



# KRC TIMES

## STAY-ENRICHED



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### PERSPECTIVE

**Pehle intelligence ki bahut izzat thi, woh bhi ab artificial ho gayi!**  
~ Harsh Goenka, Chairman, RPG Enterprises

**Centre releases Rs 219.24 crore finance commission grants for rural bodies in Assam**

NEW DELHI

The Union Government has released the Fifteenth Finance Commission (XV FC) grants for Rural Local Bodies in Assam for the financial year 2025-26, marking a significant boost to grassroots development across the state.

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The Union Government has released the Fifteenth Finance Commission (XV FC) grants for Rural Local Bodies in Assam for the financial year 2025-26, marking a significant boost to grassroots development across the state.

The latest disbursement includes the second installment of Untied Grants for 2024-25 amounting to Rs 219.24 crore. These funds will be allocated to all eligible 27 District Panchayats, 182 Block Panchayats, and 2,192 Gram Panchayats in Assam.

In addition to this, the Centre has also released Rs 4.698 crore that had earlier been withheld from the first installment of Untied Grants for 2024-25. This amount has now been cleared for 26 Block Panchayats found additionally eligible after verification.

According to the government, the release of XV Finance Commission grants for Panchayati Raj Institutions and Rural Local Bodies is recommended jointly by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and the Ministry of Jal Shakti's Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation.

The Ministry of Finance subsequently issues the funds in two installments each financial year.

#### WHO SAID WHAT



**Good governance has won. Development has won. People spirit has won. Social justice has won. Gratitude to each and every person of Bihar for blessing the NDA with a historical and unparalleled victory in the 2025 Vidhan Sabha elections. This mandate gives us renewed strength to serve the people and work for Bihar.** ~ Narendra Modi, PM

## Sitharaman launches SAMARTH initiative in Kohima, boosts AI, financial literacy and Northeast growth

### Northeast given 'top priority' in development: Sitharaman

KOHIMA

Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs, Nirmala Sitharaman, inaugurated the Students Advancing Mindsets in AI, Robotics, Technology and Digital Hardware (SAMARTH) initiative at the National Institute of Electronics & Information Technology (NIELIT), Kohima.

During her visit, the Minister toured an exhibition showcasing innovations by students and startups and visited the India AI Lab and the R&D Cyber Forensics Lab, engaging with students and faculty members.

Sitharaman launched the SAMARTH Portal and interacted with students, emphasizing the importance of financial awareness for women, particularly in the Northeast. She noted that while Indian women have traditionally managed household finances efficiently, the evolving economic landscape demands familiarity with modern financial instruments, including small savings schemes, stock mar-



ket opportunities, and collateral-free loans. She also highlighted the PM Vatsalya scheme, which allows families to save for children from birth, with these funds later converted into provident fund and pension benefits.

On the significance of early exposure to technology, the Minister urged students to familiarize themselves with Artificial Intelligence to prepare for future skill requirements. She lauded the Tata Group's

upcoming ATMP semiconductor facility in Assam and mentioned that she had requested the company to consider similar opportunities for Nagaland. She further praised the Northeast's readiness in skills, training, and enthusiasm, positioning it strongly for emerging industries.

Addressing youth participation in nation-building, Sitharaman encouraged students to remain united, focused, and positive. She cautioned

against negative influences such as drugs and bullying, reminding them that today's youth will shape India's future by 2047, and urged them to support and uplift one another for a progressive society.

Responding to queries on digital learning in rural areas, the Minister highlighted the progress of the BharatNet programme, which is expanding optical fibre connectivity to village institutions, and noted the nationwide rollout of 5G services, with both public and private networks extending coverage to remote regions.

Sitharaman also spoke on the region's economic growth, noting simultaneous development across sectors such as coal, cement, renewable energy, green hydrogen, and semiconductors. She emphasized that improved multimodal transport and logistics are breaking long-standing connectivity barriers, enabling industrial growth without waiting for sequential development.

On scholarships, she mentioned the government's plans to explore

a centralized portal listing fellowships and scholarship schemes across ministries for easier student access.

During the event, the Minister unveiled three AI training kits across different categories and distributed them to student beneficiaries. An MoU exchange between TSAT and NIELIT was also carried out.

The Minister was accompanied by Nagaland Minister Salhoutuo Kruse, Advisors Kropol Vitsu and Kekhrielhoule Yhome, NIELIT Director General and VC Prof. Madan Mohan Tripathi, Tim McIntosh from TATA Semiconductor Assembly and Test Pvt. Ltd., and other senior officials. NIELIT Kohima Director L. Lanuwabang delivered the welcome address.

The SAMARTH initiative aims to equip students with modern technological skills while fostering financial literacy and youth engagement, reinforcing the Northeast's role in India's emerging industrial and digital landscape.

## Dima Hasao village headman flags encroachment, environmental threats



HAFLONG

The Gaon Bura of Longplaidisa village in Umrangso, Dima Hasao district, has raised strong objections to proposed drilling and mining-related activities in the area, alleging land encroachment, environmental risks and violation of community consent. In a formal letter to the Director of Geology and Mining, Assam, village headman Duttaram Hojai appealed for an immediate halt to any exploratory drilling at Longplaidisa village. He cautioned that such activities threaten valuable cultivable land, forest cover, flora and fauna, water bodies and the overall ecological balance.

Hojai noted that the tribal residents of Longplaidisa village are already suffering from pollution and social impacts caused by existing cement plants, ongoing mining operations and alleged illegal rat-hole coal extraction, which have led to an inflow of outside labourers and a rise in crime.

In a separate letter to the Principal Secretary of the North Cachar Hills

Autonomous Council (NCHAC), Hojai accused a private cement company of encroaching over two kilometres into the boundary of Longplaidisa village.

He said the company has begun constructing a road through Nohdiongkukro village and is allegedly planning limestone mining in the Longplaidisa area — all without the consent of the villagers. The residents of Longplaidisa village have strongly opposed the encroachment, asserting that any mining or road construction would endanger their land, environment, wildlife and streams. Hojai stressed that the people of the Umrangso region have already borne the brunt of unchecked industrial activities and have a duty to protect their land and environment for future generations. Urging urgent intervention, the village authorities called on NCHAC and the state government to review the matter and take necessary action to safeguard the rights, resources and traditional way of life of the people of Longplaidisa village.

## COCOMI announces boycott of Sangai Festival amid unresolved Manipur crisis

IMPHAL

Meitei body, Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), has declared a complete boycott of the upcoming Sangai Festival, asserting that holding a tourism festival amid the unresolved Manipur crisis and the prolonged suffering of internally displaced persons (IDPs) would be "insensitive and unacceptable".

In a press release issued on Friday, the COCOMI stated that thousands of people continue to live in turmoil due to the ongoing violence, displacement and insecurity across Manipur, making it inappropriate to organise any grand celebration.

The committee stressed that the boycott reflects the collective sentiments of the people who remain deeply affected by the conflict. According to the COCOMI, the State has failed to restore basic Constitutional rights, including the security of life and property, freedom of movement, and safe resettlement of IDPs.

Yet, the Government's focus appears to be on preparing for an international tourism festival rather than addressing urgent humanitarian and security concerns. The organisation criticised



the authorities for moving ahead with festival preparations, while over 15 lakh citizens continue to face restrictions on movement and daily life due to the prevailing law-and-order situation.

It warned that celebrating the festival under such circumstances risks projecting a misleading image of normalcy in Manipur. The statement further questioned whether the Government's priorities such as issuing Protected Area Permits to foreign tourists and attracting international performers outweighed the need for restoring peace, rehabilitating displaced families, and ensuring justice for those affected by the conflict. It alleged that the contin-

ued instability indicates a failure of governance, including under the period of President's Rule.

The COCOMI has appealed to civil society organisations, cultural institutions, and the public to refrain from participating in the festival. The committee said that the decision should stand as a unified message to the authorities that "peace and security must come before tourism and celebration". The group reaffirmed its commitment to safeguarding the interests of the people of Manipur and called for collective efforts to prioritise the resolution of humanitarian and security crises over hosting high-profile public events.

## Guwahati to host Northeast's largest renewable energy expo as FINER confirms 2025 edition

GUWAHATI

A push to accelerate clean-energy adoption in the North East will take centre stage next year as the Federation of Industry & Commerce of North Eastern Region (FINER) schedules the second edition of the North East Renewable Energy & Electric Vehicle Expo for November 21-23.

