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PERSPECTIVE

Echoes of laughter linger longer than the shadows of sorrow.

Mysterious Poultry Disease Spreads Across Imphal Valley, Hundreds of Birds Dead

IMPHAL

An unidentified flu-like disease has triggered large-scale poultry deaths across several areas of Imphal East and Imphal West districts in Manipur, severely affecting commercial farms and backyard poultry owners. Farmers said the outbreak has already killed hundreds of chickens and ducks, causing heavy financial losses and widespread panic among poultry growers in the valley districts. Reports indicate that the disease is affecting multiple poultry varieties, including kuroiler, broiler, layer and local breeds of chickens and ducks. According to affected farmers, infected birds are showing flu-like symptoms such as swelling of the head, nasal discharge and sudden death.

The outbreak has been reported from several localities in Imphal East, including Khurai, Keirao, Thongju, Bamon Kampu, Kongba, Wangkhei, Akampat and Kongpal. Cases have also emerged in areas of Imphal West such as Ningombam, Langol, Iroishemba, Lamshang, Samurou and Yumnam Huidrom.

A poultry farmer from Thongju Ningomthong said 30 egg-laying hens died suddenly before veterinary assistance could be arranged. Similar incidents have reportedly been recorded in multiple affected areas. Amid mounting losses, several farmers have started selling infected or potentially exposed birds at sharply reduced prices to minimise financial damage. Large birds weighing between 3 and 4 kilograms are reportedly being sold for as low as Rs 200 per bird.

WHO SAID WHAT



The goal of the algorithm is simple: show each user the content they are most likely to find interesting, limited only by the laws within a given jurisdiction. No thumb on the scale. Doesn't mean we achieve the goal, but that is what I tell the team.

~ Elon Musk, American Entrepreneur

Assam Pushes Fast-Track Clearance for Muga Silk, Tourism and Key Road Projects

GUWAHATI

The Assam government has moved to accelerate several major development initiatives, including a flagship Muga silk branding project, eco-tourism infrastructure, skill development centres and pending land clearances for road projects across the state.

Chief Secretary Ravi Kota on Friday said a major proposal to brand Muga silk as Assam's unique identity product is likely to receive central approval following discussions held during two high-level virtual review meetings.

Kota stated that he attended a meeting of the Empowered Inter-Ministerial Committee (EIMC), chaired by the Secretary of the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, where multiple proposals submitted by Assam under the Special Development Projects scheme were reviewed. Some of the projects are linked to the tripartite Memorandum of Settlement signed between the Union Home Ministry, the Assam government and Bodo and Adivasi groups.

Among the key proposals discussed was the pilot project titled "Branding Muga, the Golden Silk, as the State's USP of Assam",



with a proposed outlay of Rs 59.83 crore. The three-year initiative is planned across Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts.

Officials said the project is expected to benefit nearly 14,371 Muga farming families, covering around 44 per cent of Assam's total Muga farming households.

The meeting also reviewed proposals linked to tourism, infrastructure, community development and skill enhancement, with discussions focusing on project readiness, implementation timelines and compliance requirements.

A proposal to establish Skill Development

Centres in Kokrajhar, Sonitpur, Doomdooma, Golaghat and Baksa districts at an estimated cost of Rs 14.99 crore was also taken up. The centres aim to improve vocational training, entrepreneurship and employability opportunities for youth.

Another proposal under the 2022 Adivasi Memorandum of Settlement includes the construction of a conference centre near Beltola College in Guwahati at a projected cost of Rs 9.11 crore.

The committee further examined a Rs 165.01 crore eco-tourism promotion initiative covering six destinations across Assam. The proposed allocations include Rs 28 crore for Manas National Park, Rs 35.01 crore for Bornadi at Bogamati, Rs 20 crore for Chakrashila at Baokhungri, Rs 25.01 crore for Bhairabkunda, Rs 14.97 crore for Raimona National Park at Kachugaon and Rs 42.02 crore for Sareswar Beel at Saralchar.

Kota said the state government reiterated its commitment to the timely implementation of approved projects and effective utilisation of development assistance for tourism promotion, infrastructure creation and inclusive growth.

In a separate review meeting held on the directions of Chief Minister Himanta

Biswa Sarma, the Chief Secretary also reviewed pending land acquisition and compensation issues linked to road infrastructure projects under Asom Mala and related schemes.

The review covered projects spanning more than 300 km across districts including Sivasagar, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Cachar, Hailakandi, Sribhum, Sonitpur, Udalguri, Kokrajhar, Tamulpur and Chirang under schemes such as ASRIP, ASCOIP, NIDA and SOPD.

According to official details, compensation already released includes Rs 55 crore for the Sivasagar-Chumoni road project, Rs 118 crore for the Moran-Disanginar Bongali road in Dibrugarh and Rs 101.44 crore for the Borkhola-Kalain road project in Cachar.

Kota said several road stretches were facing delays due to pending land acquisition and compensation-related issues. He directed district officials to expedite compensation disbursement, remove encumbrances and ensure hindrance-free land for timely completion of the projects.

Officials were also asked to closely monitor implementation and strengthen coordination with executing agencies to avoid further delays.

Manipur to Begin Electoral Roll Revision Drive From May 20 Under ECI Phase 3

IMPHAL

The Election Commission of India (ECI) will launch Phase 3 of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Manipur from May 20 as part of a nationwide exercise aimed at updating and cleaning voter records.

According to an official statement issued by the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), the revision process in Manipur will begin on May 20, with July 1, 2026 fixed as the qualifying date.

The ECI has included 16 states and three Union Territories in the third phase of the revision exercise, including northeastern states such as Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura.

As part of the exercise, nearly 2,996 Booth Level Officers (BLOs) will conduct house-to-house verification and enumeration across Ma-



nipur between May 30 and June 28 to ensure the accuracy of electoral data.

