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PERSPECTIVE

It's better to be unhappy alone than unhappy with someone - so far.

Assam tea garden women: 'They must have a seat at the table', says Gaurav Gogoi

GUWAHATI
APCC President and MP Gaurav Gogoi, speaking during the ongoing Winter Session of Parliament in New Delhi on Sunday, warned that women, the backbone of Assam's tea gardens, are still excluded from crucial policy discussions affecting their lives.

Raising the issue forcefully in the House, Gogoi said the tea industry survives on the daily hard labour of women, yet their concerns are rarely considered when decisions are made. He emphasised that women perform the toughest physical work, from plucking leaves to carrying heavy loads, while the financial gains mostly benefit garden owners and big companies.

He highlighted that despite being the largest participating workforce in the estates, women have almost no representation in meetings between garden managements, labour unions, and the government.

According to him, this systematic exclusion prevents their most urgent problems from entering policy frameworks.

Gogoi listed several issues that demand immediate attention: lack of toilets in labour lines, rising anaemia among women workers, poor access to healthcare, drug abuse and liquor outlets near estates, and increasing domestic violence. He said these are real, daily challenges, but "remain unheard because the affected women are not at the discussion table."

The Congress leader urged the government to ensure the mandatory inclusion of women representatives in every future meeting related to the tea industry.

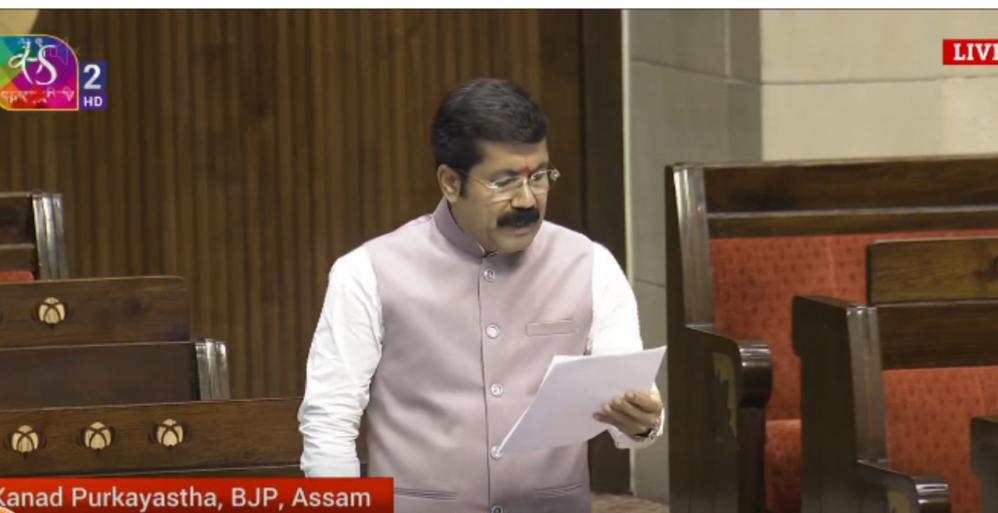
He argued that without women's participation, policies will continue to overlook the ground realities of plantation life.

WHO SAID WHAT



It is a matter of immense joy that the 20th Session of UNESCO's Committee on Intangible Cultural Heritage has commenced in India. This forum has brought together delegates from over 150 nations with a vision to protect and popularise our shared living traditions. India is glad to host this gathering, and that too at the Red Fort. It also reflects our commitment to harnessing the power of culture to connect societies and generations. - Narendra Modi, PM, India

Call to rename Silchar Station as Bhasha Shahid Station echoes in Parliament



OUR CORRESPONDENT

SILCHAR: Silchar's long-pending

demand to rename its railway station after the language martyrs reached the national

stage on Tuesday (December 9). During Zero Hour in the Winter Session of Parliament,

Six militant outfits call 48-hour shutdown in Manipur to protest President Murmu's visit

IMPHAL

The Coordination Committee (CorCom), a coalition of six banned extremist organisations in Manipur, has announced a 48-hour total shutdown on December 11 and 12 to boycott the scheduled visit of President Droupadi Murmu.

The shutdown will begin at 1 am on December 11 and remain in force throughout the President's stay in the state, the group said in a statement issued by media coordinator M. Shak-Hen.

President Murmu is slated to attend the state-level observance of Nupi Lal Day on December 12 - a commemoration honouring Manipuri women who fought British colonial forces in 1904 and 1939.

Militant groups oppose visit

CorCom accused the Cen-

THE SHUTDOWN will begin at 1 am on December 11 and remain in force throughout the President's stay in the state, the group said in a statement



tre of waging a "proxy war" in Manipur and alleged that the President's visit would "further fuel hostility among com-

munities" instead of fostering peace or development.

The outfit urged the public to "condemn and boycott" the visit, claiming it aims "to suppress the people's aspirations."

CorCom comprises six proscribed organisations - KCP, KYKL, PREPAK, PREPAK-Pro, RPF/PLA, and UNLF - all active insurgent groups advocating separatist objectives in the region.

Essential services exempted. The committee clarified that critical services including healthcare, fire services, water supply, media operations, and ritual-related activities will be exempt from the bandh restrictions.

The Manipur government has not yet issued an official response to the shutdown call, even as security preparations are underway for the high-profile visit.

Assam clears PMAY-G backlog; 3.25 lakh families receive home approvals in statewide drive

GUWAHATI

Assam has issued fresh momentum to its rural housing programme with Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma rolling out a large-scale distribution drive for Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) approvals. A total of 3,25,234 families across the state received approval letters on Monday, along with the release of the first instalment to begin house construction.

Launching the initiative at a public event in Boko, Sarma said the drive marks a significant push toward housing saturation in rural Assam.

"Across the state, more than three lakh beneficiaries will receive their approval letters today. The first instalment of funds is also being disbursed," he announced.

The Chief Minister credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Assam on May 19, 2022, as a key milestone in the state's progress under PMAY-G. Sarma recalled that following the Prime Minister's trip, the government distributed five

lakh houses, and another two lakh approvals were issued earlier this year.

"With today's distribution, we have cleared the entire backlog under PMAY-G," he said, noting that all pending instalments under the house-warming programme have now been settled.

Sarma also highlighted the government's expansion of rural housing in 2025, pointing to a major distribution held on March 19 in Guwahati, when lakhs of beneficiaries were handed approval letters.

He further credited Prime Minister Modi's welfare schemes - including PM-Kisan and the expanded Arunodoi programme providing ₹1,000 a month - for improving quality of life in the state.

"These schemes are transforming rural households," he said.

With the latest rollout, the government expects to fast-track construction and move closer to ensuring that every eligible family in rural Assam has access to a permanent home.

Hornbill Esports Festival returns to Kohima, over 300 gamers compete in 2nd edition



KOHIMA

The Hornbill Esports Festival 2025-Nagaland's premier competitive gaming showcase-opened its second edition on Monday at the Indira Gandhi Stadium, drawing more than 300 national-level players to the state capital.

Organised by the Esports Association of Nagaland (ESAN) in collaboration with the Department of Youth Resources and Sports, the event forms a key part of Nagaland's efforts to scale up its esports ecosystem by merging gaming with music, digital culture and youth engagement.

Speaking at the inaugural ceremony, Abu Metha-advisor to the Chief Minister and chairman of the Invest-

ment and Development Authority of Nagaland (IDAN)-described esports as an economic and creative space that India can no longer overlook.

"Esports is a modern-day trend and a billion-dollar industry that cannot be ignored," he said, adding that Nagaland intends to ensure its young players find a place in the rapidly growing sector.

Pointing to the emerging talent pool in the state, Metha highlighted the recent win of a Naga athlete in the football category at the Khelo India Esports Championships and noted that global competitions now offer prize pools running into millions of dollars.

He said competitive gaming has grown beyond a leisure activity to become a legitimate career avenue-not only for professional players but also for content creators, broadcasters, game designers and developers. Several international sports institutes, he noted, were already incorporating simulation platforms into athlete training, strategy development and performance decision-making.

Welcoming the national qualifiers participating in the festival, Metha said every competitor entering Kohima "was already a champion," and encouraged them to embrace the cultural essence of Hornbill, network with fellow players and take home enduring memories.

The festival, one of the marquee youth attractions of the Hornbill season, is expected to host multiple tournaments and engagement events through the week, positioning Nagaland as a rising destination in India's growing esports map.