The event, commonly known as NER-EVE, will return to Guwahati's Sarusajai Stadium with a larger footprint than its debut edition. Organisers say the expo will serve as a key meeting point for national and regional players working in renewable power, electric mobility and related technologies.

The 2025 edition highlights the region's growing relevance in India's clean-tech strategy. Backing from multiple central ministries — including New and Renewable Energy, MSME, Road



Transport and Highways, and Power — signals a coordinated push to support emerging industries in the North East. Around 70 companies and 120 exhibi-

tion stalls are expected, along with an open display zone for electric vehicle manufacturers to present new models and prototypes. The expo will also feature policy discussions, technical sessions, and dedicated B2B and B2G meetings aimed at strengthening cooperation across government, industry and research institutions. FINER has placed particular emphasis on supporting local entrepreneurs and early-stage ventures. Organisers say the platform will give startups access to new technologies, market insights and direct engagement with central agencies and major companies. Capacity-building sessions will focus on skills and business development, an area industry bodies view as essential for long-term growth. According to FINER, the initiative is part of a broader effort to expand industrial opportunities in the region while contributing to India's wider sustainability goals.

KRC FOUNDATION

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**Welcome Debasish Deb**

**Member, Organising Committee, NEIR 2026**

www.northeastintegrationrally.in



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## PAK-AFGHAN CONFLICT

The latest round of Pakistan-Afghanistan talks, held in Istanbul, mediated by Turkey and Qatar, has collapsed. These talks were led by intelligence chiefs on both sides, which meant that Pakistan's polity had no role, as also Rawalpindi's intent was to coerce Kabul to adhere to their terms under threat of military action. This was laced with announcements of sharing information on presence of terrorist groups on Afghan soil.

The Pak side was led by their DG ISI, while the Afghan delegation by their head of Intelligence. Pakistan had attempted to browbeat the Taliban but failed to gauge their determination. Most importantly, the tenuous ceasefire, agreed to in Doha in the first round of talks, would remain in place.

Pakistan wanted the Taliban to take all responsibility for militant activity on their soil as also contain and neutralize all TTP (Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan) members in Afghanistan. This was Pakistan's sole agenda and they were unwilling to bend unless Kabul acceded and provided a written undertaking. The Taliban had their own concerns, which the Pak delegation refused to consider.

Kabul's concerns included Pakistan stop using trade as a weapon by closing borders, thereby blocking Afghan exports as also the inhuman manner in which Afghan refugees were being expelled and in their garb members of the ISKP (Islamic State - Khorasan Province) infiltrated into Afghanistan. The ISKP, supported by the ISI, seeks to overthrow the Taliban regime. Kabul also demanded Pak stop US drone flights from using its airspace.

While the Taliban officially denied the existence of TTP its soil, Pakistan ignored concerns of Kabul. It had mentioned in earlier talks in Doha that it has an agreement with the US for drone flights, which it cannot break. Accusations by both sides appear to hold water but demanding that only one side bends, while the other believes in its military power, is not the manner by which conflicts are resolved by dialogue. Pakistan also claimed Qatar favoured Afghanistan, while Kabul believed Turkey supported the Pak perspective.

Pakistan's defence minister hinted at what the future would be when he mentioned 'talks are over' and that the ceasefire would remain in place unless 'violated from the Afghan side.' In reality, it is Pakistan violating the ceasefire and targeting Afghanistan. It appears that Rawalpindi is seeking an excuse to engage in conflict with Afghanistan.

There is a belief within Pakistan's military circles that it alone has the ability to subdue the Taliban, when major powers like Russia and the US failed. After all it is a neighbour, not located at a distance. It has, in recent days, been hinting at hitting Afghanistan compelling it to accede to its terms.

After being routed in Operation Sindoor and the recent conflict with the Taliban, Pak believes that compelling Afghanistan to accept its terms, would re-build the image of the army. While Pakistan's information war hid reality of its losses in both conflicts, the truth is well known to those who matter.

Another reason for engaging in a conflict with Afghanistan could be that the Pak senate and subsequently the country would soon be debating the 27th amendment, which would provide their failed marshal indirect control over the country. It would also send the message that the Pak army alone stands between those who seek to destroy the country, boosting their reputation. A victory over Afghanistan would seal the debate in favour of the failed marshal.

However, such a thought may be disastrous for Rawalpindi. Operations against India are justified on religious grounds as also India is a historic adversary, controlling water essential for survival of Pakistan. Pakistan's history books have engrained in their public that India seeks to break the country and hence is an enemy. Pakistanis also believe that without Kashmir they are incomplete as a nation.

Afghanistan, on the other hand, is a brother Muslim state, targeting whom may not be acceptable to the public as also all political parties. Religious leaders within Pak may also not be supportive of the conflict. Calls for peace, after the initial round of conflict, came largely from Muslim nations as also mediation was done by Qatar and Turkey.

Further, Pashtuns, who dominate Afghanistan, have close linkages with their brethren in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Pak Pashtuns are unlikely to support operations as also could rise up in arms against the state. The Baloch, who have their bases in Afghanistan could intensify operations against Pak forces, adding to their concerns. Even within Afghanistan, Pakistan has lost support due to their airstrikes resulting in civilian casualties.

Imran Khan's PTI, which governs KP, has close ties with Afghanistan, had mediated with the TTP during their reign, would also not support the conflict. Other political parties would begin believing that the army acts on its own forcing the nation into avoidable conflicts. This could impact passing of the amendment.

In case Pak gets drawn into another prolonged conflict, as the US and Russia did, the result could go against the army. Pakistan's economy is sinking and would only deteriorate further. Its army cannot battle rising discontent amongst the masses and a nation whose forces are trained for prolonged guerilla war on one side, with another powerful nation on the other border, as after all Operation Sindoor has only been paused.

Pak is unwilling to understand that its disagreements with Afghanistan are historic as Kabul has never accepted the Durand Line. It has attempted to handle both its border disputes, Kashmir and the Durand Line, by force and backing terrorism but failed every time. It has never understood the power of diplomacy and dialogue. Afghans are well aware of Pakistan's military capabilities.

Further, growing Indo-Afghan ties, opening of Chabahar port for Afghan exports, has reduced dependency on Karachi. Increased influence of India is an added imaginary threat to Rawalpindi. Such is their concern that they term the TTP and Baloch as Indian sponsored. As India's influence increases, the ability of Islamabad to dominate Kabul reduces.

# 'SIR-GICAL' STRIKE DEFUSES 'H.BOMB'



SHIBAN KHAIBRI

What an irony, fakers are feted while innovators are isolated : some people think that the truth can be hidden with a little cover-up and decoration ; but as time goes by , what is true is revealed and what is fake is faded away .....

Bihar election results , besides voters overwhelmingly establishing full faith in "vikas" , have come out with many notable lessons for those who take pride in floating false narratives and cementing caste based politics as consideration of casting votes. No caste factor , no religion factor and the like worked here this time as if the voters had resolutely resolved to teach such politicians a lesson to remember for decades in a row. NDA crossing the 200 mark, a tsunami of votes indeed, while the Mahaghatbandan getting squeezed to a paltry 34 seats writes a new chapter in the political horizon of Bihar. Congress getting just 5 out of 234 seats speaks volumes about where the Party stands in terms of its outreach and acceptability among the people.. Narendra Modi's popularity has emerged invincible. Nitish Kumar's honesty , hard work and focus on development has paid rich dividends to JD(U). In short, matured Bihari voters , have diffused both "Atom and Hydrogen Bombs" talked about by Rahul Gandhi through the power of their vote. The importance of pan India SIR phase -2 beginning , therefore, can well be realised. The much needed , desperately requiring prompt implementation and proper follow-up , employing the verifying parameters and requisites very scrupulously, Special Intensive Revision (SIR) aiming at unique voter list verification process hardly requires any explaining as to its importance in ensuring very accurate and sans any space for accommodation of any frauds or manipulations. Those who claim to be loving this motherland must bear it in mind that only those who are genuine Indians alone can be there in a voter list to cast vote. Not others, even if, by default or by mechanisms, albeit such illegal immigrants may be "a milking cow" vote bank for some political parties. India cannot afford to be an International Dharamshala and continue ipsis tippy to have a lackadaisical policy it had been pursuing since early 50s down to late 90s even thereafter , to be elastically soft towards swarms of Bangladeshi illegal immigrants and others , now Myanmar illegal ones too, crossing over to this side, not only for green pastures but to melt down in the native population and afford by deceit, fraud , personification , porous exit and entry points in the status-quo-ante eco system coupled with other underhand means, getting most vital Aadhar, Bank Pass books, ration ticket, voter ID and the like. Reforms, revisions, changes and innovations , are, therefore, drastically required wherever needed but what about the established trend of routinely and vehemently opposing and attacking changes in the policies and adopting reforms by most of the opposition parties . That approach is a great mis-

fortune and an irreversible disservice done to the political, economic, social, cultural and most sensitive demographic spheres of this country.