Preparatory activities, including training programmes and

printing of enumeration forms, will be carried out from May 20 to May 29. The rationalisation of polling stations is also scheduled to be completed by June 28.

The draft electoral roll will be published on July 5, following which voters will be able to submit claims and objections until August 4.

Officials said the disposal of claims and objections will continue until September 2, with the final electoral roll set to be published on September 6, 2026.

The Commission has urged all eligible voters to actively participate in the revision process and submit their enumeration forms during the exercise.

During the verification drive, BLOs will conduct door-to-door visits with assistance from Booth Level Agents (BLAs) appointed by political parties to ensure transparency in the revision process.

16th Assam Assembly Session to Commence From May 21 in Dispur



GUWAHATI

The first session of the newly elected 16th Assam Legislative Assembly will begin on May 21 at the Assembly Chamber in Dispur, according to an official notification issued by the Assembly Secretariat.

The notification, issued on the orders of Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya, stated that the session will commence at 9.30 am.

"In exercise of the powers conferred under Article 174 of the Constitution of India, the Governor of Assam has summoned the first session of the Sixteenth Assam Legislative Assembly to meet on May 21 at the Assembly Chamber in Dispur," the notification said.

Meanwhile, senior BJP legislator

Chandra Mohan Patowary was sworn in as the pro-tem Speaker by the Governor on Friday. He will administer the oath to the newly elected MLAs during the opening sitting of the Assembly.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had earlier stated that the four-day session would continue till May 26. Apart from the swearing-in of legislators, the election of the new Speaker is also scheduled to take place during the session.

The ruling NDA has nominated senior BJP leader Ranjeet Kumar Dass for the Speaker's post. Dass had previously served as Speaker after the BJP-led government came to power in Assam in 2016.

Governor Acharya is also expected to address the House on the opening day of the session.

The NDA returned to power in Assam for a third consecutive term with a two-thirds majority in the recently concluded Assembly elections. The Bharatiya Janata Party secured 82 seats, while its allies, the Asom Gana Parishad and the Bodoland People's Front, won 10 seats each in the 126-member Assembly.

38 Hostages Released in Manipur Amid Coordinated Rescue and Peace Efforts



IMPHAL, MAY 16

Thirty-eight people belonging to the Kuki and Naga communities, who were allegedly held hostage by armed groups in Manipur's Kangpokpi and Senapati districts, have been released following coordinated efforts by security forces, civil society organisations and political leaders, officials said on Saturday.

The releases come amid heightened tensions in the conflict-hit state following separate incidents of violence reported earlier this week in Kangpokpi and Noney districts.

Officials said negotiations involving civil society groups, representatives of the Manipur government and security agencies are continuing to secure the release of individuals who are still believed to be in captivity. According to police sources, those released include 12 Naga women from Konsakhul village who were allegedly abducted and later freed at Makhnan village. In another development, four men and 10 women from the Kuki community, who were reportedly being held in Senapati district, were also released and handed

over to security personnel on Thursday night. Authorities further confirmed that two Salesian brothers of Don Bosco, including one from Nagaland, were freed by armed groups from separate locations. On Thursday evening, security teams also rescued three individuals, including an 18-year-old Kuki woman, in Senapati district before handing them over to police officials.

The hostage situation emerged after a series of violent attacks in the hill districts earlier this week. Three church leaders were killed and four others injured after suspected militants ambushed two vehicles carrying members of the Thadou Baptist Association in Kangpokpi district. In a separate incident in Noney district, unidentified gunmen allegedly opened fire on a civilian vehicle, killing one person and injuring his wife.

Officials said the state administration, security forces, community leaders and civil society organisations are continuing joint efforts to prevent further escalation of violence and restore normalcy in the affected areas of Manipur.

IMD Issues Heavy Rain, Thunderstorm Alert Across Assam Till May 21

GUWAHATI

The India Meteorological Department has forecast a prolonged spell of heavy to very heavy rainfall across Assam over the next several days, issuing warnings for thunderstorms, lightning and gusty winds in multiple districts till May 21.

According to the latest IMD bulletin, south Assam is expected to receive very heavy rainfall on Friday, while widespread heavy rainfall activity is likely to continue across Assam and Meghalaya throughout the May 15-21 period. The weather department warned that thunderstorms accompanied by lightning and strong winds with speeds reaching 40-50 kmph could affect several parts of the Northeast during the forecast period. "The heavy rainfall may lead to waterlogging in low-lying areas, traffic disruptions and localised landslides in vulnerable hilly regions," the IMD said in its advisory.

Residents have been advised to remain alert, monitor official weather updates and follow safety advisories issued by local authorities. The IMD also cautioned that strong winds and lightning may damage weak structures, standing crops, trees and electricity infrastructure.

"People are advised to stay indoors during thunderstorms, avoid taking shelter under trees and unplug electrical appliances during lightning activity," the advisory stated.

The department further warned that kutcha houses and temporary structures in vulnerable areas could suffer partial damage due to intense rainfall and gusty winds.

During the past 24 hours, several areas across Assam and Meghalaya recorded significant rainfall activity, while gusty winds were reported in Guwahati and adjoining regions. Wind speeds in Guwahati touched 46 kmph, while places such as Manas and Shillong also experienced strong wind conditions.

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Officials said district administrations are closely monitoring the evolving weather situation, especially in flood-prone and landslide-prone districts.

The IMD has advised commuters to avoid unnecessary travel during periods of heavy rain and thunderstorms, warning that waterlogging and poor visibility could disrupt road traffic in urban centres.