Itanagar on edge as youth groups enforce 12-hour bandh over mosque demolition, migrant deportation demand



ITANAGAR

A 12-hour shutdown enforced by three youth organisations triggered palpable tension across the Itanagar Capital Region on Monday, as protesters pressed for the demolition of what they allege is an illegal mosque in Naharlagun and the deportation of suspected illegal migrants.

The bandh, driven by the Indigenous Youth Force of Arunachal (IYFA), Arunachal Pradesh Indigenous Youth Organisation

(APIYO) and All Naharlagun Youth Organisation (ANYO), went ahead despite the district administration declaring the shutdown "illegal and unlawful". The groups also demanded a ban on weekly markets within the capital area. Security was tightened across key junctions and public spaces. Inspector General of Police (IGP) Chukhu Apa, addressing journalists from the Police Headquarters, warned that any breach of peace would invite strict legal action.

He said "elaborate security arrangements" had been made to safeguard public movement and appealed to protesters not to disturb law and order.

Civil society organisations have urged the youth bodies to reconsider their agitation, noting that the shutdown could cause severe inconvenience to residents, particularly at a time when election-related activities are underway.

The current bandh had originally been planned for November 25 but was deferred after the state government proposed dialogue. A subsequent meeting scheduled with the Home Minister on December 5, however, could not take place due to election commitments - a development that prompted the protesting groups to enforce the December 9 shutdown. APIYO president Taro Sonam Liyak said the bandh would not be withdrawn further and called for public and business participation. He also stated that the state government must take responsibility for any untoward incident during the protest.

With political talks stalled and demands unaddressed, authorities continue to monitor developments closely as the shutdown unfolds across the capital.

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Army's 'Boots to Bytes' Leap

The Army's newly unveiled 'Boots to Bytes' transformation plan marks one of the most consequential shifts in India's military thinking in recent decades. At its heart lies a simple truth: the character of warfare has changed irreversibly. The dominance of infantry formations, conventional firepower and linear battlefields is now overshadowed by a new triad—drones, digital systems and data-driven decision-making. In this context, the Army's Digitisation-3 programme and its suite of 100 indigenous digital and AI applications represent not just a technological upgrade but an existential necessity. Modern warfare has become defined by speed, precision and cognition. Conflicts across the world—from Ukraine to the Middle East—underscore a new reality where drones strike with pinpoint accuracy, cyber weapons disrupt the nation behind the frontline, and battlefield decisions must be taken in fractions of a second. India can neither afford to ignore this shift nor rely solely on the strengths that gave it victory in previous eras. The 'Boots to Bytes' initiative recognises exactly that.

The Operation Sindoor provided a striking illustration of the changing battlefield. Pakistan's use of Turkish and Chinese armed drones, many flown in coordinated swarms, signalled a deliberate attempt to alter the operational balance. Yet, India's preparedness—built on proactive surveillance, electronic warfare and counter-drone capabilities—ensured the nation suffered almost no damage. The retaliation, meanwhile, exposed Pakistan's vulnerabilities. But this must not breed complacency. Against a technologically sophisticated adversary like China, which has already integrated AI, robotics, cyber warfare and hypersonic capabilities into its war doctrine, India must continuously anticipate and prepare for the next generation of threats.

This is where the Army's new digital overhaul becomes crucial. The Digital Sena mission, with 40 applications focusing on logistics, automation and efficiency, and the larger set of 60 AI-powered tools, shows a force ready to embrace transformational thinking. The introduction of tethered UAVs equipped with jammer systems represents a proactive shift—not merely reacting to enemy drones but denying them access altogether. Similarly, the indigenous GIS platform transforms decision-making by giving commanders a unified, real-time operating picture of terrain, assets and troop movement. Even more significant is the Ekam AI platform, designed specifically to align with military doctrines and handle classified data. With capabilities ranging from document analysis to automated military correspondence, and eventually an Indian Army-specific large language model, Ekam represents a paradigm shift. The Army will have a secure, indigenous AI system capable of pattern recognition, predictive analysis and decision support—without relying on foreign technologies or vulnerable networks.

AI-assisted warfare is no longer a futuristic theory. In the digital age, there is little time for extended war-room discussions when an enemy missile, swarm drone or cyber strike can be launched within seconds. The imperative now is to feed AI systems with all possible scenarios well in advance—allowing them to recommend or even initiate defensive responses at machine speed. Human oversight will remain essential, but human limitations can no longer be the central driver of battlefield response times.

The Army's new climatology tool, built on two decades of geospatial data, is further proof that modernisation is not restricted to weapons and sensors. This predictive system, capable of forecasting landslides and avalanches, is a lifesaving tool in some of the world's most treacherous operational terrains. It exemplifies the broader approach: modern warfare requires modern logistics, modern planning, modern communications and modern situational awareness.

The Defence Ministry's nod to this extensive technological modernisation is timely and necessary. What stands out is the breadth of the reform, encompassing more than 100 projects. This demonstrates the determination to incorporate every conceivable technological advancement into its operational ecosystem. It is a recognition that there is no upper limit to improvement, and no final stage to modernisation. As AI evolves, so will India's military capabilities.

'Boots to Bytes' is not just a slogan—it is a shift in military culture. Every soldier, regardless of rank or role, must now understand the intricacies of digital systems, drones, cyber defence and AI-driven operations. Modern wars will be fought by humans, but won by those who best leverage technologies.



QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Day by day, what you choose, what you think and what you do is who you become." - Heraclitus

Trump's long Shadow India-Russia Careful on Optics



SHIVAJI SARKAR

The currency crisis is bound to impact India growth. Indeed, a deep crisis is ahead. The falling rupee is likely to hit the common man's pocket as domestic fuel prices may rise sharply despite a global thaw in crude prices. Would the Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit, his close embrace and promises, make a difference?

Putin's visit may help New Delhi in many spheres but not in the crude sector, which India has decided to cut sharply. The Russian crude has impacted Indians, due to overdependence on trade with the US Trumpire, though they never benefitted from the deals. The benefit was only to two companies, one Indian and the other Russian. Their profits alone swelled, while people, government and companies continued to buy fuel at high prices.

India-Russia ties go back to the Soviet era and have endured irrespective of the changing geopolitical landscape coinciding with New Delhi's talks with the US on a trade deal to cut punitive tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump on its goods over India's purchases of Russian oil. That's to put it mildly. Trump has been breathing down each movement of the Indo-Russian ties. There was even news that the plane Putin was travelling to New Delhi had the most-monitored movements. Trump shadows all.

The Putin visit is not a nostalgic return to Cold War diplomacy. "It is a negotiation over risk, supply chains and economic insulation", says Global Trade Research Initiative. India has close ties since the Nehru-Kruschev era of 1950s, the 25-year strategic deal with Indira Gandhi, Putin renewing it in 2000 with AB Vajpayee continuing the legacy. Since then much has changed both in the Ganga and Volga, but "Russia ties like pole star", says Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Putin promises non-stop energy.

The Ukraine war has added a new NATO-European dimension. The UK is all for NATO but not keen on joining

a war. Putin faces pressure from his European allies. Russia feels being isolated in Europe, its geographical entity. Ambassadors of Germany, France and the UK write a rare joint article in an Indian newspaper criticising Russia's stance on Ukraine as he lands in New Delhi.

Were the NATO allies acting on their own or at the behest of their masters? Not known but it's more likely. Trumpian disgust for Russian oil purchases accusing India of fuelling/funding the Ukraine war ignites his sanctions to keep both the countries cornered if exactly not on leash.

For Trump, Putin got the freedom to move out with the Alaska meet for peace negotiations on August 15, where the two leaders discussed how to end the Ukraine war. That was the first free trip of Putin outside Moscow since 2020. The next is the celebrated visit to New Delhi. Almost it is his first visit to an Asian country. This is not to mention his discussions at Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) meet in Tianjin, China on August 31 and September 1.

Putin's New Delhi visit has plenty of optics, modest deliverables but Russia or Soviet Union has been a dependable ally. The missing defence deal, even the nuclear submarine deal, spoke loudly: India is balancing Russia and America with caution.

The visit seeks India's august revival of free-trade talks with the \$5-trillion Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). With exports weakening due to steep 50 percent Trump tariffs, two months of declining shipments, a slowdown in manufacturing, and the rupee falling past 90 per dollar, India is urgently seeking new markets. Russia and the EAEU have become priority destinations, as New Delhi works to offset rising pressure on its trade.