We dutifully and unchangingly owe a lot to our coming future generations to ensure their land, identity, religion, culture, traditions and historical symbols of this ancient most civilization are protected on assured sustainable basis. Demographic invasion, in various disguised forms, therefore, has to be averted , opposed and totally contained.

We must metaphorically "thank" Bihar for having revealed what was conveniently kept or had remained hidden, knowingly or otherwise, to the detriment of the interests of the country . Resisting changes and rectifications, giving the alibis of "Vote Chori" and other jibes , was tantamount to justifying unauthorised voters in the voters' list. It is another thing as to what kept successive Election Commissions from initiating such exercise from time to time regularly and punctually . However, the exercise in Bihar proved successful beyond expectations where the sincerity of purpose, authenticity and correctness , the three main tools of SIR , resulted in complete absence of any sort of appeals to the final rolls compiled and that speaks of the dire need , sensitivity , seriousness and significance of SIR. In fact, it will not be any sort of an overstatement in saying that "great lessons" have been learnt in Bihar post June 24 the day this exercise was given a go start, hence the extreme necessity of starting this cardinal exercise in 12 states as decided by the Election Commission of India. At the cost of repetition, June 24 circular - the roadmap of the exercise applicable to all the designated 12 states , shall have expectedly more updated guidelines . Let authenticity and correctness be the hallmarks of the voters' list as against anything on the obverse. Let some honesty and sincerity prevail and cheap politics, at least , in this most vulnerable area, be abhorred and totally avoided.

Realising the need of SIR and cooperating with the ECI, being the expectations from the matured and responsible opposition parties , one feels aghast over what appears on the ground as Congress and allies parties have started peddling fakery to discredit the exercise and paint it as a move by the government in power to "delete opposition voters" . From Tamil Nadu to West Bengal, why should a sort of "Hungama be barpa" in this regard? Who came out with the clarion call , "Be ready to hit streets" ? Mamta Banerjee who should have wholeheartedly welcome the move was recently seen leading a protest march in Bengal against SIR. Why , what is the issue? At least, could those hundreds following Mamta Ji in the protest clarify as to what for was the protest and why they joined the protest.

What a paradox, Rahul Gandhi holds a press conference alleging "fake voters" while a key constituent of INDI alliance, Mamta Banerjee holds protest march against the removal of these very "fake voters". Mirza Galib had aptly said in such circumstances ; "Hum vahan hain jahan say

hum ko bhi , kutch hamari khabbar nahin aati .." It is just like some students taking out protest marches against concerned authorities for disallowing and denying them copying , cheating, and other unfair practices "rights" in examination centres. On the other hand , CM Stalin calls the SIR as a "dirty trick" . Who plays the "dirty trick" and on whom and by the way, what is meant by "dirty trick"? Literally , a trick can always be dirty , can any trick be fair , honest and God fearing? Thank God he did not Hindi(ise) it by saying "was being imposed" on Tamil Nadu. Stalin also went a step further by alleging that large number of voters from the working class, scheduled castes, minority , and women communities were "unfairly removed" from the rolls in a similar exercise in Bihar. So much of cogent "research work" done by Stalin needs to be noted Why are fears and doubts being spread to create confusion in the minds of voters over an exercise to verifying genuine voters and having others not reasonably found genuine, deleted with sufficient opportunity to appeal and prove the exercise having not done justice in a particular aggrieved case.

By the way , why did Shaheen Bagh take place? Why was the CAA , entirely based on humanity, compassion and even commiseration , so much vehemently opposed ? Who among any Indian citizens was going to be affected , even in the least? Was not Mamta Banerjee upfront and up in arms against the CAA? What was the logic ? Did she not openly declare that her fight against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act would continue and she would "never allow" this law and NRC in Bengal. She even declared that the CAA was "against the constitution and the humanity". Incredible, indeed. How can you disregard and not allow a law enacted by the Parliament to be implemented in a state yet displaying red covered book ostensibly -the constitution of the country- feigning high regard for it? It is this very constitution that made the CAA and which allows reforms like SIR etc. to take place. What are the real intentions ? Why and what for , therefore, were 52 precious lives lost in Delhi in CAA violence besides hundreds of thousands of crores Rupees worth assets and properties destroyed in the wake of a wholly unwarranted, uncalled for and unexpected stir against the CAA that had provisions for providing citizenship rights to a few persecuted and hounded out Hindus, Sikhs , and other minorities in Pakistan, Afghanistan , Bangladesh etc. Who , therefore, was going to suffer in India by its implementation ?

Rahul Gandhi, must at least, clarify as to what exactly is the fuss and all the rhetoric about the SIR and not try to confuse and cause unnecessary doubts to take place in the minds of the people . Like this, the entire electoral process of the country is sought to be discredited. Alternately it is also , therefore, projected that Congress party, a darling of millions is not showing massive electoral wins only because of something very wrong in voters lists which he is unable to pinpoint . Doubts can arise

whether all this was done deliberately. Who is behind this "vote chori" syndrome and what is sought to be achieved ? It is all fakery going on in the name of opposing SIR and that is unfortunate. Now this fakery has even gone global . Brazilian Model photograph has been dragged in Haryana polls and her alleged claim of an old photograph having been used asking , "What craziness is this?" Rahul Gandhi unveiling what he called "H-files" claiming that "25 lakh voters were either duplicate, non-existent or manipulated" in Haryana voter list must take the issue to the logical ends by proving the same and stop spreading fakery, or a propaganda against the SIR.

It is disgusting to see that the issue of voters' list passing through the strict verification process of SIR is weapon (ised) with potent danger of creating a trust deficit among voters. However, in the absence of concrete proof, evidence and material, SIR was expected to proceed ahead and diffuse so called H.Bombs et-al. Bihar has shown the way on Nov.14.

### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

**The FSTP plant in Tezpur is driving a quiet but powerful transformation, turning waste into a cleaner, healthier city. With modern treatment systems and efficient operations, watch how Tezpur is setting a new benchmark in urban sanitation and sustainable growth. ~ Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM Assam**



## GST Reduction: Passing on the Benefits to Farmers'

DR. PARVEEN KUMAR

Agriculture is very crucial sector for the country's growth. With a contribution of about 17% to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the sector still is a source of livelihood to around 50 percent of the population. Since independence, successive governments have been working to strengthen this sector through various policies, programme and by enacting various legislations. Last decade has witnessed many pro farm initiatives which have not only augmented production but also mobilized and empowered farming community including youths and farm women. Every year the renewed focus of government on agriculture and allied sectors is manifested through the Budgetary allocation to these sectors. The focus of the government thus lies in welfare of farming communities, agripreneurs, various agro-based industries and all other stakeholders engaged in the upliftment of farming community.

The government relies on various types of revenue for public spending. For this it levies various types of taxes (Direct as well as Indirect) as a means of revenue generation. An important indirect tax is the Goods and Services tax (GST) which has replaced many indirect taxes in the country such as excise duty, Value Added Tax (VAT), services tax etc. After subsuming majority indirect taxes, GST is now the single domestic indirect tax law for the whole country. The GST Act was passed in the Parliament on March 29, 2017 and came into effect on July 01, 2017. It is widely seen as a tool to eliminate the cascading effect of taxes and to curb tax evasion as well as to increase the taxpayer's base.