Apart from Assam and Meghalaya, heavy rainfall warnings have also been issued for Arunachal Pradesh between May 15 and 17, and again on May 20 and 21. Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram are also expected to witness spells of heavy rainfall during the forecast period. Across the wider Northeast region, weather conditions are likely to remain unstable through the coming week as pre-monsoon activity intensifies, bringing widespread rain, thunderstorms and gusty winds.

Gaurav Gogoi Targets Centre Over Price Hikes, Calls It 'Post-Election Gift' to Public

GUWAHATI

Assam Pradesh Congress Committee president Gaurav Gogoi on Friday criticised the Narendra Modi-led Central government over the recent increase in fuel prices, LPG cylinder rates and essential commodities, alleging that the burden of inflation was imposed on citizens immediately after the completion of Assembly elections in five states. In a statement, Gogoi said he had earlier warned that price hikes would follow once the elections were over and claimed that the prediction had now "come true word for word".

The Congress leader described the recent rise in prices as a reflection of the government's "economic failure" and termed it a "post-election gift" for the people.

According to Gogoi, the prices of several essential goods and services have risen sharply in recent days. He cited a Rs 99 increase in commercial LPG cylinder prices, a Rs 261 hike in 5-kg cylinders, a Rs 2 per litre rise in milk prices, and a 15 per cent increase in import duties on gold and silver. He

also referred to a Rs 3 hike each in petrol and diesel prices, a Rs 2 increase in CNG rates, a 38 per cent rise in tomato prices, and a 2 per cent increase in the cost of both vegetarian and non-vegetarian meals. Gogoi alleged that despite large-scale election campaigns and attempts to project austerity measures after the polls, the government could not conceal what he called its failure to control inflation. He said ordinary citizens in Assam and across the country were being forced to bear the burden of rising living costs at a time when household expenses were already under strain. Calling the situation unfortunate, the APCC chief urged the Centre to take immediate measures to provide relief to the public from inflation and escalating prices of essential commodities.

The remarks come amid continued political exchanges between the Indian National Congress and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party over inflation, fuel prices and the broader economic situation in the country.



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INDIA INC'S ROLE IN VISION 2047

The world economy is being reshaped by a confluence of unprecedented disruptions—geopolitical realignments, technological acceleration and climate transition. These disruptions are not just a source of uncertainty; they are also a catalyst for reinvention as they re-organise the global economy. Supply chains are being redesigned, industries are being reimagined and new centres of innovation are emerging. It is in this environment that India needs to achieve its ambition of becoming a developed nation.

Industry has a critical role in catalysing this ambition—as a builder of capabilities, driver of innovation and a value creator. The decisions businesses make today—on manufacturing, technology, energy and talent—will shape not just enterprise success, but the trajectory of India's future. It is in this context that CII's Vision for India@100 assumes significance.

Developed through engagement with more than 10,000 stakeholders, it represents a multi-stakeholder roadmap for India's journey to becoming a developed nation by 2047. The theme of the CII Annual Business Summit 2026—The Future | Global Economy, Industry, Society—places this vision within the context of a rapidly changing world, with industry at the centre of translating ambition into action.

India is expected to remain the fastest growing major economy, and as per IMF estimates, its growth is expected to be more than twice the global average in the near future. It is seen as a trusted partner—able to engage across regions, build bridges and offer stability amidst uncertainty. This gives India a unique vantage point to shape global conversations on trade, technology, climate and development.

India's experience in building inclusive digital ecosystems at scale demonstrates how innovation can serve society and simultaneously enable a rapidly growing digital economy. Together, these strengths point to a clear shift—India is not only participating in global systems but actively helping redesign them.

The global economic order itself is undergoing a structural shift. Trade and investment flows are increasingly shaped by resilience, trust and strategic alignment, rather than cost efficiencies alone. Industrial policy has re-emerged as governments seek to shape economic outcomes more directly.

In this environment, competitiveness must be built across multiple dimensions—manufacturing strength, technological depth, sustainability and institutional capability. Nations need to balance self-reliance with global integration, strengthening domestic capacities while remaining deeply engaged with the world. This balance lies at the core of India's path forward, which rests on five strategic capabilities. First is building manufacturing scale and strategic depth. The renewed global emphasis on industrial policy highlights the importance of targeted capability-building. Industry will play a decisive role in this transformation—by investing in advanced manufacturing, strengthening supply-chain resilience and leveraging free trade pacts, and driving innovation to position India as a competitive manufacturing hub. Second is the imperative of technology leadership. In an increasingly innovation-driven economy, technological capability will be central to productivity, competitiveness and strategic influence. Today, artificial intelligence, digital platforms and advanced manufacturing are becoming foundational to growth. Sustaining India's momentum in this space will require higher research and development investment, stronger industry-academia collaboration and a continued focus on building globally competitive products and platforms. Third is ensuring energy security while advancing the green transition. Reliable, affordable and diversified energy is fundamental to sustaining growth and industrial expansion. India has demonstrated strong leadership in scaling renewable energy and advancing emerging pathways such as green hydrogen. Sustainability is increasingly becoming a source of competitive advantage—driving innovation, attracting investment and enabling future-ready industries. Industry is central to this shift—accelerating clean energy adoption, improving efficiency and embedding sustainability into core business strategies, positioning India as a leader in the global transition to a low-carbon economy.