India and Russia announced a major expansion of economic ties during Putin's visit. Both sides launched a new Economic Cooperation Programme aimed at sharply increasing trade and investment, with targets of

\$100 billion in annual trade by 2030 and \$50 billion in mutual investments.

Putin reaffirmed the commitment to complete four more nuclear plants at Kudankulam. Two have been commissioned supposed to be India's largest nuclear plant. The milestone advances India's largest nuclear project highlights Moscow's role as New Delhi's most dependable energy partner.

Bilateral trade already hit a record \$68.7 billion in 2024-25 from a mere \$ 8.1 billion in 2020. Key agreements were signed in energy, finance (including national currency settlements), fertilizers, healthcare, steel, shipbuilding, coal, and banking. India also plans to open new consulates in Russia to deepen official engagement. Defence cooperation remains central, anchored by an existing military and technical pact that runs through 2031. Commodity exports to Russia minimal in millions dollar.

The national currency settlement reiterated by Putin is a commitment to BRICS. He held talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, attended a business forum and announced the launch of Russia Today (RT), a Kremlin-funded state-controlled TV network. Interestingly Trump has a dislike for the RT.

Even with relatively few major deliverables, the visit provided enough substance for Moscow and New Delhi to reaffirm their "special and privileged strategic partnership." President Putin praised efforts to expand cooperation, underscored by agreements such as the Russia-India Economic Cooperation Programme, a framework for collaboration on critical minerals and supply chains, and a commitment to strengthen pharmaceutical ties, including a joint factory in the Kaluga region.

It may be recollected Soviet Union helped build the medicinal plant company Indian Drugs and Pharmaceuticals Ltd. (IDPL) (and other drug units) in the 1960s, providing crucial technology and aid for public sector drug production in India. It provided inex-

pensive necessary drugs for decades before the plant was closed.

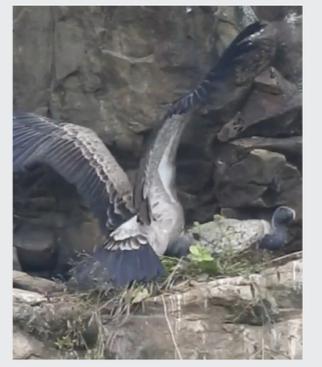
Optics did not stop at economics. Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge, Leaders of the Opposition in both Houses of Parliament, were not invited to the dinner hosted for Russian President Vladimir Putin at the President's residence on Friday, though Congress MP Shashi Tharoor was. This comes a day after Lok Sabha LoP Rahul Gandhi alleged the Modi government is going against "tradition" and doesn't want him or a representative of the Opposition to meet Vladimir Putin because of its "insecurity".

The Putin visit may have more optics left in the domestic and international scenario. Uncanny Trump, sceptical European leaders and neighbourhood developments in Afghanistan and Iran may have lot to unfold. Is it the beginning of a new era—peace, conflict or tranquil?

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Glad to announce the release of 30 White-rumped & 5 Slender-billed Vultures from VCBC, Rani into @kaziranga's 6th Addition.

Like Jatayu soaring in Ramayana, these guardians of our health return to the wild, marking a triumph of our dedicated conservation efforts. ~ Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, Assam CM



VANDE MATARAM BEYOND POLITICS: A NEEDONOMICS CALL FOR VALUE-DRIVEN YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

**PROF. MADAN MOHAN GOEL
PROPOUNDER NEEDONOMICS & FORMER
VICE-CHANCELLOR**

The recent Lok Sabha debate surrounding Vande Mataram once again drew the nation into a storm of political confrontation—accusations, counter-accusations, and partisan narratives. Yet this moment offers a deeper opportunity for reflection, especially for the youth of India who stand at the crossroads of the nation's future.

Needonomics School of Thought, rooted in ethical, value-based living, encourages us to view Vande Mataram not through a political lens, but through a moral and national one. It calls upon young Indians to rise above verbal wars and embrace the values that truly strengthen the nation.

Vande Mataram: A Value Statement, Not a Political Slogan

Vande Mataram was conceived as an expression of reverence toward the motherland—a tribute celebrating discipline, unity, selflessness, and sacrifice. Over time, however, political compulsions have sought to reduce it to a slogan of convenience rather than a compass of character.

Needonomics reminds us that the true worth of any national symbol lies not in the volume with which it is argued, but in the sincerity with which it is lived. For the youth, chanting Vande Mataram

should not spark confrontation; it should inspire commitment—to ethical choices, responsibility, and national harmony.

From Noise to Need: A Needonomics Lens for Youth

In a digital era dominated by social media outrage and sensationalism, young minds are often pushed into echo chambers that reward aggression over understanding. Heated debates may generate visibility, but they rarely generate values.

Needonomics principle—focuses on what is needed, not on the noisy distractions—is particularly relevant.

What the youth need today is not more ideological conflict, but:

Clarity of thought
Character in action
Constructive engagement with national values
Instead of asking "Who insulted whom?" or "Which leader is right?", young citizens must reflect on deeper questions:

What does Vande Mataram ask of me as an Indian?

How can I embody respect, unity, and responsibility?

How can I contribute positively rather than add to the pollution of public discourse?

Learning from the Gita: Duty Over Disputes
Needonomics draws wisdom from the Bhagavad

Gita, which teaches karm (purposeful action), vivek (discernment), and samatv (balanced conduct). These principles urge us to remain grounded, responsible, and free from the influence of anger and ego.

Just as the Gita advises focusing on one's duty without attachment to praise or provocation, Vande Mataram—in the Needonomics framework—becomes a call to service, not a battlefield for rhetoric.

Youth as Torchbearers: From Debaters to Nation-Builders

India's demographic advantage will transform into national progress only if the youth choose values over verbal violence. Needonomics encourages three core practices for value-driven youth engagement:

1. Respectful Engagement

Acknowledge the contributions of leaders across political lines. Public discourse must be anchored in dignity, not derision.

2. Value Assimilation

Let Vande Mataram inspire everyday ethics—respect for the land, responsible use of resources, and empathy towards fellow citizens.

3. Responsible Citizenship

Channel energy into action: community development, environmental protection, skill enhancement, and ethical entrepreneurship.

Good citizenship, not loud sloganeering, is the true tribute to the motherland.

Reimagining Patriotism: Quiet Strength Over Loud Claims

Patriotism need not roar in the halls of Parliament; it must reflect in daily life. Needonomics highlights a grounded form of patriotism that emerges through:

Helping others without expectation
Practising honesty in academic, professional, and public spaces

Using natural resources wisely
Offering constructive suggestions rather than personal attacks

This moral patriotism is what Vande Mataram truly stands for.

Vande Mataram as a Moral Compass for Youth
When Vande Mataram is dragged into political rivalry, its spiritual and cultural essence becomes diluted. The Needonomics School of Thought urges the youth of India to move beyond these divisions and reclaim the song as a beacon of national character.

Young Indians must become ambassadors of unity, discipline, and harmony—not contributors to verbal warfare. Ultimately, Vande Mataram is not just a phrase to be spoken; it is a value to be lived.

A nation built on such lived values will stand stronger than any argument, any debate, or any political storm.

Assam CM presents scooters to students under Dr. Banikanta Kakati Merit Award

GUWAHATI

Giving a boost to the young achievers, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma launched distribution of scooters under Dr. Banikanta Kakati Merit Award, supporting 11,250 students including 6,860 girls who scored 80 per cent and above in the Higher Secondary Examination- 2025 at a function held at Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra in Guwahati on Monday.

Speaking on the occasion, Chief Minister Sarma said that his government, with the aim of promoting academic excellence, introduced the Dr. Banikanta Kakati Merit Award.

He said that under the scheme, the government has given scooters to a total of 1,86,442 students from 2017-18 to 2024-25.

He said that for the purpose, the gov-

ernment has already spent more than Rs. 1043 crore. Congratulating the scooter recipients, Chief Minister Sarma advocated two golden rules for road safety: avoid riding a scooter until they obtain a driving license, and wear a helmet every time they ride.

The Chief Minister said that the government made minor changes to the implementation of the Dr. Banikanta Kakati Merit Award this year. As a result, the number of students who received scooters fell to 11,250 from a whopping 48,673 last year.

He observed that, even though fewer students received scooters under the Dr. Banikanta Kakati Merit Award this year, the Nijut Moina scheme now covers more than 5 lakh girls.

Sarma said that to inspire boys in their studies, a new corresponding scheme like 'Nijut Moina' will be intro-

duced for boys on the first of January.