Recently, Government of India slashed the GST on various agricultural items. The GST which was previously as high as 18% was brought down to as low as 5%. It also has given a relief to industries that are agriculture related. A farmer now definitely is feeling relaxed from the burden of taxation. At the same time, the government's move to reduce the GST in agriculture speaks in volumes of how seriously it is concerned about promoting farmers' welfare and rural growth. The reform will not only cut costs for farmers but also help collective organizations like cooperatives and FPOs (Farmer Producer Organizations). Cheaper fertilizers and farm machines will raise productivity. Support for cold storage and food processing will reduce wastage and give farmers better returns. Dairy, honey and other allied activities will also become more profitable. These steps will make Indian farming stronger and more self-reliant, in line with the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Lower GST on tractors and farm equipment will make mechanization more affordable for farmers. More mechanization means more efficiency and timeliness of operations leading to more productivity. Let us see how the GST reduction will help promote use of machinery in agriculture. The GST on tractors (below 1800 cc) has been reduced from 12% to 5%. This will lead to a decrease in the cost of tractors by 40,000 to 60,000 depending upon the horsepower of tractor. Similarly, power tillers will now cost rupees 11,000 less as a result of new GST rates. The biggest price drop is in case of harvester. Farmers can save up to rupee 1, 87, 500 by its purchase whereas straw

reapers are now cheaper by rupees 21,875.

GST on commercial goods vehicles (like trucks and delivery vans) has been reduced from 28% to 18%. GST on prepared and preserved vegetables, fruits, and nuts has been reduced from 12% to 5%. On farm machinery, the GST rate has been lowered from 12% to 5% for a range of machinery, including tractor parts like tyres, tubes, and hydraulic pumps, Sprinklers and drip irrigation systems, harvesting machinery, straw reapers and compost machines. The GST on Fixed Speed Diesel Engines of power not exceeding 15HP has also come down from 12% to 5%. In Dairy sector, GST on Butter, Ghee and milk has come down from 12% to 5%. Similarly, in aquaculture, GST on prepared/preserved fish has also come down from 12% to 5% enabling a more no. of peoples to consume this nutritious food. GST on bio-pesticides and micronutrients has also been reduced, which will benefit farmers. This will also increase their inclination towards bio-fertilizers from chemical fertilizers. Ammonia, Sulphuric acid and Nitric Acid constitute major inputs for fertilizer production. The GST on these inputs has been reduced from 18% to 5%. This will help reduce production costs, help companies avoid passing price hikes onto farmers, keeping fertilizers affordable and demand steady. It thus means ensuring timely availability of affordable fertilizers, directly aiding farmers during sowing seasons.

GST on solar power-based devices has been reduced from 12% to 5% to lower irrigation costs. This means solar energy will now be available to the

common masses at a more affordable price leading to lower upfront costs, and more and faster adoption of this renewable energy source. A 3 Kilo Watt roof top system now costs around 10,000 less making it easier for the households to install. The price of an agriculture 5 HP solar pump costing about 2.5 lakh has now come down by rupees 17,000. The GST on iron, steel, and aluminium milk cans has been reduced from 12% to 5%.

Kendu leaves (Diospyros Melanoxylon) used for wrapping Bidis is a nationalized product like Bamboo and Sal seed. It is also one of the most important non wood forest products of states like Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh and Odisha. The GST rate on Kendu leaves has been cut from 18% to 5%. It positively impacts the supply chain especially for forest dependent communities by increasing their income security and making Bidi manufacturing cheaper. The reduction means a lower cost for Bidi manufacturers, potentially leading to higher margins for tribal rural families who are engaged in collection of Kendu leaves.

The reductions in GST are intended to make mechanization more accessible, reduce costs of various items and equipments thereby helping farmer especially small and marginal ones to purchase them and bring efficiency and precision in their farming operations ultimately resulting in improved productivity. Farmers certainly find these items more affordable. They now have the choice to access modern machinery through ownership or in shared use with various collective organizations.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

**If the wicked flourish and the fittest survive, Nature must be the god of rascals. - George Bernard Shaw**

## Manipur signs MoUs with BSNL and AAI to strengthen forest protection and communication

IMPHAL

The Forest Department of Manipur signed two key Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) and the Airports Authority of India (AAI) on November 14, aiming to modernise the State's forest administration and bolster forest and wildlife protection.

The agreements were signed in the presence of Anurag Bajpai, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests & Head of Forest Force, at the Forest Headquarters in Sanjenthong, Imphal. Senior officials from both BSNL and AAI, along with top Forest Department officers, attended the ceremony.

The MoU with BSNL, titled "Networking & Communication Infrastructure for Forest Revenue Stations of Manipur," will enable the deployment of advanced networking solutions across Divisional Headquarters, Range Offices, and Beat Offices. Key initiatives include installation of Optical Fibre Cable networks, GPS-enabled devices for frontline staff, IP-based CCTV, ANPR



and trap cameras at strategic forest check posts, drone units for aerial surveillance, and the establishment of a Central Command & Control Centre (4Cs) at the Forest Headquarters. The project, aimed at improving real-time monitoring, coordination, and reporting, is planned for phased implementation over the next three years.

The agreement with AAI will establish a dedicated office at Imphal International Airport to facilitate coordination for environmental governance, wildlife protection, and regulatory enforcement. This initiative is expected to curb illegal trafficking of forest and wildlife products at the State's busiest gateway, linking Manipur to other In-

dian states and South-East Asia.

Speaking at the ceremony, PCCF Anurag Bajpai highlighted that the partnership with BSNL would enhance efficiency, transparency, and responsiveness in field operations, while reliable connectivity is crucial for forest protection, monitoring of forest produce movement, and revenue enhancement. The collaboration is being hailed as a first-of-its-kind initiative in Manipur.

BSNL officials reaffirmed their commitment to providing a secure and robust communication infrastructure, supporting the digital transformation of the State's forest administration. AAI representatives emphasised the importance of sustainable practices in aviation and pledged full support to reinforce environmental stewardship and regulatory compliance.

These collaborations mark a significant step in strengthening Manipur's forest governance and demonstrate the State government's commitment to leveraging technology and partnerships for sustainable development.

## Tripura launches statewide crackdown on underage driving; guardians face Rs 25,000 fine



AGARTALA

In an effort to curb rising motor vehicle accidents, the Tripura Police has launched an intensive enforcement drive targeting underage driving across the state.

According to a press release issued by the Tripura Police, the initiative focuses on juveniles below 18 years of age operating motorised vehicles, a practice strictly

prohibited under Section 199A of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988.

Authorities stressed that underage driving poses a serious threat to public safety and will be dealt with firmly.

"According to the amended provisions of the Act, driving a motorised vehicle under the age of 18 is illegal, and guardians or vehicle owners who permit minors to drive will be held accountable. The penalties for such offences are stringent. Vehicle owners or guardians may face a fine of Rs 25,000, while responsible adults could face imprisonment of up to three years.

The registration of the offending vehicle may also be cancelled for one year. Furthermore, juveniles caught driving illegally will be barred from obtaining a driving license until the age of 25," the statement said.

Tripura Police urged all parents and guardians to ensure that minors do not operate any motor vehicle under any circumstances, emphasising that compliance is essential to maintaining road safety across the state.

## Over Rs 600 lakh in unclaimed assets settled in Assam during DEA fund camps

GUWAHATI

More than Rs 600 lakh in unclaimed assets belonging to over 500 depositors have been successfully settled across Kamrup Metropolitan and Kamrup districts in Assam, officials said, as part of the nationwide 'Your Money, Your Rights' campaign.

The campaign, organised through Depositor Education and Awareness (DEA) Fund district-level awareness and assistance camps, will continue across the state till December 31 to promote financial literacy and help citizens claim unclaimed deposits, insurance benefits, and mutual fund investments. In the fourth phase held on Friday, Kamrup Metropolitan and Kamrup districts hosted special camps aimed at spreading financial awareness and assisting depositors. In Kamrup Metropolitan, the camp was organised by the Lead Bank, UCO Bank, under the guidance of the district collector and the State Level Bankers' Committee (SLBC), Assam. In Kamrup district, the event was conducted under the aegis of Yuva Vikash Kendra, Amingaon. Assistance counters were set up to guide citizens through the process of claiming unclaimed deposits, insurance payouts, and mutual fund returns. Participating banks and financial institutions provided verification and KYC support to ensure smooth settlement.

The camps resulted in a total settlement of Rs 511.05 lakh for 327 depositors in Kamrup Metropolitan and Rs 89.59 lakh across 177 accounts in Kamrup, the officials confirmed.

Officials said the initiative not only helps depositors reclaim their assets but also raises awareness about their financial rights and the importance of maintaining up-to-date banking records.

## Meghalaya cabinet clears land acquisition for New Shillong, resolves Group D recruitment row

SHILLONG

The Meghalaya Cabinet on November 14 approved a series of key decisions, including the acquisition of 35 acres of land in New Shillong Township, amendments to the rules governing Group D recruitment, and a revision of the state's fiscal deficit ceiling.

Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma said the newly approved land at Tynring will serve as a crucial corridor linking the Administrative City and the Knowledge City within New Shillong, while also facilitating the proposed relocation of the Central Jail. He said the expansion is essential to ensure seamless connectivity as the government continues to develop the new township. The cabinet also resolved a long-standing ambiguity in recruitment norms for Group D staff by approving an amendment to Rule 6 of the Meghalaya Ministerial District Establishment Service Rules, 2017. For decades, two contradictory office memorandums—issued in

1996 and 2017—had left uncertainty over whether half of all Group D vacancies should be filled through Regular Casual Workers or via direct recruitment. Sangma said the government has decided to follow the 1996 memorandum, making it clear that 50 per cent of the vacancies will now be reserved for Regular Casual Workers. In another major decision, the cabinet approved amendments to the Meghalaya Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2006, raising the state's fiscal deficit limit from 3 per cent to 3.5 per cent of GSDP.

The chief minister said this will create additional borrowing space for the state and help finance developmental projects.

The cabinet also approved the reappointment of Justice Shivaji Pandey as President of the Meghalaya State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission and cleared the Service Rules for the Commission, allowing it to constitute its own recruitment board.

## Gaurav Gogoi says he 'does not fear' Himanta Biswa Sarma, vows to capture Dispur in 2026

GUWAHATI

Assam Pradesh Congress Committee president and Lok Sabha MP Gaurav Gogoi, on November 14, declared that he has "no fear" of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and asserted that the Congress is preparing to return to power in the 2026 Assembly elections.

Addressing reporters in Maibang during his two-day visit to Dima Hasao district, Gogoi said the party will first "capture Dispur" and then take control of the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council.

Gogoi, who attended a workers' meeting of the district Congress unit, said discussions centred on local issues and the party's strategy for the months ahead. He announced that booth-level conventions will soon be held across Dima Hasao and that Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka



Gandhi will be invited to participate.

Responding to questions on the NDA's sweeping victory

in Bihar, the Congress leader said the outcome there would not influence Assam.

"The people of Bihar will vote in Bihar, and the people of Assam will vote in Assam. Here, the Dimas, Bodo, Karbi, Rabha, Moran, Motok, Gorkha and Bengali communities will vote to end the dictatorship of Himanta Biswa Sarma," he said. Gogoi alleged that, under the present government, 40,000 bighas of tribal land had been handed over to major corporate groups. "There is no protection for the land of tribal communities in Assam. If Congress forms the government, safeguarding people's land rights will be our priority," he said. He also criticised the recent delimitation exercise, claiming it was carried out under the influence of Minister Ashok Singhal in a manner that disappointed tribal communities. He accused the chief minister of sidelining leaders

such as Debolal Gorlosa, Tuliram Ronghang, and even former chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal to consolidate his own position. "Himanta Biswa Sarma has finished Pramod Boro's party, and before that, he destroyed Hagrama Mohilar's," Gogoi added. Gogoi said he was unfazed by the allegations periodically levelled against him by the chief minister. "If he thinks false accusations can silence me, he is mistaken. Neither I nor the people of Assam are afraid anymore. Even BJP leaders in Delhi no longer trust him," he claimed.

Earlier in the day, Gogoi visited Haflong Civil Hospital before travelling to Maibang, where he took part in the Congress-backed signature campaign against "vote theft and chair theft". He later addressed a workers' meeting and concluded his tour of the district before departing for Guwahati.

## 'Malicious Misinformation': Debabrata Saikia moves CID against morphed posts targeting him

GUWAHATI

Leader of the Opposition and senior Congress MLA Debabrata Saikia has filed a formal complaint with the Crime Investigation Department's (CID) Cyber Crime wing, alleging the circulation of digitally manipulated and defamatory content about him on Facebook.

In his complaint addressed to the Special DGP, Saikia stated that on November 11, several Facebook pages and accounts shared morphed images and fabricated statements claiming that he had apologised for revealing land details allegedly linked to MP Gaurav Gogoi and his relatives in the Tribal Belt. The posts further insinuated that Saikia was attempting to shield land acquisitions associated with Minister Ashok Singhal and his family-linked company.



Saikia asserted that the content was intentionally created to damage his public image, describing the posts as "false, misleading and defamatory," with the potential to seriously harm his reputation and dignity.

According to the complaint, the

posts fall under offences related to defamation under Section 356 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) 2023, forgery and use of forged digital material under Section 336(4) of BNS 2023, and provisions of the Information Technology Act, 2000, including

Sections 66A and 67 relating to circulation of harmful electronic information.

Saikia urged CID to register an FIR, identify the administrators of the Facebook accounts involved, direct Meta to remove the manipulated content, and preserve digital evidence. He also submitted screenshots and URLs of the posts as supporting proof.

"This misinformation has been created with malicious intent. Such online harassment cannot be ignored," Saikia stated in his letter. The CID Cyber Crime unit is expected to verify the complaint and initiate a preliminary inquiry as per procedure. The circulation of morphed political content has been on the rise in recent months, prompting repeated calls for stricter oversight of social media abuse in Assam.

## Sitharaman reviews schemes in Nagaland, meets anganwadi workers during high-level Kiphire visit



KOHIMA

Union Minister of Finance and Corporate Affairs Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday visited Anganwadi Centre 'A' in Kiphire, where she held an interaction with Anganwadi Workers, Helpers and local children, as part of her review of development initiatives in Nagaland's Aspirational Kiphire District.

During the visit, Sitharaman handed over a cheque provided by the State Bank of India (SBI) and reviewed the progress of Central Government schemes, welfare initiatives and ongoing development projects sanctioned for the district.

Director of the Social Welfare Department, Nagaland, Tosheli Zhimomi, moderated the programme and delivered the welcome address. She also briefed the Union Minister on the

functioning and background of Anganwadi Centres in Kiphire, highlighting the services being delivered to children and women in the region.

Advisor for Fire & Emergency Services, Home Guards & Civil Defence S. Kiumsum Yimchunger, along with several officials and dignitaries, attended the programme.

Later in the day, Sitharaman graced the Pungro-Kiphire Mandal Atmanirbhar Bharat Sankalp Campaign Vidhansabha Sammelan of the BJP Nagaland as the Guest Speaker at the Hopongkiu Memorial Hall in Kiphire. She was joined by Minister for Tourism & Higher Education Temjen Imna Along; Minister for Housing & Mechanical Engineering Bashangmomba Chang; BJP State Secretary & Co-Convenor of the Atmanirbhar Bharat Sankalp Abhiyan Pintu M Ghost; State Vice President and Convenor Zaremo Kikon, along with other senior party leaders.

Ahead of her district engagements, a grand cultural programme was organised in honour of the Union Finance Minister on November 13 at the 14th NAP (IR) Battalion in Kiphire, showcasing the rich cultural heritage of the region and extending a warm wel-

# 72nd All India Co-operative Week inaugurated in Imphal

IMPHAL

The 72nd All India Co-operative Week Celebration 2025 was inaugurated in Manipur under the theme of "Cooperatives as Vehicles for Atmanirbhar Bharat," with a special focus on "Promoting Digitalization to Enhance Operational Efficiency, Accountability and Transparency," on Friday.

The inaugural function was graced by Shailesh Kumar Chourasia, IAS, Commissioner (Cooperation), Government of Manipur, as the chief guest.

As part of the inaugural ritual, the chief guest hoisted the Co-operative Flag, marking the formal commencement of the week-long celebration.

Speaking at the event, Shailesh Kumar Chourasia emphasized that the success of the cooperative movement depends on the efficiency of the entire system, which includes every cooperative society and each individual involved, not just the Department of Cooperation or the Registrar's office.



He highlighted that a strong structure is essential for effective functioning and that the performance of apex societies directly influences the outcomes of the societies working under them.

Acknowledging existing challenges in Manipur's cooperative sector, he pointed out the issues during the ongoing computerization process, particularly the lack of active participation from members.

He stressed that many societies are not functioning as intended because only a small fraction of their regis-

tered members participate in essential activities.

He underscored the vast potential of the cooperative movement in Manipur, especially in sectors like handloom, handicrafts, agriculture, and other local industries, which can generate employment and reduce the need for youth to migrate outside the state.

Unlocking this potential requires collective commitment, coordination, and accountability from all stakeholders.

Training, innovation, and openness to new methods were identified

as essential elements for progress.