Fourth is strengthening institutions, capital and execution capabilities. India's ability to deliver at scale has been a defining advantage, reflected in its progress in infrastructure, digital systems and policy reforms. To sustain this momentum, industry must play a critical role in catalysing investment, partnering in implementation and driving efficiency and innovation. Fifth is advancing human capital and inclusive growth. India's demographic strength presents a historic opportunity to build a productive, skilled and innovation-driven workforce. Realising this potential requires aligning education and skilling systems with evolving economic needs. Industry can play a pivotal role by shaping skilling ecosystems, creating quality jobs and fostering entrepreneurship—ensuring that growth is broad-based and that every citizen can participate in and benefit from India's development journey. Clearly, industry must be a co-architect of India's development. The alignment of corporate strategies with national priorities is critical to translating the vision of becoming a developed nation into reality. CII will continue to act as a bridge between the two, fostering collaboration, alignment and sustained collective progress.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"I am thankful for all of those who said, "No" to me. It's because of them, I'm doing it myself." - Albert Einstein

PAINFUL REALITY OF NEET PAPER LEAKS IN INDIA



SANJAY KHAROO

The cancellation of NEET 2026 due to allegations of paper leakage has once again exposed the deep cracks in India's examination system. It is not merely the cancellation of an examination; it is the collapse of the hopes, discipline, sleepless nights, and emotional sacrifices of lakhs of students and aspirants who dedicate years of their lives preparing for one single opportunity seeking an admission into prestigious medical colleges. For those students who studied day and night with honesty and determination, such incidents feel nothing less than betrayal by the system itself.

In India, cracking NEET is not an ordinary academic challenge. It is often seen as a life-defining mission. Students begin preparation from Class 9th or 10th itself. Many leave their hometowns, stay in hostels, join expensive coaching institutions, isolate themselves from social life, and remain under enormous psychological pressure. Parents too make unimaginable sacrifices, be it financially, be it emotionally, and socially hoping their children will secure a dignified future in the medical profession. When a paper leak surfaces after all this hard work, it destroys the morale of deserving candidates and shakes public faith in the credibility of national institutions.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time India has witnessed

such examination scandals. Time and again, papers leak, middlemen flourish, organized cheating rackets emerge, and the honest student suffers while the corrupt manipulate the system for money and influence. The tragedy lies not only in the leakage itself, but in the fact that such incidents continue repeatedly despite technological advancements, surveillance systems, and strict administrative frameworks. It raises a serious question: how can highly confidential national examinations still become vulnerable to criminal networks?

The larger damage caused by such leaks is psychological. Students preparing for competitive examinations already face immense anxiety, depression, and fear of failure. Many study for 12 to 15 hours daily under extreme pressure. When an examination gets cancelled after the paper leak controversy, students feel mentally shattered. Some lose confidence in merit itself. They begin to wonder whether hard work truly matters in a system where dishonesty can overpower sincerity. This growing distrust is dangerous for the future of any nation because meritocracy is the backbone of a healthy democracy and a progressive society.

Another painful dimension is the commercialization of education surrounding examinations like NEET. Over the years, an entire industry of coaching centres has emerged,

turning education into a business enterprise. Parents spend lakhs of rupees believing that competitive success guarantees social respect and economic stability. The pressure becomes unbearable for middle-class families. When exams are cancelled due to leaks, it not only wastes academic efforts, well being of students but also drains emotional and financial resources accumulated over the years by the parents.

The authorities must now understand that mere statements, committees, and temporary suspensions are not enough. India requires a complete overhaul of the examination system. Strong digital encryption, multiple paper sets, last-minute secure transmission mechanisms, AI-based monitoring, strict accountability of officials, and fast-track courts for examination fraud are urgently needed. Those involved in leaking papers must face exemplary punishment irrespective of their position or influence. Unless fear of strict consequences is established, such crimes will continue to repeat.

Simultaneously, the government must also rethink the excessive dependence on a single high-pressure examination for determining the future of millions of students. A more balanced and transparent evaluation system can reduce the enormous burden placed upon one examination alone. Mental health support for aspirants should also become an integral

part of the educational ecosystem.

India cannot aspire to become a global knowledge power if its examination system itself remains vulnerable to corruption and manipulation. The nation owes an apology to every honest student who prepared sincerely for NEET 2026.

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Greetings to my sisters and brothers on their Statehood Day. The contribution of Sikkim to India's development is deeply valued. Wishing the people of the state good health and prosperity. This occasion comes at a time when Sikkim is marking 50th Statehood Day celebrations. A few days ago, I had the good fortune of being among the people of Sikkim for the celebrations. The warmth I received in Sikkim will remain a part of my memory. The Central Government will keep supporting Sikkim's growth trajectory in the times to come.

~ Narendra Modi, PM, India



Heavy Rain Leaves Large Parts of Silchar Waterlogged

SILCHAR

Incessant rainfall since Thursday night triggered widespread waterlogging across several parts of Silchar on Friday, once again exposing the city's persistent urban flooding and drainage problems during the monsoon season.

Continuous overnight rain and heavy morning showers submerged roads, flooded residential areas and disrupted normal life across the town, with commuters forced to wade through waterlogged streets as traffic movement slowed in multiple localities.

Visuals of submerged roads, stranded vehicles and residents navigating knee-deep water circulated widely on social media through the day, prompting fresh criticism over the city's drainage infrastructure and flood preparedness.

Residents alleged that inadequate drainage systems, clogged



canals and poor water discharge mechanisms continue to aggravate flooding every monsoon despite repeated assurances from authorities regarding improvement measures.

Many questioned how even newly developed and previously less-affected localities had experienced severe waterlogging this year.

"Inadequate drainage infrastructure, clogged canals and poor water discharge mechanisms continue to worsen the situation every monsoon," several residents alleged, while also questioning why canal-clearing and drainage maintenance work had allegedly not been completed during the dry season.

Areas including Bilpar, Vivekanda Road, Link Road, Radhamadhab Road, Church Road and CR Avenue witnessed severe water accumulation, with residents seen carrying children, pushing stalled vehicles and attempting to protect household belongings from enter-

ing floodwater.

One of the most distressing incidents was reported from Vivekanda Road, where residents allegedly had to carry a deceased person through flooded streets to reach the crematorium, highlighting the hardship caused by recurring urban flooding.