He attributed his decision to building a strong academic environment in Assam. The Chief Minister, on the occasion, also urged the students to embrace positive thinking. He said that people who hold negative thoughts create disorder in society. Students who indulge in negativity often drift from the right path.

He noted that such students eventually fall into the traps of criminal mentality. He said his government has been working since the beginning to fight such harmful mindsets and foster a positive outlook among the students.

He added that students with a positive mindset show strong self-confidence. Even if they fail to achieve an encouraging result, they do not lose hope. In contrast, people with a negative outlook find faults in everything. He said that the human mind and artificial intelli-

gence share a balance in how they form thoughts. The habits and mindset people follow shape their personality, the Chief Minister added. Speaking about the rapid pace of development in Assam, the Chief Minister said that the state now has more than 25 medical colleges. 15 colleges are already operational, and 10 more are at various stages of construction. He said that at one point, medical education in the state was not accessible. Only very brilliant students or those from very wealthy families could pursue it because the state had only three medical colleges with 250 seats. He said that the number of medical seats now stands at 2000, and that the tally will continue to grow to 5000 by 2030. The Chief Minister said that those days were gone when students from Assam had to travel to cities like Pune for higher studies because the state lacked universities. Giving a turna-

round, Assam now has two central universities and twenty-five to twenty-six state universities that either function already or remain under construction.

He added that the state now has almost 30 engineering colleges, including IIT Guwahati and NIT Silchar, which people once could not even imagine.

Sarma said that Dassault Systmes has taken steps to set up a facility worth about Rs 200 crores at Assam Engineering College to build a platform for students to create digital tools. Once this project takes shape, students in Assam will receive training in fields related to the design of complex aerospace products. He said that his government has also started an institute in Dibrugarh for maritime engineering that teaches ship repairing. He said that plans are in the pipeline for setting up a Google data centre in Assam. He also informed that the

State government is working to establish a mobile manufacturing unit in the state. He said that work on the first green hydrogen plant in Numaligarh will start next year and that the government has already allotted land for it.

Sarma also said that the state aims to set up a unit to produce bio-aviation fuel. He also elaborated on plans to build a 3,200-megawatt thermal power plant. A state that once faced severe electricity shortages will supply power to neighbouring states like Nagaland, Meghalaya and Tripura by 2031, the Chief Minister added. Secretary of Education Narayan Konwar delivered the welcome address for the programme, which Education Minister Ranaj Pegu also addressed. Adviser Higher Education Professor Debabrata Das, along with other dignitaries and students, was present on the occasion.

SC grants bail to former Assam professor accused of anti-India post, says order no ground for reinstatement

GUWAHATI

The Supreme Court on Monday granted bail to former Gossaigaon College professor Md Joyal Abedin, who was arrested in May for allegedly posting anti-India content on social media. The bench, however, made it unequivocally clear that the bail order cannot be cited as justification for seeking reinstatement in the college from which he remains suspended.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Jyotsna Singh Bagchi noted that Abedin has been in custody for over six months and the trial is unlikely to conclude soon. "Taking into consideration all the factors, let him be released on bail, subject to furnishing bail bonds. Let him be present in court for every hearing," the court said.

The judges also underlined that Abedin still faces two additional cases - one involving allegations of molesting female students, and another concerning objectionable remarks against them online. The bench reiterated its earlier observations describing the former professor as "a pervert" and "a threat to young girls," saying those remarks remain relevant in the context of the accusations.

CJI Kant further told the Assam government's counsel that Abedin's suspension would continue and should not be affected by the grant of bail.

Abedin had approached the Supreme Court after the Gauhati High Court rejected his bail plea. His counsel argued that the contentious post was deleted and an apology issued soon after, adding that trial delays caused prolonged detention as no judicial officer was available at the Gossaigaon court.

In an earlier hearing, the apex court had asked the Chief Justice of the Gauhati High Court to either fill the judicial vacancy at Gossaigaon or transfer the matter to Kokrajhar to enable progress in the trial.

Manipuri Arts and Culture Centre inaugurated at Fulertal



OUR CORRESPONDENT

LAKHIPUR: Minister Kaushik Rai on December 8 inaugurated the Manipuri Arts and Culture Centre at Konjeng Leikai in Fulertal, Lakhimpur. The centre has been set up under the Untied Fund 2022-23 with a financial allocation of ₹50 lakh.

The new facility aims to strengthen efforts to preserve and promote the cultural heritage of the Meitei community. It will function as a learning and performance space for young artists, helping them stay connected to

their traditions and develop their skills.

The event drew several dignitaries, including Manipuri Development Council Chairperson Reena Singha, retired ADC Shanti Kumar Singha, AP President Biromoni Singha, Lakhimpur Municipality Board Chairman Mrinal Kanti Das, Vice Chairman Rabintra Singha, BJP District Vice President Sanjay Kumar Thakur, R. K. Samahal and others.

The gathering marked a significant step toward nurturing local talent and expanding cultural activities in the region.

Ukhrul relief camp objects to unscheduled visit by MLA Khemchand

IMPHAL

A brief, unannounced visit by MLA Y. Khemchand to the Litan Sareikhong Relief Camp in Ukhrul on December 8 has drawn objections from camp authorities and local bodies, who say the stopover was neither coordinated nor communicated in advance.

Khemchand, accompanied by a group of BJP workers, reached the camp around 9.30 a.m. when many internally displaced persons (IDPs) had already left for daily wage work, leaving mostly women, children and elderly inmates present. Camp in-charge Lunkhohang Baite said the visit lasted only a short while and mainly involved photographs being taken. "We were not informed of the visit beforehand," he said.

Following the visit, camp representatives flagged con-



cerns over certain media reports which, they claimed, merged visuals of the visit with an unrelated interview by a journalist, creating the impression of deeper engagement

between the MLA and camp residents. They urged news organisations to maintain clarity and accuracy to avoid misleading narratives.

The Kuki Inpi Ukhrul Dis-

trict (KIU) also registered its objection, terming the visit a breach of protocol and expressing concern that the sight of security personnel unsettled survivors already living through displacement and uncertainty. The body added that neither district-level Kuki organisations nor the local youth bodies were notified in advance.

While KIU acknowledged that movement of Meitei individuals through the district has been permitted in the interest of coexistence, it clarified that political visits require consultation and cannot be assumed as routine passage.

Both camp authorities and KIU called for greater sensitivity, coordination and transparency from political leaders and the media when engaging with displaced families, stressing that humanitarian spaces should not be used for unscheduled political activity.

Assam CM alleges Congress ticket 'sale' for crores ahead of Assembly polls

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has levelled serious allegations against the Congress, claiming that party tickets for the upcoming Assembly elections are being offered in exchange for payments ranging from ₹1 crore to ₹10 crore - particularly in constituencies with significant minority electorates.

Speaking to reporters on Monday, Sarma said multiple Congress aspirants had privately complained of being asked to pay advance amounts even before ticket declarations.

"We have received credible information that Congress leaders in Assam are demanding crores from ticket hopefuls. An advance of ₹1 crore is being sought, and for at least 22 seats, the rate has been



fixed between ₹1 crore and ₹10 crore," he alleged.

The Chief Minister suggested that the scale of the alleged transactions would become clearer once the party releases its candidate list.

"The day they announce their tickets, the reactions will speak for

themselves. I won't say more today," Sarma remarked, hinting that further disclosures could follow.

Sarma also criticised what he described as unusual practices around internal Congress meetings in Delhi. According to him, ticket-seeking leaders have been

instructed to mobilise supporters at their own expense - a departure from typical party-funded arrangements.

"The INC President has reportedly asked aspirants to bring people to Delhi themselves. There has been a sudden spike in rail and flight bookings from minority-heavy districts," he claimed.

He further questioned the internal system he alleged was driving multiple leaders to spend large sums despite only one ultimately receiving a nomination. "These are not official candidates - only hopefuls. One gets the ticket, the rest will lose their money. Everyone is trying to prove strength by bringing more supporters," Sarma said.

The Chief Minister also asserted that he has "inside sources" within the Congress, adding, "Even if something is discussed inside their homes, I will know."

Multispeciality Mega Health Camp draws 425 beneficiaries at Imphal's IMA Market



KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

IMPHAL: Six Lions Clubs of Imphal Valley, in partnership with NHM-NCD and the Directorate of Health Services, organised a Multispeciality Mega Health Check-up and Paediatric Cancer Awareness Camp on December 7 at the historic IMA Market in Khwairamband Bazar.