He encouraged closer coordination among training agencies such as the Directorate, MSCU, and other bodies.

Regarding scheme implementation, such as the computerization of PACS, he stressed the importance of thoroughly understanding the framework, norms, and purpose behind any scheme. He urged societies to identify gaps and bottlenecks honestly, as acknowledging problems is the first step toward improvement.

He noted the Government of India's strong support for the cooperative movement and encouraged the societies to study available schemes and proactively seek benefits rather than waiting passively.

As Cooperative Week commenced, he encouraged stakeholders to use the occasion for thoughtful reflection and renewed commitment.

He concluded with confidence that, through collective effort and close coordination with the department and the Registrar's office, Manipur's cooperative sector can achieve excellence.

The function was also attended by the former director of ICM and officials and staff of the Cooperative Department.

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# Delhi blast probe: NIA arrests Al Falah University doctor from Bengal's Uttar Dinajpur for alleged terror links



NEW DELHI

With the detention of a young doctor from Al Falah University, the NIA probing the Delhi car explosion case, has found a West Bengal connection to the incident of 10 November.

The national anti-terror agency, along with Delhi Police, detained Zanishar Alam, an MBBS graduate of 2024 from the Faridabad-based university, from Suryapur market in the Dalkhola area of North Dinajpur district, West Bengal, on Friday, for

his alleged links to the explosion near the Red Fort that claimed 13 lives and injured more than 20.

Zanishar, who had come to his native Konal village on 12 November to attend a wedding ceremony, was taken to Siliguri for interrogation. He and his father, Touhid Alam, reside in Ludhiana, sources said. Acting on a tip-off, NIA officials first contacted Touhid in Ludhiana and collected details about his son. They learnt about Zanishar's location from Touhid and then rushed to Dalkhola, sources

added. Villagers described Zanishar as honest, polite, and soft-spoken, expressing shock over his detention in connection with the blast.

The NIA has already arrested four doctors from the same university for their alleged involvement in the Delhi blast.

Meanwhile, the National Medical Commission, the apex body regulating medical education in India, has decided to cancel the registrations of the four accused doctors, including woman practitioner Saheen Sahidi, sources said.

# 9 killed, 32 injured as explosives seized in Faridabad accidentally detonate at J&K police station

JAMMU

At least nine people were killed and 32 injured after what officials said was an accidental blast that tore through the Nowgam police station on the outskirts of Srinagar on Friday night. Officials said the explosion occurred as authorities were extracting samples from a cache of explosives seized in the Faridabad terror module case, adding that the blast was triggered by the unstable nature of the chemicals.

The material was part of the 360 kg of explosives, including ammonium nitrate, recovered from the rented accommodation of arrested accused Dr Muzammil Ganaie from Faridabad and stored at the police station.

The explosion took place during a routine inspection and sampling process involving a Forensic Science Laboratory team, local police personnel and revenue officials, sources said.

The blast caused extensive damage to the building and set several vehicles in the compound on fire. Windowpanes of nearby houses were also shattered, and the impact was felt few kilometres away.

Those killed in the incident included three personnel from the Forensic Science Laboratory, two from the Revenue Department including a Naib Tehsildar, two police photographers, one member of the State Investigation Agency, and a tailor. The bodies have been taken to the Police Control Room in Srinagar.

At least 24 police personnel and three civilians have been admitted to various hospitals in the city, the officials said.

The massive blast smashed the quiet of the night and damaged the police station building. Small successive explosions prevented immediate rescue operations by the bomb disposal squad.

Jammu and Kashmir Director General of Police (DGP) Nalin Prabhat on Saturday said the explosion at the Nowgam police station was an "accidental blast", adding that the cause was under investigation.

"During investigation, an FIR No 162 of 2025 of PS Nowgam, a huge quantity of explosives was recovered from Faridabad on November 9. This recov-



ery like the rest of the recoveries was transported and kept securely in the open area of Police Station Nowgam," Prabhat told media persons at the Police Control Room in Srinagar.

"As part of the prescribed procedure, the samples of the recovery have to be forwarded for further forensic and chemical examination. On account of the voluminous nature of the recovery, this process was going on for the last two days by the FSL team," he said.

According to Prabhat, the unstable and sensitive nature of the material meant the sampling and handling were being carried out with extreme caution by the FSL team. "However, unfortunately at around 11.20 pm last night, an accidental explosion took place," he said.

The blast caused extensive damage to the police station and shook the surrounding area. Windowpanes of many residential houses were shattered, and the impact was felt 2-3 kilometers from the site.

"Any other speculation into the cause of this incident is unnecessary," the DGP asserted. He said nine people were killed in the explosion, while 27

policemen, two revenue officials and three civilians from adjacent areas sustained injuries. The injured were immediately taken to hospital.

Prabhat, said the police station building was severely damaged and nearby structures had also suffered impact. "The extent of this damage is being ascertained. The cause for this incident is being inquired into," he said.

While some of the explosives recovered have been kept at forensic lab of police, the major part of the 360 kg of explosives was stored at the police station, where the primary case for the terror module was registered.

The explosives were stored at the same police station where the initial FIR was registered in mid-October after posters threatening police and security forces appeared on walls in Bumpora, Nowgam.

Treating the incident as a serious threat, Srinagar police registered a case on October 19 and formed a dedicated team.

Meticulous, frame-by-frame analysis of CCTV footage led investigators to identify and arrest the first three

suspects - Arif Nisar Dar alias Sahil, Yasir-ul-Ashraf and Maqsood Ahmad Dar alias Shahid. These three had cases of stone pelting registered against them and were seen pasting the posters.

Their interrogation led to the arrest of Maulvi Irfan Ahmad, a former paramedic turned Imam (preacher) from Shopian who supplied the posters and is believed to have radicalised the doctors using his easy access to the medical community. The trail ultimately led Srinagar police to Al Falah University in Faridabad, where they arrested Dr Ganaie and Dr Shaheen Sayeed. It was here that the massive cache of chemicals, including ammonium nitrate, potassium nitrate and sulphur, was seized. Investigators believe the entire module was run by a core trio of doctors - Ganaie, Umar Nabi (the driver of the explosives-laden car that exploded near the Red Fort on November 10) and Muzaffar Rather (absconding).

The role of the eighth arrested person, Dr Adeel Rather, the brother of the absconding Dr Muzaffar Rather from whom an AK-56 rifle was seized, is still under investigation.

# INTERNATIONAL

## UN Security Council to vote on November 17 on Trump's Gaza plan

UNITED NATIONS

The UN Security Council will vote Monday on a resolution endorsing US President Donald Trump's Gaza peace plan, diplomats said.

Last week the Americans officially launched negotiations within the 15-member Security Council on a text that would follow up on a ceasefire in the two-year war between Israel and Hamas and endorse Trump's plan.

A draft of the resolution seen Thursday by AFP "welcomes the establishment of the Board of Peace," a transitional governing body for Gaza - that Trump would theoretically chair - with a mandate running until the end of 2027.

It would authorize member states to form a "temporary International Stabilization Force (ISF)" that would work with Israel and Egypt and newly trained Palestinian police to help secure border areas and demilitarize the Gaza Strip.

Unlike previous drafts, the latest mentions a possible future Palestinian state.

The United States and several Arab and Muslim-majority nations, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, called Friday for the UN Security Council to quickly adopt the resolution.

"The United States, Qatar, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Jordan, and Türkiye express our joint support for the Security Council Resolution currently under consideration," the countries said in a joint statement, adding they were seeking the measure's "swift adoption."

Friday's joint statement comes as



Russia circulated a competing draft resolution to Council members that does not authorize the creation of a board of peace or the immediate deployment of an international force in Gaza, according to the text seen Friday by AFP.

The Russian version welcomes "the initiative that led to the ceasefire" but does not name Trump.

It also only calls on the UN secretary-general to submit a report that addresses the possibilities of deploying an international stabilization force in war-ravaged Gaza.

The United States has called the ceasefire "fragile," and warned

Friday of the risks of not adopting its draft.

"Any refusal to back this resolution is a vote either for the continued reign of Hamas terrorists or for the return to war with Israel, condemning the region and its people to perpetual conflict," the US ambassador to the United Nations, Mike Waltz, wrote in The Washington Post.

"Every departure from this path, be it by those who wish to play political games or to relitigate the past, will come with a real human cost."