Several shops remained partially submerged, while rainwater entered homes in multiple residential neighbourhoods, causing anxiety among families as drainage channels struggled to cope with the heavy rainfall.

Meanwhile, Devid Borah said assessment teams had been deployed to monitor conditions in the affected areas.

He stated that debris-clearing operations had recently been carried out at Rangirkhal, Longaikhal and Singirkhal canals to improve water flow and drainage capacity.

Earlier in April, Aayush Garg

had led a multi-agency inspection of Silchar's drainage network and reiterated a "zero-tolerance" approach towards canal encroachments and blockages contributing to flooding.

"The objective is not temporary relief but sustainable urban flood mitigation," the District Commissioner had stated during the inspection exercise.

Member of Parliament Parimal Suklabaidya said he would speak with district officials and the administration to expedite canal-clearing work so that accumulated rainwater could drain out more quickly.

With every spell of heavy rainfall exposing the same civic vulnerabilities, residents have once again demanded immediate as well as long-term drainage reforms, warning that Silchar will continue to face severe flooding each monsoon unless sustainable solutions are implemented.

"India's first satellite-tagged Ganges softshell turtle released at Kaziranga": Assam CM Himanta Sarma

GUWAHATI

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said that the country's first satellite-tagged Ganges softshell turtle was released at Kaziranga National Park on Friday, and called it a "proud moment" for Assam. Sharing the information on X, the Assam Chief Minister said the "major step for wildlife conservation" was taken on the occasion of Endangered Species Day today.

"A first for India at Kaziranga! Marking #EndangeredSpeciesDay, the country's 1st satellite-tagged Ganges softshell turtle was released in Kaziranga, a major step for wildlife conservation," Sarma said.

He further said that Assam remains committed to protecting every species inhabiting the state's forests and wildlife habitats.

"A proud moment for Assam as we continue to protect every species that calls our forests home," he added.

Earlier on March 3, Sarma formally inaugurated the Kaziranga Orchid Park, developed by the state government at Kohora in Kaziranga. He also inaugurated and laid the foundation stones for several other projects.

It may be noted that built over 20 bighas, the Orchid Park has been developed in its first phase at a cost of approximately Rs 16 crore.

The park houses, displays, and conserves more than 900 species of indigenous and exotic orchids. The orchids are exhibited in seven state-of-the-art glasshouses as well as planted in natural surroundings.

The park also includes a children's garden, a 500-seat amphitheatre, a traditional cuisine restaurant, tourist accommodation facilities, and an administrative building. Designed to integrate conservation, education, recreation, and tourism, the park aims to provide a holistic experience to visitors.

Zubeen Garg Case: Bail Hearing of Accused Shyam Kanu Mahanta Deferred Till May 22



GUWAHATI

The bail hearing of accused Shyamkanu Mahanta in connection with the case related to the death of Assamese singer Zubeen Garg was deferred to May 22 following proceedings before a Guwahati court on Friday.

The matter was heard in the court of Chief Judicial Magistrate Mitali Thakur.

Speaking to reporters after the hearing, advocate Jiaul Kamar said the court directed the invest-

igating agency to submit the case diary before the next date of hearing.

He further stated that Mahanta's legal team is expected to file a special affidavit on May 18 in connection with the bail application.

During Thursday's proceedings, both the prosecution and defence had presented their arguments before the court. The prosecution had also sought the submission of additional documents related to the case.

The case pertains to an incident dated September 19, 2025, linked to the death of Zubeen Garg, one of Assam's most prominent musical figures.

The court is scheduled to take up the bail plea again on May 22 after examining the case diary and other submissions placed before it.

In a related development, a fast-track court had earlier rejected Mahanta's bail plea on April 30, marking a significant step in the ongoing legal proceedings.

GUWAHATI

Senior BJP leader Chandra Mohan Patowary was sworn in as the Pro-tem Speaker of the newly constituted 16th Assam Legislative Assembly on Friday ahead of the commencement of the first Assembly session later this month.

Lakshman Prasad Acharya administered the oath of office to Patowary at Lok Bhavan in Guwahati.

In a message shared on social media, the Governor expressed confidence that Patowary would conduct the initial proceedings of the Assembly in accordance with constitutional norms and democratic values.

"Today at Lok Bhavan, Assam, Shri Chandramohan Patowary was administered the oath as the Pro-tem Speaker of the newly constituted 16th Assam Legislative Assembly. I am confident that with his vast experience and commitment to democratic values, the initial proceedings of the Assembly will be conducted with



full constitutional dignity," Acharya stated.

Speaking to reporters after the ceremony, Patowary said he had been entrusted with the responsibility of administering the oath to newly elected MLAs during the upcoming Assembly session beginning on May 21.

"I have been appointed as the Pro-tem Speaker for the Assembly session scheduled from May 21 by the Assam Governor today. I have been assigned with the re-

sponsibility to oversee MLA oath taking," he said.

Patowary, a seven-time MLA, also expressed gratitude to the people of Assam and Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for the opportunity.

"I have been elected to the Assembly for the seventh term. I express immense warmth for the blessings showered by people," he added.

As Pro-tem Speaker, Patowary will preside over the swearing-in

ceremony of all newly elected legislators and oversee Assembly proceedings until the election of a full-time Speaker.

Following the oath-taking ceremony, the Assembly will elect its Speaker, who will then preside over the House for the remainder of the term.

Earlier, the Assam Cabinet had recommended Patowary's name for the post ahead of the first session of the new Assembly, which is scheduled to be held on May 21, 22, 25 and 26.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had also stated that ministerial portfolios in the new Cabinet would be allocated shortly and that ministers would take oath during the upcoming session.

The ruling NDA has nominated former minister Ranjeet Kumar Dass as its candidate for the Speaker's post.