Led by Prof. Nongmaithem Romi Singh, PMJF, GMT District Coordinator-I, the camp saw strong participation from more than 425 beneficiaries, including women vendors from the three Ima Markets and residents from nearby localities.

A team of 18 medical specialists from General Medicine, PMR, Orthopaedics, and dietetics provided day-long consultations. The camp offered a wide range of diagnostic services, including blood sugar tests, routine lab investigations, ECG, HIV screening, diabetes detection, and TB screening with on-site X-ray support. These facilities

helped identify early health concerns and guided participants toward appropriate follow-up care.

The programme also featured a Paediatric Cancer Awareness session highlighting early warning signs and the need for timely treatment. Dr. N. Hemanta Kumar Singh, Director of Health Services, and Dr. Y. Premchandra, State Nodal Officer, NCD, attended the event and praised the collective effort to bring essential healthcare directly to the community. Senior Lions leaders, including Past District Governor Lion Haobam Manikumar, Lion M. Gojendra, and Lion Th. Kesho, joined the camp, interacting with beneficiaries and motivating volunteers. A total of 54 Lions volunteers supported the day's operations.

The participating Lions Clubs announced plans for more community-focused health initiatives across Manipur, reaffirming their commitment to accessible healthcare and sustained public outreach.

Taxpayers' money is being wasted: AIUDF leader Rafiqul Islam on Vande Mataram debate in Parliament

GUWAHATI

Reacting to the Vande Mataram debate in Parliament on Monday on the 150th anniversary of the National Song, All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) leader Rafiqul Islam said that allocating 8 hours for discussion on Vande Mataram was redundant, and taxpayers' money was being wasted.

Rafiqul Islam said, "I don't understand what has happened to our Prime Minister. There are so many important issues which need to be discussed in the Parliament, but they are not being discussed. The opposition gives important notices but there is no discussion on that. I don't understand the need to allocate 8 hours to discuss Vande Mataram. People who sing Vande Mataram continue to do so without opposition, but those who do not sing it, the Constitution does not compel them to sing it either. They are wasting the precious hours of Parliament, and taxpayers' money is being wasted."

Earlier, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra took potshots at the BJP during the discussion in Lok Sabha on 150 years of Vande Mataram, saying the National Song "has always been dear to us, has always been sacred to us, and will always remain



sacred to us" and asked if it is "sung in the BJP-RSS sessions or not".

Priyanka Gandhi said the Modi government wants to divert the country's attention from essential issues concerning the public and asked for the rationale for a debate on the National Song, which people deeply revere.

"There are two reasons for the debate on Vande Mataram in the House today. One, elections are coming up in West Bengal. In such a situation, our Prime Minister wants to establish his role, and second, those who fought the freedom struggle and sacrificed for the country - this government wants an opportunity to level new accusations against them. By doing this, the govern-

ment wants to divert the country's attention from the essential issues concerning the public," Priyanka Gandhi said.

She alleged that the BJP indulges in "event management" and said that not accepting the decision regarding the paragraphs of Vande Mataram will amount to an insult to members of the Constituent Assembly and leaders of the freedom movement.

"You (BJP) are for the elections, we are for the country. No matter how many elections we lose, we will sit here and keep fighting you and your ideology. We will keep fighting for our country. You cannot stop us," she said.

The Congress leader accused Prime

Minister Narendra Modi of being short on facts in his speeches and deliberately overlooking the contributions of the Congress.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivers good speeches, but he is weak when it comes to facts. The way Modi ji presents facts before the public is his art. But I am a representative of the people - I am not an artist," she said.

She said PM had not properly contextualised former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's letter to Subhash Chandra Bose on Vande Mataram and had not given all related facts.

The Congress leader said the government is not finding a solution to the problems of people and claimed that people BJP people are also saying in private that "centralisation of power" is damaging the country.

"In every session of the Congress, Vande Mataram is sung collectively. The question is: Is Vande Mataram sung in BJP-RSS sessions or not? By making this great mantra of the nation's soul controversial, the BJP is committing a sin, but the Congress party will not be part of this sin. This national song 'Vande Mataram' has always been dear to us, and will always remain sacred to us," Priyanka Gandhi said.

"PM Modi said that in 1896, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore sang this song for the first time in a convention, but he did not tell which session it was. Was it a session of the Hindu Mahasabha or RSS? Why was he hesitant to say that it was Congress's session?" she asked.

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Pakistan Army-backed terror attacks hinder normal ties: New NCERT Class VII book

NEW DELHI

NCERT's new Class VII Social Science book has introduced a chapter on India's neighbours, noting that Pakistan Army-backed terror attacks have hindered India-Pak normal ties.

The book also underlines that efforts are underway with China to resolve disputes through trade and dialogue.

The 31-page chapter -India and Her Neighbours- expands the idea of neighbourhood beyond land borders to maritime partners. It states that the book uses this broader lens "to situate India's central and strategic place in South Asia."

This chapter has been newly introduced in the Class VII book -Exploring Society India and Beyond- and did not exist in the previous edition.

On China, the chapter underlines long civilisational links and recent friction. The book describes India and China as two of Asia's largest and most influential nations with Buddhism have a powerful link between the two countries.

"In recent years there have also been phases of heightened tensions, mostly related to their shared borders and a few serious conflicts... On the other hand, efforts are being made to resolve disputes through trade, dialogue and border resolution mechanisms," it notes.

In the 'Dont Miss Out' box, there is also a mention of the Hindu merchants who built temples in the Chinese port city of Quanzhou, an important trading centre

in 13th Century. At the Kaiyuan temple, pillars depict carvings of Vishnu, Shiva, and stories from the Ramayana and the Puranas.

The section on Pakistan calls bilateral ties among the most difficult in the region, shaped by Partition and four major conflicts.

In one of its strongest lines, the book says, "Frequent terrorist attacks launched against India with the support of the Pakistan Army have prevented normal relations between the two countries."

The chapter adds that the India-Pakistan border is "not just a geographical line, but also a symbol of shared heritage as well as a tragically divided history."

The chapter also gave an overview of the Kartarpur Corridor, which makes it easier for thousands of people to visit Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Kartarpur. "For decades, Indian devotees could only view this holy site from a distance, using binoculars set up near the border at Dera Baba Nanak in Punjab. The idea for a corridor was first proposed in the 1990s but only became a reality in 2019, when the corridor was officially opened to mark Guru Nanak's 550th birth anniversary," the book mentions.

In Bangladesh, the text points to a close partnership anchored in history, rivers and culture. It says the two nations share "an enduring relationship shaped by a common history,

culture and language," and describes it as one of India's most important regional ties.

India-Nepal relations are framed around open borders and deep cultural connections. The book explains that their arrangement "allows citizens to cross freely without passports or visas, enabling people on both sides to access education, healthcare, employment and maintain family connections."

With Bhutan, the chapter highlights hydropower cooperation and Buddhist heritage, calling the bilateral bond "a relationship marked by mutual respect, strategic cooperation and cultural affinity."

On Sri Lanka and the Maldives, the book underscores ancient cultural overlap and modern strategic cooperation, noting India's repeated emergency assistance to its island neighbours, including during the 2004 tsunami and the 2014 Male water crisis. The chapter also traces India's historic imprint across Southeast Asia -- Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia -- through maritime trade and the spread of Buddhism, Sanskrit names and epics. It notes how these connections shaped regional art, literature and religion over centuries.

The concluding section says India's ties with neighbours draw from long civilisational flows.

Over 10 lakh flyers hit by IndiGo's December meltdown



NEW DELHI

Over 10 lakh passengers missed their flights during IndiGo's December meltdown even by conservative estimates, it has emerged.

The shocking extent of the chaos that were unleashed by "problems in IndiGo's crew rostering and internal planning systems", according to Union Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu, came to light on a day when the airline cancelled nearly 500 flights.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is currently examining the airline's response to a show-cause notice issued to its CEO before taking any final action, sources said.

Officials from the Ministry of

Civil Aviation said that between December 1 and 7 a total of 5,86,705 ticket PNRs (Passenger Name Records) were cancelled.

Since each PNR can include multiple passengers—up to nine in standard bookings and more in bulk bookings, the actual number of impacted passengers is significantly higher.

Including cancellations from late November, a total of 9,55,591 PNRs were affected between November 21 and December 7.

An IndiGo spokesperson said that by Monday, the airline had restored operations across all 138 destinations on its network.

In a statement, the airline noted that it operated over 1,800 flights on Monday, up from 1,650 on Sunday, achieving 90% on-time performance compared with 75%

the previous day.