While it seemed until now that

Council members supported principles of the peace plan, diplomatic sources noted there were questions about the US text, particularly regarding the absence of a monitoring mechanism by the Council, the role of the Palestinian Authority, and details of the ISF's mandate.

The Russian UN mission said in a statement that its alternative proposal differed by recognizing the principle of a "two-State solution for the Israeli-Palestinian settlement."

"Unfortunately, these provisions were not given due regard in the US draft," it said.

## "Excited by India's chairmanship of BRICS," says High Commissioner of South Africa to India



NEW DELHI

The High Commissioner of South Africa to India, Anil Sooklal, has expressed excitement over India's upcoming chairmanship of BRICS, which is set to begin in January 2026. Sooklal praised India's energy and leadership, citing its successful G20 presidency as an example.

When asked about India's BRICS chairmanship, Sooklal said that the chairpersonship came at a critical time in the world community's current situation.

Sooklal said, "As the BRICS family, we are very excited by India's chairmanship of BRICS starting first of January 2026 because we know the energy that India brings to the table. We saw that during the G20 presi-

ency in India, and I expect the same kind of energy to be brought to the table by India."

"India is taking the BRICS chairmanship at a very critical time."

The global community is, in many senses, at an inflection point and in need of leadership. India at present is one of the few countries with a positive trust factor in its favour with both countries of the global north and countries of the global South," he added.

He further denounced the fact that trade has been weaponised in a way that has adversely impacted BRICS.

"It's unfortunate that trade has been weaponised in this day and age, and BRICS countries are being severely impacted, including India and South Africa, which face 50% tariffs, which are impacting

people's livelihoods. It's driving more people into poverty, and it's impacting the development of our countries," he said.

Sooklal said that BRICS cannot be ignored now, as it addresses several global issues, including terrorism, which has recently reared its "ugly head" in Delhi.

"Today, you cannot ignore BRICS, and in many senses, BRICS is surpassing entities of the Global North. BRICS is not just about the global South, because all of these issues that we address has to do with the global community as a whole, whether it's the global financial challenges we have the global economy in terms of peace and security, including terrorism, and how we collectively address the scourge of terrorism that's reared its ugly head here in Delhi a few days ago," he said.

He further stated that he was confident India would work closely with South Africa to ensure a successful summit.

"We're very confident that India will work very closely with the presidency of South Africa to ensure a successful summit, a substantive Summit, even though we may not have a full house in terms of attendance, but as I have said, we are confident that South Africa will host a successful summit, and with our partners like India, a substantive outcome," he said.

India will host the 18th BRICS Summit in 2026, assuming the presidency on January 1.

## Contours of a Changing Homeland: Assam's Search for Stability Amid Shifting Demographies

Assam stands at a crossroads shaped by decades of complex demographic movement, cultural anxieties, and political contestation. This northeastern state-lush with rivers, forests, and layered memories-has long carried the weight of migration-linked apprehensions that stretch far back into colonial history. What appears today as a silent churn of identity is, in truth, the culmination of generations of unresolved questions about belonging, territory, and cultural survival.

Across Assam's public sphere, the debate is no longer confined to academia or political rallies; it has seeped into homes, marketplaces, community halls, and the quiet conversations that shape social anxieties. The question which rises repeatedly-sometimes softly, sometimes as a cry-is deceptively simple: Who belongs to Assam? And who does Assam belong to? The answer, however, remains profoundly complex.

**A Century of Transformation: How Assam's Demographic Story Began**

To understand Assam's present, one must look back to a past shaped by colonial engineering. When the British expanded tea plantations and administrative networks, they facilitated-and sometimes encouraged-migration from various regions. Labourers from central India, peasants from present-day Bangladesh, and traders from northern India dramatically altered the socio-economic landscape.

Post-Partition political upheavals intensified the movement. The newly created international border with East Pakistan introduced a porous frontier, making Assam vulnerable to sustained cross-border migration. Wars in 1965 and 1971, the birth of Bangladesh, river erosion, and agricultural opportunities all contributed to demographic inflows.

Thus, Assam's anxieties are neither sudden nor fabricated-they are born of lived realities that span generations.

**Reading the Numbers: What Census Trends Reveal**

Scholars often debate the interpretation of census data, yet certain patterns are unmistakable.

From 1961 to 2011, several lower Assam districts-including Dhubri, Goalpara, Barpeta, and South Salmara-consistently registered population spikes higher than the state's average growth. Dhubri's 24% rise in 2001 and 22% in 2011, contrasted with Assam's overall 17% growth, remains one of the most frequently cited figures in policy circles.

Upper Assam districts, by comparison, saw far more modest increases, reinforcing long-standing perceptions of uneven demographic pressure.

Linguistic shifts further deepen the contours of concern. Assamese is still the largest linguistic group, yet the percentage of Assamese speakers has remained stagnant for four decades-48.8% in 1971 and 48% in 2011. Meanwhile, tribal languages in several pockets show signs of decline, often linked to land pressure, internal displacement, and demographic restructuring.

For a state where language is not merely a mode of communication but a marker of identity, such subtle shifts carry profound emotional significance.

**Exploring the Debate: Two Competing Interpretations of Change**

Assam's discourse on migration sits on two contested viewpoints.

1. The Cautionary Lens: Do Not Over-Interpret the Data

A range of scholars and civil society groups caution against leaning solely on census data to explain demographic anxieties. They argue:

"Fertility rates vary significantly across communities.

"Economic migration to riverine and agriculturally rich zones is natural.

"Internal mobility within the state contributes to localised spikes.

River erosion, particularly along the Brahmaputra, forces large populations to move frequently, complicating population estimates.

Economists further note that migrant agricultural labour has played a crucial role in cultivating floodplains, restoring silted fields, and boosting food productivity, particularly in char areas.

From this standpoint, sensationalising demographic information risks stigmatising vulnerable communities, fuelling prejudice, and undermining the social cohesion Assam desperately needs.

2. The Ground-Reality Perspective: Lived Experiences Cannot Be Ignored

Yet, to dismiss the fears of indigenous communities is to overlook a different layer of truth.

For many tribal and ethnic groups-Bodos, Misings, Tiwas, Rabhas, Deoris-the concern is not abstract. It is tied to shrinking lands, pressures on traditional livelihoods, reconfiguration of local governance structures, and the visible alteration of electoral constituencies.

Land patterns in char areas, population changes in strategic border belts, and the transformation of once-homogenous villages contribute to a sense of cultural vulnerability.

These anxieties are not rooted in xenophobia but in everyday observation-what they see in their neighbourhoods, fields, markets, and census rolls.

**When Judiciary Speaks: A Rare Warning**

The judiciary, too, has taken note. The Gauhati High Court, in multiple observations over the last decade, flagged concerns about irregular migration. Its much-discussed remark in 2024, describing the process as a "silent and invidious demographic invasion," was grounded in state records and field reports. It was not political rhetoric; it was a judicial acknowledgment of persistent structural vulnerabilities.

Such remarks reinforced fears in indigenous communities and shaped the discourse around border management and citizenship



verification.

**The Indigenous Question: Identity in a Fragile Ecosystem**

In Assam, identity is not a matter of political convenience; it is a lived, intergenerational experience.

Bodo villages losing cultivation lands to erosion or encroachment

"Mising settlements grappling with pressures on riverine farming

"Tiwa and Rabha communities navigating shrinking autonomous spaces

"Tribal youth worrying about declining use of ancestral languages

For these groups, cultural survival feels increasingly linked to territorial stability. Their institutions-Morungs, satras, village councils-are symbols of community continuity. When demographic pressures threaten land tenure or local governance, the fear of losing identity becomes deeply personal.

**Humanity's Parallel Story: The Other Side of Belonging**

And yet, Assam's story is not solely one of anxiety.

There is another narrative: of families who have lived in Assam for generations, who speak Assamese fluently, whose children attend local schools, who know no other homeland. For them, the idea of being viewed as foreigners or outsiders is both painful and unjust.

Many such families have built lives in the chars, in tea gardens, in riverbanks, or in small urban pockets. Their economic contributions-farming, fishing, labour, trade-are woven into Assam's growth.

To reduce them entirely to demographic categories risks eroding the inclusive spirit that gave Assam its rich, diverse identity.

Balancing these two emotional universes-indigenous fears and humanitarian considerations-remains one of Assam's hardest governance challenges.

**Government Intervention: Policies That Seek to Restore Balance**

In recent years, policy measures reflect an attempt to respond to long-standing demographic anxieties while trying to uphold constitutional fairness.