Sarma had further indicated that the Assam Cabinet could be expanded during the first week of June following the conclusion of the Assembly session.

Meghalaya Deploys SF-10 Commandos in Lapangap Amid Border Tensions with Assam

SHILLONG

The Meghalaya government has intensified security deployment in the disputed Lapangap area of West Jaintia Hills district amid renewed tensions along the Assam-Meghalaya border, with Special Force-10 commandos and additional police personnel deployed in the region.

At least three platoons of the Meghalaya Police, including commandos, have been stationed in and around Lapangap village over the past few days following complaints by local residents regarding alleged harassment linked to cultivation activities in the disputed area.

Meghalaya Director General of Police Idashisha Nongrang said one platoon of SF-10 commandos was deployed on Thursday morning to strengthen security



arrangements.

"The present deployment will be reviewed considering the law-and-order situation in the area," she said.

The enhanced security presence comes after villagers in Lapangap claimed they were unable to cultivate their agricultural fields due to alleged interference by residents from the Assam side of the border.

According to local residents, saplings planted during the day were allegedly destroyed at night by people from the neighbouring state, heightening tensions in the border village.

Residents have also demanded that the night curfew imposed in the area be lifted so they can guard and monitor their farmlands during nighttime hours.

The curfew was imposed by the district administration following violence and the death of a border resident from Assam last year.

Villagers have additionally sought stronger security arrangements, including increased deployment of forces, to ensure they can safely continue farming activities.

On Wednesday, residents marched to Shillong and met Deputy Chief Minister Sniawbhalang Dhar, who report-

edly assured them of enhanced security measures.

Meanwhile, the Meghalaya government has established a police outpost about 19 kilometres from Barato to improve monitoring and law enforcement in the region.

Officials said the outpost was set up away from Lapangap because both Assam and Meghalaya had previously agreed to maintain status quo on the establishment of new security infrastructure in disputed areas.

However, both states had agreed that developmental activities could continue in the region.

At present, the Assam Police operates a camp near Lapangap. Meghalaya Police is also considering setting up a similar security camp closer to the disputed zone to provide additional protection to local residents, the DGP added.

NFR Installs Weather Stations at Vulnerable Locations Ahead of Monsoon

GUWAHATI

The Northeast Frontier Railway has begun installing automatic weather stations at vulnerable points across its network to strengthen operational safety and disaster preparedness during the monsoon season.

The railway authority said the initiative is aimed at improving real-time weather forecasting and enabling timely preventive action during floods, landslides and other adverse weather conditions that frequently disrupt rail operations in the Northeast.

According to an official statement issued on Friday, three automatic weather stations (AWS) have already been installed successfully, while six additional stations are currently under various stages of installation at identified high-risk locations under the NFR zone.

The vulnerable stretches identified for installation include the Lumding-Badarpur section in Assam, the Katakhal-Sairang railway section connecting Mizoram and the Jiribam-Khongsang route in Manipur.

Railway officials said these areas are particularly prone to heavy rainfall, flooding and landslides during the monsoon months, making continuous weather monitoring crucial for safe and uninterrupted train movement.

The remaining six weather stations are expected to become operational by the end of May.

The project is being imple-

mented in coordination with the India Meteorological Department to ensure accurate and location-specific weather data for railway operations.

According to NFR, the AWS network will help authorities take faster and more informed decisions during emergency situations and severe weather events, significantly improving disaster response mechanisms in flood-prone and landslide-sensitive regions.

The stations are equipped with advanced sensors capable of monitoring multiple weather parameters with high precision.

Officials said the rain gauge sensors can record precipitation intensity of up to 900 mm per hour, while temperature sensors are capable of measuring temperatures ranging from minus 40 degrees Celsius to plus 75 degrees Celsius.

The systems also include wind-monitoring equipment capable of recording wind speeds up to 80 metres per second, humidity sensors covering a range between 0 and 100 per cent, and atmospheric pressure monitoring devices with a capacity of up to 1200 hPa.

"The deployment of these advanced weather monitoring systems reflects NFR's continued commitment towards enhancing operational safety, adopting modern technology and ensuring uninterrupted rail connectivity in challenging geographical regions during the monsoon season," the statement added.

Students, teachers gain hands-on experience in water testing in school in Guwahati

GUWAHATI

Biodiversity conservation organisation Aaranyak on Friday conducted an interactive water testing and awareness workshop to educate students on the growing global water crisis. The initiative, organised in partnership with the Assam Pollution Control Board, aimed to provide young minds with practical skills to monitor and conserve local water resources.

At a time when the world is grappling with what the United Nations has described as a looming era of "Global Water Bankruptcy," leading biodiversity conservation organisation Aaranyak, in collaboration with Assam Pollution Control Board, Samagra Shiksha Axom, and Wipro Earthian, brought the message of water conservation and pollution awareness directly to young minds through an engaging water testing and outreach programme at Krishnanagar Vidyapeeth High School.

The initiative aimed to sensitise students to the growing global and local water crisis through hands-on scientific learning and practical community engagement.

According to the World Health Or-

Quest!

According to research, siblings may be more influential shapers of who we become than parents.



ganisation and UNICEF, nearly 2.1 billion people worldwide still lack access to safe drinking water, a crisis worsened by climate change and pollution. Adding urgency to the issue, a United Nations report released in January 2026 warned that the Earth's water reservoirs have been exploited beyond their renewable limits, pushing many regions into an irreversible "post-permanent crisis" stage.

Against this alarming backdrop, students and teachers at the Guwahati school rolled up their sleeves to partic-

ipate in real-time water quality testing under the guidance of Aaranyak officials Tikendrajit Gogoi and Geetashree Sarma.