Several internal processes were expedited to resume normal operations and reduce passenger inconvenience, the spokesperson said.

IndiGo also said that it has refunded ₹827 crore to customers for cancellations up to December 15.

Regarding baggage handling, the airline said 50% of delayed luggage had already been delivered, with over 4,500 bags returned to customers and the remainder expected within 36 hours.

Additionally, the airline arranged more than 9,500 hotel rooms and nearly 10,000 cabs and buses for affected passengers between December 1 and 7, assisting over 2 lakh customers daily through various communication channels.

For the first time, IndiGo acknowledged sending advance notifications about cancellations, stating that all changes to Monday's schedule were communicated to passengers a day in advance.

Meanwhile, regulator, DGCA is probing the reasons behind the unprecedented meltdown at India's largest airline that has an almost 65% share in the domestic market.

The DGCA said IndiGo had requested a fortnight to conduct a comprehensive Root Cause Analysis (RCA) of the disruption. A preliminary explanation was submitted by the airline on Sunday evening, and the regulator is reviewing it before deciding on enforcement action.

IndiGo told the DGCA that pinpointing the exact causes of the disruption was "realistically not possible" at this stage due to the scale and complexity of operations. The airline cited the DGCA manual, which allows a 15-day response period for show-cause notices, as the basis for the extended timeline.

In its preliminary explanation, IndiGo attributed the disruptions to a combination of factors: minor technical glitches, schedule changes linked to the start of the winter season, adverse weather, increased congestion in the aviation system, and implementation of updated crew rostering rules under the Flight Duty Time Limitation Phase II.

The airline said these compounding factors caused a drop in on-time network performance, which in turn affected crew availability.

IndiGo reportedly took the "drastic measure" of rebooting its network on December 5, by cancelling a significant number of flights to recover stranded passengers, ease airport congestion, and reposition crew and aircraft.

The airline expressed regret over the inconvenience caused to passengers, describing the disruption as the result of an "unfortunate and unforeseeable confluence" of multiple factors.

INTERNATIONAL

'Why India dumping rice into US?': Trump's new tariff threat amid US trade talks

WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump said India should not be "dumping" rice into the U.S. market and said he will "take care" of the issue, emphasising that tariffs would easily solve the "problem."

This comes amid United States Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Allison Hooker's visit to New Delhi and Bengaluru from December 7 to 11.

The visit is expected to sharpen the strategic focus of the US-India partnership at a time when both sides are navigating economic friction, geopolitical volatility and rapid technological shifts.

According to the US Embassy, Hooker will prioritise advancing the US-India strategic partnership, deepening economic and commercial ties, expanding American exports, and accelerating collaboration in emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence and space exploration.

Her visit comes amid renewed efforts in Washington and New Delhi to stabilise ties after weeks of heightened tensions over the Trump administration's 50% tariff on Indian goods and India's continued purchase of Russian energy.

On Monday, Trump hosted a White House roundtable with farming and agriculture representatives, joined by key cabinet members including Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins.

He announced USD 12 billion in federal aid for farmers.

Meryl Kennedy, who runs her family's agribusiness, Kennedy Rice Mill in Louisiana, told Trump that rice producers in the southern United States are "really struggling" and that other countries are "dumping" rice into the U.S. market.

When asked by Trump which countries are dumping rice into America,



Kennedy, sitting next to the President, replied, "India, and Thailand; even China into Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico used to be one of the largest markets for US rice. We haven't shipped rice into Puerto Rico in years."

Kennedy said that this has been happening for years and did not start during the Trump administration. But unfortunately, we're seeing it in a much bigger way now," she said.

She said that tariffs imposed by the Trump administration are working, but we need to double down, to which Trump said, "You want more, I understand".

Trump then turned to Bessent and said, India, tell me about India.

Why is India allowed to do that? They have to pay tariffs. Do they have an exemption on rice?

"No sir, we're still working on their trade deal," Bessent replied.

Trump then said, "But they shouldn't be dumping. I mean, I heard that. I heard that from others. They can't do that."

Kennedy then told Trump there's a World Trade Organisation case against India. Trump asked Kennedy to give him the names of the countries dumping rice into the US and instructed Bessent to note down the names.

"India. Who else?" Trump said.

"India, Thailand, China into Puerto Rico, not into the continental US, but into Puerto Rico. Those are the main culprits," Kennedy said, adding that American farmers can feed the US as well as nations around the world, but "we need fair trade, not free trade".

Trump said this will be so easy to settle.

"It's solved so quickly with tariffs to these countries that are illegally shipping. It's solved. Your problem is solved in one day. That's why we have to win the Supreme Court case," he said, adding that this problem will be solved in one day.

Lower courts in the US have ruled that Trump's use of emergency powers to impose tariffs on nations around the world is illegal, and the case will now be decided by the Supreme Court.

"It's so unfair. They go out of business. They put everyone out of business," Trump said.

Trump said that America lost half of its car industry and chip industry because these products were being manufactured in other countries, and previous administrations did not impose tariffs on these imports into the US.

"It's the same thing with rice. If it be good, will get it solved very quickly. We just need the countries. Just give us the

names of the countries. Tariffs, again. It solves the problem in two minutes," the president said.

Kennedy then said that they have "bought" the largest brands at retail, too, so they have an incentive to subsidise their products.

When Trump asked, "Who did that?" she said, "Indians".

"We'll take care of it. It's so easy," Trump said.

India is the largest producer of rice - 150 million tonnes - and has a 28 per cent share of the global market.

It is also the top exporter, with a 30.3 per cent share of global exports in 2024-2025, Indian Rice Exporters Federation (IREF) data shows.

According to information on the website of the India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF), India exported about 2.34 lakh tonnes of rice to the US in the 2024 fiscal, less than 5 per cent of its total global basmati rice exports of 52.4 lakh tonnes.

West Asia remains the dominant destination for Indian rice, it said.

Among the rice varieties that India exports globally, 'Sona Masoori' is preferred in markets such as the US and Australia.

Trump has imposed a 50 per cent tariff on India, the highest in the world, including 25 per cent for Delhi's purchases of Russian oil.

Indian Rice Exporters Federation National President Prem Garg had termed the 25 per cent reciprocal tariff as a temporary "hurdle" for rice shipments and had stated that India still retains a pricing advantage over competitors like Vietnam and Pakistan.

"This tariff is a temporary hurdle, not a long-term roadblock. With strategic planning, diversification, and flexibility, Indian rice exporters can protect and even expand their presence in the US market," Garg had said earlier this year.

JERUSALEM

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in a fiery speech at the Knesset (Israeli parliament) on Monday (December 8, 2025), defended his handling of the country's affairs, asserting that despite a wave of anti-semitism against the Jewish state, it enjoys an unprecedented support from many countries and leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Speaking during a so-called '40-signature debate', a parliamentary mechanism that allows the Opposition to compel the Prime Minister to appear once a month at the Knesset forum, Netanyahu put up a strong defence of his government's policy on various fronts, including Israel's foreign relations. "Israel is today stronger than ever," he said.

The Israeli Premier hit back at what the Opposition described as "the collapse of Israel's international standing," arguing that Israel remained diplomatically, militarily, and economically dominant despite its two years at war with Hamas, highlighting his ties to global leaders.

Sitting through a series of scathing criticisms from opposition members, Netanyahu opened his speech by mocking the subject of the debate, calling the assertion that Israel's global standing has collapsed over the war "a detachment from reality," and insisting that "Israel today is stronger than ever."

It is the strongest power in the Middle East, and in certain fields, it is a global power," Netanyahu stressed, claiming that "this is a direct result of the way we have led the War of Revival".

The Israeli government decided to name the war that started with the attack of Hamas on its territory on October 7, 2023, as the 'War of Revival' in October, a decision that many in Israel contest.

"Many states around the world and very many

world leaders are seeking us out," Netanyahu said before acknowledging that "there are challenges" as well.

He blamed the "waves of antisemitism" sweeping the West as a result of two things: radical Muslim minorities that have entered almost every country, first and foremost in Europe, and antisemitic incitement on social media. "Incitement amplified by anti-Zionist governments and organisations".

"We are fighting this anti-semitism around the world," he continued, noting that his government has made an unprecedented allocation of some NIS 2.35 billion (\$725 million) to the Foreign Ministry "to combat this propaganda".

"I believe we must fight it with new methods," Netanyahu said, while insisting that "we must look at our tremendous achievements".