1. Strengthening Border Management

Efforts include:

"fencing vulnerable stretches of the Indo-Bangladesh border,

"deploying specialised riverine patrols, using drones and technological surveillance in char areas,

"enhancing inter-agency coordination in infiltration-prone zones.

For a state where rivers routinely swallow villages and redraw borders, these measures are not merely administrative-they are existential safeguards.

2. Land Governance Reforms

Reforms include:

"digitisation of land records to curb manipulation and fraudulent transfers,

"targeted eviction drives against organised encroachments,

"satellite-based monitoring of sensitive belts,

"formalisation of indigenous land rights.

While these steps attract criticism-especially regarding due process-they represent systemic responses to deeply rooted demands from local communities.

3. Development-Based Population Stabilisation

Instead of coercive methods, recent policies focus on:

"improving women's education,

"expanding maternal health programmes,

"enhancing socio-economic indicators in backward districts.

These development-centric interventions aim to address structural contributors to demographic imbalance while preserving human dignity.

**The Citizenship Conundrum: Assam's Most Contentious Debate**

No issue has shaped Assam's political memory as intensely as citizenship verification.

The NRC Update

The National Register of Citizens (NRC), though plagued by administrative challenges, was rooted in the Assam Accord's historic promise to

the need for fairness, transparency, and due process.

**The Ethical Imperative: Identity Must Not Become Hostility**

For Assam to move toward stability, identity preservation cannot translate into blanket exclusion. Similarly, humanitarian compassion cannot ignore indigenous vulnerabilities.

A balanced approach must:

"protect ancestral land rights,

"respect linguistic and cultural diversity, ensure transparent citizenship mechanisms,

"strengthen border management,

"uphold human dignity for all legal residents.

Equity-not alienation-should underline policy decisions. Sensitivity-not hostility-must guide political engagement.

Assam's social cohesion, already fragile from years of mistrust, cannot withstand further polarisation.

**Toward a Shared Future: Crafting a New Social Contract**

Assam's future depends on weaving together the narratives of all its people-indigenous tribal groups, Assamese-speaking communities, migrant workers, and long-settled families who consider the state their only home.

The path forward calls for:

"evidence-based policy, not rhetoric

"empathetic governance, not knee-jerk populism

"community dialogue, not parallel monologues

"legal clarity, not administrative ambiguity

If Assam can forge such a path, identity and inclusion need not be adversaries.

The challenge is monumental, but so is Assam's history of resilience. The state has survived colonisation, Partition, insurgency, ethnic conflict, and waves of migration. Its people have repeatedly rebuilt trust, redefined their boundaries, and reimagined their collective belonging.

Will Assam Remain Uneasy, or Step Forward with Confidence?

Assam's demographic question will not vanish overnight. Yet it need not forever define the state's destiny. With thoughtful policy, respect for ground realities, and genuine commitment to justice, Assam can reorient its narrative-not as a land caught in perpetual demographic fear, but as a state capable of accommodating both identity preservation and inclusive citizenship. The real test lies not merely in guarding its past, but in imagining a future where all communities-indigenous and long-settled-feel secure, valued, and heard.

Assam now stands at a moment where its choices will shape generations. Whether it remains trapped in its unease or rises toward a confident tomorrow will depend on how it resolves the delicate question of identity, belonging, and coexistence.

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# Northeast India and the need for integration

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## INTRODUCTION

Northeast India, comprising eight states—Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura—holds a special place in the Indian subcontinent. The process of integration among the Northeast states has become a key focus for policymakers. Understanding the complexities of Northeast India's integration requires a multidimensional approach that considers geography, demography, diversity, political factors, geopolitics, and the urgent need for unity.

## GEOGRAPHY: THE LAND AND ITS CHALLENGES

Northeast India is often described as a land of rolling hills, lush valleys, snow-capped mountains, and mighty rivers. Spread over approximately 262,000 sq. km (about 8% of India's total area), the region is geographically separated from central India by the narrow Siliguri Corridor (often called the Chicken's Neck), a strip of land only about 22 kilometres wide at its narrowest point. The region's terrain is mostly hilly and forested, making connectivity with the rest of India challenging. It shares international borders with China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal. This unique geography has not only shaped the livelihoods, culture, and settlement patterns of its people but has also contributed to its strategic significance.

## DEMOGRAPHY AND DIVERSITY: A TAPESTRY OF COMMUNITIES

The Northeast is home to approximately 45 million people, accounting for just 3–4% of India's total population. However, its demographic profile is marked by an astonishing diversity. The region is home to hundreds of ethnic groups and tribes, each with its own unique languages, customs, and social systems.

Christianity is a major religion in states like Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya, while Hinduism, Islam, and indigenous faiths are also prevalent. The multiplicity of languages—over 220 distinct languages and dialects—demonstrates the rich cultural heritage. Nevertheless, this diversity poses challenges to social cohesion and, at times, has resulted in friction and conflict.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND POLITICAL ASPECT

Traditionally, the Northeast had distinct historical trajectories. The Ahom dynasty in Assam, tribal chieftainships in Nagaland and Mizoram, Manipur's kingdom, and princely states like Tripura



and Sikkim had their own distinct political systems before colonisation. British administration brought these varied polities under a loosely unified structure, but even during the colonial era, the region was governed with a degree of autonomy. The Inner Line Permit and other special administrative provisions separated "excluded" or "partially excluded" areas from direct colonial administration.

With independence and the creation of the Indian Union, most of the region's states were gradually integrated through a mix of negotiations, constitutional provisions (e.g., Sixth Schedule, Article 371), and, occasionally, military intervention. Despite this, demands for autonomy or outright independence have persisted, fuelled by a sense of ethnic distinctiveness, perceived neglect, and issues like inadequate infrastructure, unemployment, and migration.

## GEOPOLITICS: STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE AND SECURITY DILEMMA

Northeast India's location endows it with immense geostrategic importance. Sharing more than 90% of its border with neighbouring countries, the area is key to India's relations with Southeast Asia. It serves as a counterbalance to the strategic moves of China and other regional players. The 1962 Sino-Indian War highlighted vulnerabilities in the region, especially in Arunachal Pradesh. Insurgency, migration and cross-border ethnic ties have often created security challenges. Various secessionist movements, demanding greater autonomy or outright independence (e.g., in Nagaland, Manipur, Assam), have resulted in decades of armed conflict, prompting heavy military and paramilitary presence and the imposition

of laws such as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA).

At the same time, Northeast India is at the heart of India's Look East/Act East Policy, intended to foster links with Southeast Asian economies. Improved connectivity—such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway—and greater participation in regional groupings like BIMSTEC present new opportunities for economic integration and growth.

## THE NEED FOR INTEGRATION: CHALLENGES AND THE ROAD AHEAD

Integration, in this context, is not merely about administrative or territorial unity but about inclusive development, equal opportunity, and respect for local cultures and aspirations. Several challenges need to be addressed:

**1. Infrastructure and Connectivity:** Despite major projects, road, rail, and digital links remain weak compared to the rest of India. Poor connectivity hinders economic growth and exacerbates the sense of isolation.

**2. Social Cohesion and Identity:** Unity cannot come at the cost of erasing identities. Integration must be based on the recognition of ethnic diversity, linguistic plurality, and unique cultural traditions. Dialogues, cultural exchanges, and educational initiatives are essential.

**3. Political Empowerment:** Ensuring effective governance, transparency, and representation is vital. Implementing decentralisation, respecting local political structures, and addressing grievances promptly fosters trust among one another.

**4. Security and Stability:** Addressing security concerns requires a nuanced approach, moving beyond militarisation to dialogue, negotiations, and targeted socio-economic interventions.

**5. Economic Development:** Special economic zones, organic farming, eco-tourism, and tapping into cross-border trade potential can transform the region. Skill development, education, and health remain fundamental long-term needs.

**6. Geopolitical Engagement:** Leveraging the strategic location for regional integration with Southeast Asia through trade, energy cooperation, and cultural ties can convert Northeast India's identity from a "frontier" to a vital bridge.

## Conclusion

The integration of Northeast India presents both challenges and opportunities. Its geography and demography, while contributing to its uniqueness, also provide lessons for India's unity in diversity. Effective integration requires a balanced approach that promotes growth, maintains identity, ensures security, and fosters a sense of belonging. Only then can the Northeast truly become a united, dynamic part of India's story in the 21st century.



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