Using water samples collected from the school campus as well as their homes, students tested key parameters such as pH, temperature, total dissolved solids (TDS), hardness, alkalinity, chloride, nitrate, iron and fluoride - transforming science lessons into real-world environmental action.

The programme also highlighted the

growing contradiction faced by Guwahati, where several localities struggle with drinking water scarcity even as others battle recurring floods and waterlogging.

To deepen their understanding, students carried out a water audit of the school campus and were encouraged to assess water usage patterns in their homes and neighbourhoods. They were also assigned mini case studies to document public attitudes towards water pollution and conservation.

"These activities not only made learning easier, but also inspired me to think differently about water-related issues in my locality," said Pratistha Rabha, a Class VIII student.

"Through the activities, I learned about fluoride and arsenic and their potential impacts on our bodies," she added.

Senior Science Teacher Bhaskar Jyoti Sarma described the initiative as a powerful example of experiential learning. "Activities like these genuinely help bridge theoretical knowledge and real-world environmental challenges," he said.

The event, which was held on Wednesday, was coordinated by Geetashree Sarma, Young Professional at Environment Education and Capacity Building Division, Aaranyak, in alignment with the objectives of Mission LIFE (Lifestyle for Environment) and reflects the organisation's continued commitment to nurturing environmental literacy and scientific awareness among students across Assam.

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BJP defends Rs 3 fuel price hike; says India shielded citizens from global oil shock for 76 days



NEW DELHI

Defending its fuel price hike move, the BJP on Friday claimed that while several countries experienced a steep price rise, India managed to shield citizens from the global oil shock for more than two months and implemented only a "limited and calibrated" rise.

The remarks came hours after petrol and diesel prices were hiked by Rs 3 per litre each, the first increase in more than four years, amid mounting losses suffered by oil marketing companies due to surging global crude oil prices.

Taking to X, BJP IT cell head Amit Malviya said India recorded one of the

lowest increases among major economies, with petrol prices rising by 3.2% and diesel by 3.4%. "The Rs 3 per litre increase announced on May 15 is effectively the first fuel price hike in nearly four years, and on a base price of around Rs 95 per litre, it translates to only about a 3.5% increase," he said. Malviya claimed that India's public sector oil marketing companies, which account for nearly 90% of the retail fuel market, absorbed a substantial portion of the increase in crude oil costs for 76 days after the West Asia crisis intensified.

"For 76 days after the West Asia crisis intensified, India's public sector oil marketing companies did not

pass on the full burden of rising international crude oil prices to consumers. They absorbed a significant portion of the cost themselves," he said. Citing reports, he claimed that under-recoveries had risen to nearly Rs 1,000 crore per day. "With the Strait of Hormuz facing disruptions and oil supplies getting affected, Brent crude stayed above USD 100 per barrel for most of April and May. The impact was directly visible at fuel stations across nearly every major economy," he said.

"In several countries, diesel prices have risen between 50% and 100%, especially because diesel directly affects freight movement and trade," he said.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah appeals for global anti-narco alliance, warns of irreversible damage

NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah highlighted that the world has less than a decade to mount a coordinated response to the global narcotics crisis before the damage becomes irreversible.

He called for a unified international legal and intelligence framework to combat drug trafficking and narco-terrorism.

Speaking at the RN Kao Memorial Lecture 2026 organised by Research and Analysis Wing, Shah said fragmented national approaches had allowed international drug cartels to exploit legal loopholes and expand their influence across borders.

"If joint efforts are not initiated now, after 10 years the world will realise that it was too late to reverse the harm," Shah said before an audience comprising ambassadors and high commissioners from over 40 countries, former R&AW chiefs and senior members of India's security establishment.

Delivering the lecture on the theme "Narcotics: A Borderless Threat, A Collective Responsibility", Shah linked the global drug trade directly to terrorism, organised crime and geopolitical instability. He warned against the emergence of "narco-states" and said proceeds from drug trafficking were increasingly being used to finance terror networks and parallel economies.

The annual lecture series, instituted in 2007, honours Rameshwar Nath Kao, the founding chief of R&AW.

Members of Kao's family were also present at the event.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah addresses the R N Kao Memorial Lecture-2026 organised by the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW)



Shah reiterated the government's commitment to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a "Drug-Free India by 2047", saying Indian agencies had prepared a roadmap to dismantle narcotics syndicates under a strict "Zero Tolerance" policy.

"Not one gram of narcotics will be allowed to enter India or use the country as a transit route," he said.

The Home Minister, however, focused much of his address on the lack of global consensus in anti-drug laws, arguing that inconsistent definitions of banned substances and varying punishments across jurisdictions had weakened international enforcement efforts.

"Unless there is a high degree of global alignment on what is designat-

ed as controlled substances, as well as common standard penalties for drug trafficking, drug cartels will continue to take advantage of the inconsistencies in policy," he said.

Shah proposed a four-point framework for international cooperation: a uniform global definition of prohibited narcotics, standardised punishments for trafficking offences, streamlined extradition of drug kingpins and real-time intelligence sharing among countries.

Highlighting India's recent enforcement efforts, Shah said the country had repatriated more than 40 transnational criminals over the past two years with support from partner nations, though he acknowledged that "much more" remained to be done.

Addressing diplomats directly, Shah urged governments to treat the narcotics crisis not merely as a law-and-order issue but as a broader civilisational challenge requiring coordinated political, intelligence and security responses.

"A world of 8 billion people, 195 nations, and 250,000 kilometres of international borders cannot tackle the problem of drugs through fragmented approaches," he said.

He concluded by calling for collective global action that rises above geopolitical divisions, stressing that the fight against narcotics networks and narco-terrorism must be pursued simultaneously through intelligence sharing, coordinated operations and sustained international cooperation.