Despite this, Netanyahu argued that Israel's diplomatic standing remained significant, pointing to the visit of German Chancellor Friedrich Merz this week, a visit he said came at Merz's request.

"And there are other world powers that are coming our way. I speak frequently with my old friend, the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi. We have arranged to meet soon, and I must tell you — India, a huge country with a billion and a half people, also wants to strengthen ties with us," Netanyahu emphasised.

"Germany, India, and here is another sign of your imagined political collapse: at the end of the month, I will go to the United States for another meeting with my friend, President Trump", he said mockingly.

"This will be my sixth meeting with the President of the United States, since he took office in January of this year — more than any other leader in the world", the Israeli Premier pointed out.

Israeli media has been

Netanyahu defends leadership during Gaza war, touts his strong connect with world leaders, including PM Modi

speculating a "political clash" between Netanyahu and Trump, citing "huge differences" that Netanyahu rubbished as a "fixed ritual" before his meetings with the US President.

"And after each meeting, you are disappointed, because the positive results surprise you again and again. And again, of course, with the US, we don't have to agree on everything," Netanyahu said.

"And even in cases where it's necessary, I stand up for our vital interests. It's not always necessary, but when it's necessary, we stand up for them. The US and Israel are two independent countries. We have a relationship based on shared values and shared interests that have only become more acute", he stressed.

"Israel has no better ally than the US, and the US has no better ally than Israel", the Israeli Premier asserted.

Netanyahu has long touted his "personal chemistry" with global leaders during his election campaigns, with images of his meetings with Trump, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Modi, splashed across the ruling party Likud's headquarters during one such campaign.

His supporters often portray him as the only Israeli political leader with a global standing and also the ability to challenge US Presidents in order to protect Israeli interests. They often refer to his frosty ties with former U.S. Presidents Barack Obama and Joe Biden, with whom he had frequent differences over several issues.

Netanyahu also emphasised his close ties with Putin during his address.

"I add that we have continuous contacts with another world power — Russia. I speak with President Putin on a regular basis, and this personal relationship over the decades protects our vital interests," he said.

Turmeric: The North-East's Golden Root of Health, Heritage and Economic Promise

For generations, the villages of India's North-East have nurtured a secret beneath their green hills and rich red soil—a golden root with the power to heal bodies, colour food, strengthen rituals and now, increasingly, transform lives and livelihoods. Turmeric, the brilliant yellow rhizome known botanically as *Curcuma longa*, has travelled a long path from kitchen spice and home remedy to the world's most pursued medicinal ingredient. As scientists, nutritionists and global markets turn their gaze towards natural health boosters, the humble turmeric of the North-East stands at the forefront, glowing with both cultural memory and economic potential.

India is already the world's largest producer and exporter of turmeric, but what distinguishes the North-East is not merely its output—it is the quality. The region's climate, biodiversity and indigenous cultivation wisdom have made its turmeric varieties, particularly Lakadong from Meghalaya and Megha Turmeric-1, prized for exceptionally high curcumin levels, the very compound that lends turmeric its colour and medicinal strength. While many countries grow turmeric, few achieve the curcumin concentration found in the North-Eastern hills, making this root not just a spice, but a premium agricultural asset.

This is the story of a crop that is ancient yet newly rediscovered, domestic yet globally demanded, and rooted in tradition while rising as a pillar of sustainable rural economy.

A Spice Born of Soil and Ancestral Knowledge
Turmeric belongs to the ginger family Zingiberaceae, native to Southeast Asia but long naturalised in the North-Eastern region of India. The landscape of the eight North-Eastern states—Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim—forms a lush ecological basin of rainfall-fed forests, fertile valleys and warm humid climate. It is in this stretch of hills and plains that turmeric thrives without synthetic pressure, nourished instead by natural rain, forest leaf litter and age-old farming practices.

Farmers in the region have traditionally grown turmeric not as a commercial crop but as part of daily life. The underground rhizome is their dye, their flavouring, their medicine, their household disinfectant and an inseparable part of ritual practice. Over time, every community developed its own variety—some with intense aroma, others with deep orange pigment or stronger medicinal potency.

Lakadong, a variety now celebrated globally, comes from the high-altitude Jaintia hills of Meghalaya and often contains over 79% curcumin—among the highest recorded anywhere. Similarly, various unnamed local strains across Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal carry strong healing properties and unique culinary flavour, preserved through seed exchange, traditional cultivation and community heritage.

A Cultural Ingredient Steeped in Taste and Belief

In the kitchens of the North-East, turmeric is more than seasoning. It is identity. In Manipur, where the rhizome is baked into chutneys, fermented into pickles or blended into aromatic masalas, turmeric marks winter meals, festivals and medicinal diets alike. The bright inflorescence (flower) itself is also edible—fried into crisp pakoras or ground fresh into chutney.

One of Manipur's most beloved delicacies, Paknam, uses turmeric in a way few outside the region would imagine: gram or pea-flour batter wrapped in turmeric leaves, then steam-baked until its aroma infuses every layer. In many traditional households, turmeric leaves are used to flavour rice cakes, cure fish and preserve meat naturally long before refrigeration ever arrived.

Beyond taste, turmeric is a ritual symbol—a purifying agent used in marriage ceremonies, worship rituals, childbirth customs and healing traditions. Its colour stands for light, health and auspicious beginnings. Few crops in the region bridge spirit, body and economy the way turmeric does.

The Golden Molecule: Curcumin and Its Medicinal Power

The golden pigment that defines turmeric is curcumin—a compound now at the centre of global pharmaceutical research. Curcumin levels vary widely depending on soil, cultivar and altitude, ranging between 3.5% and 9% in Indian varieties. The higher the curcumin, the more potent its colour and therapeutic effect. Because the North-East is home to cultivars with naturally high curcumin, exports from the region command premium value in health, food and cosmetic industries.

Modern science continues to reaffirm what Indian households have known intuitively for centuries. Turmeric fights inflammation, boosts immunity, heals wounds, aids digestion and purifies the blood. It is antibacterial, antioxidant, anti-fungal, liver-strengthening and anti-depressant. Curcumin is now being researched globally for its potential in cancer prevention, diabetes management, arthritis treatment



and even neurodegenerative conditions.

From homemade turmeric milk (haldi doodh) to modern capsules and wellness beverages, turmeric's medicinal relevance has grown from folk remedy to clinical interest. Today it is a regular ingredient in nutraceuticals, detox drinks, skin therapy, wound-healing ointments and functional foods.

What villagers applied to cuts and burns as a simple paste is now bottled, patented and exported across international markets.

Food Industry: A Colourant, a Preservative and a Clean-Label Hero

As global consumers turn away from artificial colouring, natural plant-based pigments like curcumin have become highly sought after. Turmeric offers a bright, stable golden-yellow hue that survives heat, pasteurisation and cooking—making it ideal for processed foods.

In dairy, curcumin lends colour to ghee, butter, cheese and yoghurt.

In confectionery and bakery, it brightens cakes, sweets and biscuits without altering taste.

In beverages, it colours juices, mocktails, sauces and packaged drinks.

In meat and seafood, it improves appearance, slows spoilage and enhances freshness.

The demand for natural additives has created a new market where turmeric is not just a spice but a food ingredient. As a preservative, its antimicrobial and antioxidant behaviour slows bacterial growth, protects fats from oxidation and extends shelf life in packaged foods.

This positions turmeric as a valuable tool for clean-label manufacturing—a global trend where consumers prefer functional, natural and chemical-free products.

Curcumin is now internationally approved for food use, with regulatory safety already established in the US, EU and other major markets. This compliance advantage opens doors for large-scale exports of turmeric powder, oleoresin, essential oil and processed nutraceutical extracts from the North-East.

From Healing Root to Wealth-Generating Crop
With its rich genetic diversity and organic nature of cultivation, the North-East contributes about 8.3% of India's turmeric production. Mizoram leads the regional output with nearly 28,000 metric tonnes annually, followed by Meghalaya and Manipur. While these numbers may seem modest compared to southern states, the North-East enjoys one crucial advantage—quality over quantity.

High curcumin commands higher prices. Exporters are increasingly looking to the North-East for raw turmeric, dried rhizomes and extract-grade varieties. Lakadong turmeric, for instance, has already carved a niche market abroad for supplement production. With improved processing centres, cold storage, grading units and farmer cooperatives, the region could easily transition from small-scale producers to global suppliers.

