularly Pashtun women and children.

"We have come to the United Nations Human Rights Council today to make the world aware of the continued military action in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Innocent Pashtun civilians are being targeted, not only by drone attacks, but by F-16 fighter aircraft used by the Pakistani military," Afridi said.

According to Afridi, the Pakistani state has allegedly reintegrated over 55,000

members of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and their families into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa under a secret agreement, while publicly claiming to conduct operations against them.

We want the world to know that these operations are staged. The truth is, the TTP and the Pakistani army are no different from one another. During the day, they wear uniforms; at night, they turn into Taliban. The operations are an excuse to provide militants with safe havens, not kill them," he stated.

Afridi emphasised that over 40 drone attacks have been carried out in the region without a single high-profile TTP figure being killed. Instead, he said, civilians continue to bear the brunt of these attacks.

"The use of F-16s and drones is not targeting terrorists — it's targeting our people. These strikes are designed to clear space for terrorist training camps, which are later used to export terrorism across the region," he alleged.

In addition to security

concerns, Afridi also accused the Pakistani military of systematic exploitation of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's natural resources. He claimed that vast tracts of land have been seized for military and commercial projects, including cantonments, housing societies, and resorts.

"In Waziristan alone, 700 kilometres of Chilgoza forests have been captured and sold to foreign buyers, with the revenue bypassing the national treasury. This is land theft and economic exploitation," he said. Afridi also condemned the alleged extraction and foreign sale of oil, gas, electricity, chrome, and rare earth minerals from the region, particularly a reported agreement with the United States, which he said was made without the consent of the indigenous Pashtun population.

"Selling our mineral wealth to foreign countries without our consent violates both international law and Pakistan's own constitution," he argued.

Building Assam's Future: Progress, Politics, and the Test of Delivery



Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day visit to Assam has once again thrust the Northeast into the national spotlight. Development projects worth nearly ₹18,530 crore were inaugurated or launched during the visit, encompassing healthcare, infrastructure, connectivity, housing, and industrial expansion. On the surface, these numbers suggest a transformative leap forward for Assam. Yet, in a state where geography, identity, and history are tightly interwoven, the weight of such announcements goes far beyond monetary value. Each new road, bridge, or medical college carries with it questions of equity, cultural preservation, environmental vulnerability, and the credibility of governance.

This visit, like several others in recent years, is both a political performance and a policy push. It celebrates Assam as a pivotal player in India's growth story, but it also challenges the state to reconcile ambition with delivery. The real measure of success will not be the crores sanctioned, but whether ordinary Assamese citizens feel their lives tangibly improved—whether villages cut off during floods get connected, whether patients find affordable healthcare nearby, and whether job-seeking youth find employment at home rather than migrating out.

Healthcare: Healing Beyond Announcements

Among the most notable projects unveiled was the foundation stone of the Darrang Medical College, along with a nursing college and a General Nursing and Midwifery (GNM) school in Mangaldai. Together, these institutions represent an investment of around ₹570 crore, promising to reshape healthcare access in central Assam.

For decades, patients from districts like Darrang, Udalguri, and Sonitpur have been forced to travel either to Guwahati or outside the state for specialised treatment. The new medical college holds out hope of reversing this pattern, providing tertiary care closer to home. Simultaneously, it offers local students the chance to pursue medical education without the burden of leaving their communities.

But optimism must contend with persistent challenges.



Everything shifts the moment you decide to believe.

Assam has often struggled with shortages of faculty, outdated equipment, and the migration of trained doctors to metropolitan centres. Several medical colleges in the state already face under-staffing. The question is whether the new institutions will be equipped and staffed adequately, or whether they will replicate the same deficiencies under a different banner. Unless policy ensures incentives for retention of professionals in rural and semi-urban areas, the promise of these healthcare investments risks remaining symbolic.

Connectivity: Bridges as Lifelines

Connectivity lay at the heart of the Prime Minister's announcements. The proposed Narengi-Kuruwa bridge over the Brahmaputra, a 2.9-kilometre structure with an estimated cost of ₹1,200 crore, is expected to ease traffic congestion in Guwahati while improving access to northern Assam. The Brahmaputra, majestic and life-giving, has also long been a barrier. For people living on its northern bank, reaching Assam's capital often means hours of detours and dependence on ferries vulnerable to weather. A permanent bridge promises to redraw maps of mobility.

Even more ambitious is the Guwahati Ring Road Project. At 121 kilometres and projected to cost nearly ₹7,000 crore after factoring in land acquisition and exemptions, the project is one of the largest infrastructure undertakings in Assam's history. It involves a 56 km four-lane northern bypass, widening of an 8 km stretch of NH-27, improvement of a 58 km bypass, and a 3 km major bridge across the Brahmaputra.

For Assam, often described as "geographically isolated" within India, such investments are more than asphalt and steel. They represent attempts to weave peripheral regions into national commerce and accelerate integration with South and Southeast Asian markets under India's Act East Policy. Yet they also present risks: cost overruns, environmental disruption, and uneven benefits. If bypasses skirt small villages without building feeder roads, prosperity may concentrate only in Guwahati and a handful of towns. True connectivity means linking the margins, not just the hubs.

Industry and the Bio-Economy: From Bamboo to Ethanol

Assam's industrial profile, historically limited to oil, tea, and timber, is now being recast through energy and bio-economy initiatives. At the centre of this vision is the ₹4,200 crore Numaligarh Refinery bio-ethanol project, which will be India's first bamboo-based ethanol refin-

ery. It is designed to process 3,00,000 metric tonnes of bamboo annually, producing 49,000 metric tonnes of ethanol for blending with fuel.

The project serves multiple purposes. It aligns with India's national ethanol-blending programme, reduces dependence on fossil fuels, and creates livelihood opportunities for bamboo cultivators across the Northeast. Bamboo, once dismissed as "the poor man's timber," has long been underutilised despite the region's vast reserves. Now, it may emerge as a cornerstone of Assam's industrial future.

The refinery's expansion dovetails with other major schemes: refinery capacity enhancement, affordable housing through 5.5 lakh homes under the PM Awas Yojana-Gramin worth ₹8,450 crore, and urban industrial growth. Taken together, these suggest a state moving from the periphery of India's industrial landscape to a position of national relevance.

But the gains will only be real if they translate into sustained local employment. If skilled jobs go primarily to professionals from outside, while locals remain suppliers of raw bamboo or casual labourers, the promise of inclusive industrialisation will ring hollow.

Culture and Identity: The Soul of Development

Development in Assam has always been inseparable from questions of identity. The Prime Minister, aware of this, invoked the state's civilisational heritage, citing Srimanta Sankardeva, the 15th-century saint-reformer, and participating in centenary events honouring music icon Bhupen Hazarika.

Such gestures are more than ceremonial. For a state marked by movements to preserve language, land, and culture, recognition from the highest office of the land reassures communities that economic progress will not come at the cost of assimilation. Development without respect for heritage risks alienation. Roads and bridges may connect markets, but only cultural inclusion can connect hearts.

The Political Undertone: Between Optics and Strategy

With general elections on the horizon, the political subtext of the visit is inescapable. Inaugurations and foundation stones make for powerful visuals of governance in action. Yet to dismiss the visit as mere electoral theatre would be simplistic. Assam today is no longer a peripheral frontier—it is the fulcrum of India's Act East Policy. Its roads and refineries are not just state projects but national strategic assets, connecting India to ASEAN trade routes and cross-border energy corridors.

Thus, while politics colours

the announcements, the stakes are undeniably real. Assam's transformation is tied not only to its own progress but to India's regional ambitions.

The Unfinished Questions: Floods, Equity, and Capacity

Despite the fanfare, Assam's ground realities temper celebration. The state continues to face annual devastation from floods and erosion caused by the Brahmaputra and its tributaries. Entire stretches of newly built roads are washed away within years. Embankments fail, displacing thousands. Unless infrastructure is built with climate resilience at its core, crores invested risk being undone each monsoon.

Unemployment is another pressing challenge. For years, educated youth from Assam have migrated to Bengaluru, Delhi, and Mumbai for jobs. Will the new refineries, medical colleges, and road projects create sustainable employment at home? Or will benefits accrue primarily to contractors and firms from outside?

Equity of distribution also looms large. A ₹1,200 crore bridge may be a marvel, but if interior villages remain unconnected, inequality deepens. The promise of 5.5 lakh rural homes is significant, but if corruption, delays, or political favouritism creep in, trust erodes.

Finally, institutional capacity remains a perennial worry. India's development history is filled with projects that began with enthusiasm but ended with inefficiency.

The Guwahati Ring Road could be transformative or it could languish in litigation, land disputes, and poor maintenance. Robust monitoring, transparent tendering, and citizen participation will decide which path it takes.

Symbolism and Substance
Despite the caveats, symbolism matters. The Prime Minister's repeated visits signal that the Northeast is no longer at the margins of India's imagination. By placing development, culture, and identity in the same frame, the government projects Assam as central to India's growth narrative.

That shift in perception carries weight. For generations of Assamese who have felt neglected by Delhi, it offers a new sense of inclusion. The challenge is to convert symbolism into substance. Citizens measure progress not by the number of crores announced but by whether they can reach hospitals in time, whether their homes survive floods, whether their children find jobs, and whether their traditions remain respected.

Conclusion: Assam's Bridges of Promise
The two-day visit is, at

once, a celebration and a challenge. It celebrates Assam's integration into the national development trajectory with projects worth over ₹18,000 crore. But it also challenges both state and central governments to ensure these promises survive beyond paperwork and press releases.

Progress in Assam must ultimately be measured not in kilometres of highways or tonnes of ethanol, but in reduced flood vulnerability, improved livelihoods, accessible healthcare, and cultural preservation. Development here is not only about economics. It is about bridging aspirations with delivery, tradition with modernity, and local realities with national visions.

The Prime Minister's visit is rekindled hope. But hope is fragile. The true test lies in whether, five years from now, Assamese citizens look back and say their lives were tangibly better, their futures brighter, and their identities secure. If pursued with sincerity, Assam's story could indeed become a beacon of balanced, inclusive growth for the rest of India.

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11 JAN
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10 Jan
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JAN'25
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