Turmeric also fits into the evolving model of rural economic development. It requires low investment, adapts naturally to organic farming and demands minimal chemical intervention. Small farmers, women-led self-help groups and village cooperatives can cultivate and process turmeric with basic infrastructure, generating year-round income with higher value addition.

With the right market linkages, North-East India stands to benefit not only through raw exports but through domestic value chains:

- turmeric oil & oleoresin extraction,
- cosmetic and skincare manufacture,
- herbal medicine formulation,
- food colouring and beverage industry,
- organic spice branding & e-commerce marketing.

Every gram of curcumin extracted, every packet of organic Lakadong powder exported, adds revenue to the region and global recognition to its agricultural heritage.

Looking Ahead: Strengthening the Gold in

Our Soil As demand for natural health-promoting foods continues to rise, turmeric sits in a unique position—rooted in tradition but aligned with modern wellness trends.

To unlock its full potential, the North-East must prioritise: 1. Genetic conservation and varietal improvement

2. Traditional cultivars with high curcumin content must be preserved, studied and improved for yield, disease resistance and market adaptation.

3. Infrastructure and value-added processing

Drying units, powder mills, oleoresin extraction plants and packaging hubs can multiply farmer income far beyond raw rhizome sales.

4. Export-oriented branding and certification

GI tagging, organic certification and region-specific branding like Lakadong Gold or North-East High Curcumin Turmeric can create global identity.

5. Farmer training, cooperatives and policy support

Empowering growers with market

knowledge ensures that the wealth generated does not bypass the community that has nurtured this crop for centuries.

Conclusion: A Wonder for Health, A Wealth for the Future

Turmeric is not simply a spice of the North-East—it is history, medicine, colour, soul and now, an economic passport to the world. With curcumin-rich varieties, organic cultivation traditions and immense market demand, the region stands at the doorstep of a global opportunity. What once healed wounds at home now heals economies as well.

As we look to sustainable agriculture and natural wellness as the future of global food systems, the North-East's turmeric emerges not just as a crop, but as a symbol—a golden promise of health for the body and wealth for the land.

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“WHAT IF INDIA HAD UNITED?”

COL (DR.) AKS MACHHRAL,
M-IN-D, VSM (RETD)

Preface

This story is a creation of the author's imagination. It is a vision of what might have happened had India, fragmented by pride, politics, and petty rivalries, stood united behind Raja Dahar when the first west-Asian armies approached Sindh in 711 AD. It does not claim to rewrite history, but to remind every Indian of the cost of disunity and the power of standing as one civilization.

1. The Warning from the West.

The winds from Arabia carried news of an approaching army, young, fierce, and determined. At the western frontier of Bharat, Raja Dahar felt the tremor long before it reached the gates of Sindh.

He gazed across the sands and whispered to his generals:

“If we are divided, we fall. If we are united, we become a wall the world cannot break.”

Thus began the call for unity.

What might have happened if the Hindu kingdoms of India had united behind Raja Dahar when the first Muslim armies approached in 711 AD?

The Unwritten Chapter of Raja Dahar and the Western Gate.

2. The Unthinkable Happens, India Unites.

The message shook the northern kingdoms.

Kannauj.

The proud emperor accepted the truth. For the first time in decades, he put aside rivalry and said:

“Dahar fights for India. Kannauj will fight for Dahar.”

Gujarat.

The sea kings of Gujarat saw the danger at the ports and sent their best naval warriors up the coast.

The Rajputs of Rajasthan

Hearing that a foreign army had crossed the desert, the Rajput clans declared, “It is not Dahar's battle. It is every Hindu's battle.”

Kashmir.

From the snow-clad mountains came skilled archers, the finest in Asia.

Punjab.

The warlike frontier tribes rallied, saying, “No invader shall pass the Indus while a single Punjabi breathes.”

And in a moment India never had in recorded history, they all marched toward Sindh.

Over 70,000 warriors, from elephants of the Deccan to horsemen of Rajasthan, gathered under one banner:

“One Bharat. One Dharma. One Defence.”

Even the common folk said:

“This is no time for kings to argue. This is the time to save the land.”

3. Muhammad bin Qasim Reaches Debal.

Young Muhammad bin Qasim, confident from victories in Persia, reached Debal expecting a quick victory.

But the sight before him



stunned him.

Debal's temple flag the one he planned to shoot down was protected by three concentric lines of Indian armies:

Sindhi infantry

Rajput cavalry.

Gujarat naval archers on coastal towers.

The Arab scouts returned nervous and confused.

“General, this is not the Sindh we expected.

All of India seems to be here.”

Qasim, only seventeen, realised he was facing something the Umayyad empire had not calculated:

A united Indian subcontinent:

4. The Battle of Debal, The Turning Point

The Arabs launched their first assault.

But Indian unity changed everything.

Sindh held the fort walls.

Gujarat's sea warriors cut off Arab supplies coming by ship.

Rajput cavalry encircled the desert flank.

Kashmiri archers rained arrows with deadly precision.

The Arabs fought bravely, but they had never faced:

elephants charging in formation.

armoured Rajputs on horseback. tribal warriors fighting hand-to-hand an entire subcontinent acting as one body

After three days of battle, exhausted and surrounded, Qasim's army was forced to retreat into Makran.

It was the first major defeat of the Umayyad Empire in the East.

5. The Indian Response, Beyond Defence

Instead of waiting for another attack, the United Indian coal-

tion marched westward:

They secured Makran.

Built fortified outposts along the desert.

Established a frontier alliance with local Baluchi tribes.

Strengthened naval patrols along the Arabian Sea.

The message was clear:

“Thus far, and no further.”

6. The Golden Age That Followed

The unity forged in war did not dissolve in peace.

The kings recognised the power of standing together.

They formed what historians in this alternate world call:

The Sindhu-Samrat Sabha (Council of the Indus Kings)

It ensured: mutual defence trade cooperation preservation of pilgrimage routes mathematics schools removal of petty regional conflicts

India, which in real history entered a long period of invasions and fragmentation, in this imaginary world entered a Golden Age centuries earlier.

In this alternate timeline:

Nalanda and Takshashila flourished longer.

The Rajputs built a frontier wall along Sindh.

Gujarati ships dominated the Arabian Sea trade.

Sanskrit learning spread across Central Asia.

Yoga, Ayurveda, and Indian astronomy became global centuries before the Renaissance.

No foreign power could enter India for the next 800 years.

Dahar became known as:

“Sindhu Rakshak: The Protector of the Indus”

And the phrase children learned in gurukuls across the land was:

“When Bharat stood together, No army could break her.”

7. The Final Lesson of an Alternate World

This story is imagined.

But the message is not.

India did not fall because foreign armies were powerful.

India fell because India was not one.

8. India Today. And the question rises again, not to kings but to us:

Can we, even today, rediscover the unity we lost?

Can we place Bharat above vote banks, above caste divisions, above dirty politics?

Can we revive the spirit of Sanatan Dharma not as a religion, but as the civilizational force that once united this land from Kashmir to Kanyakumari?

If our ancestors could not do it then, perhaps it is our duty to do it now.

A united India, rooted in Dharma and freed from political poison, can still rise powerful, peaceful, and guide the world once more.

9. Author's Note.

I, offer this alternate-history tale not as a criticism of our past but as a mirror for our present. History has already shown what happens when we divide ourselves: we lose more than land; we lose dignity, culture, and continuity. But history also tells us that revival is possible. Sanatan Dharma survived invasions, colonialism, and centuries of turmoil because it lives in the soul, not in buildings.

May this story remind us that unity is not a slogan, it is a duty. When we rise together, no force on earth can bend us.

“About the Author”

Col (Dr.) AKS Machhral @ Ashk Machhanvi is a curative historian and a postgraduate in History, known for his deep research into India's martial traditions and cultural heritage. A distinguished military historian, he blends academic precision with the insight of a soldier who has lived the realities he writes about.

A veteran of the Sri Lanka Operations (IPKF), he displayed remarkable courage in active combat and was honoured by the President of India with a Gallantry Award and the Vishisht Seva Medal (VSM) for bravery and distinguished service and recipient of 18 awards.

With an illustrious career spanning over 45 years, he has served as:

Instructor and Head of Department in the Faculty of Specialised Intelligence at the Military Intelligence Training School & Centre, and Instructor in the Cabinet Secretariat,

An officer on international assignments, gaining broad strategic and operational exposure.

His work is marked by disciplined scholarship, spiritual depth, and a soldier's commitment to truth, making him one of the most authentic contemporary voices in India's military history and national security affairs.



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