INTERNATIONAL

TRUMP SAYS MADE 'FANTASTIC TRADE DEALS' WITH XI

BEIJING:

President Donald Trump said he had made "fantastic trade deals" with China's Xi Jinping, as the pair met on Friday at final talks of a superpower summit that according to the US leader has also reaped a Chinese offer to help open the Strait of Hormuz.

Trump had arrived in Beijing seeking to seal deals in sectors including agriculture, aviation and artificial intelligence, as well as to contain differences between the two sides in a number of tense geostrategic areas -- not least the Middle East war.

Trump's overtures to Xi, whom he described as a "great leader" and "friend", have so far been met with more muted tones by the Chinese leader.

But the US leader said "a lot of good" has come out of the visit.

"We've made some fantastic trade deals, great for both countries," he said after a walk with Xi among the rosebushes in the gardens of Zhongnanhai, a central leadership compound next to Beijing's Forbidden City.

"We've settled a lot of different problems that other people wouldn't have been able to solve," he added, without providing details.

Xi said it was a "milestone visit", and that the two sides had to date established "a new bilateral relationship, which is a relationship of constructive strategic stability".

He promised to send Trump seeds for the White House Rose Garden. In an interview with Fox News after the first day of the summit wrapped, Trump said Xi had agreed to several US wishlist points. On the topic of the war in



Iran, the US president said Xi had effectively assured his counterpart that China was not preparing to militarily aid Tehran, which has essentially closed the Strait of Hormuz. "He said he's not going to give military equipment... he said that strongly," Trump told Fox. "He'd like to see the Hormuz Strait open, and said 'if I can be of any help whatsoever, I would like to help,'" Trump added.

Asked whether the two leaders had discussed Iran, the Chinese foreign ministry on Friday released a statement calling for "a compre-

hensive and lasting ceasefire". "Shipping lanes should be reopened as soon as possible in response to the calls of the international community," it added. The warm handshakes and pomp on Thursday were somewhat overshadowed by a blunt warning from Xi on a much longer standing geopolitical flashpoint, Taiwan. Shortly after talks started, Chinese state media reported Xi had told Trump that missteps on the sensitive issue of Taiwan could push their two countries into "conflict".

The Fox News interview did

not touch upon Taiwan, and Trump did not comment to reporters when asked about the matter on Thursday.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told CNBC the president would say more "in the coming days".

Secretary of State Marco Rubio told NBC on Thursday that "US policy on the issue of Taiwan is unchanged... as of the meeting".

Beijing had raised the topic, he said, but "we always make clear our position, and we move on to the other topics".

Taipei responded Friday thanking Washington "for repeatedly expressing its support".

Trump did not spell out on Friday the trade agreements that he said had been sealed with China.

However, in the Fox interview, Trump said one big business deal struck involved Xi agreeing to purchase "200 big" Boeing jets.

Shares of the US aviation giant fell after Trump's comments, in a sign the market had expected a more robust purchase from China.

The US president also said Beijing had also voiced interest in buying US oil and soybeans.

China, which is the key foreign customer of Iranian oil, bought small amounts of US oil before Trump imposed tariffs last year.

It has sharply slowed down purchases of US soybeans, turning instead to Brazil. And Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told CNBC that Trump and Xi were talking about setting up "guardrails" for the use of artificial intelligence.

Bessent said the world's "two AI superpowers are going to start talking", though US export controls on the advanced technology to China remain a sore point in relations.

Israel threatens to sue NYT over report on sex abuse of Palestinian inmates



JERUSALEM

Israel threatened to take The New York Times to court over a piece it published denouncing allegedly widespread sexual abuse against Palestinian detainees.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Gideon Saar have ordered the "initiation of a defamation lawsuit against The New York Times", according to a joint statement issued by their offices.

The offices said that the piece by Nicholas Kristof, a prominent opinion columnist, was "one of the most hideous and distorted lies ever published against the State of Israel in the modern press, which also received the backing of the newspaper".

Kristof's investigation is based on testimonies gathered in the Israeli-occupied West Bank from 14 men and women who said that they had been

sexually assaulted by Israeli settlers or members of the security forces.

The report described "a pattern of widespread Israeli sexual violence against men, women and even children -- by soldiers, settlers, interrogators in the Shin Bet internal security agency and, above all, prison guards".

The New York Times responded that any legal claim over the "deeply reported opinion column" lacked merit.

"This threat, similar to one made last year, is part of a well-worn political playbook that aims to undermine independent reporting and stifle journalism that does not fit a specific narrative," Danielle Rhoades Ha, a spokesperson for the newspaper, said in a statement.

Kristof's piece said there was no evidence that Israeli leaders ordered rapes.

The Israeli foreign ministry alleged that Kristof had

based his piece "on unverified sources tied to Hamas-linked networks".

It also accused the paper of deliberately timing the publication to "undermine" an independent Israeli report on Hamas sexual violence perpetrated during its October 7, 2023 attack on Israel, which was published on the same day.

Israeli forces have detained thousands of Palestinians in the West Bank since Hamas's 2023 attack, which triggered the war in Gaza.

The United States has high protections for journalistic expression, with libel suits needing to prove that information was purposefully untrue and with harmful intent.

President Donald Trump and his allies have nonetheless filed a number of lawsuits against media outlets, some of which have reached settlements rather than risk repercussions from his administration.

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highlighted the alarming rise of hypertension in India. "Prevalence of hypertension in Indian adults is 31%, affecting nearly 200 million people," he said, warning that the condition is rapidly emerging as a major public health challenge across the country. Dr. Kukreja pointed out that India is increasingly being described as a "hypertension capital" because of factors such as early onset of high blood pressure, low awareness levels, and rising cardiovascular risks in both urban and rural populations. Introducing the programme, cardiologist Dr. Rituparna Baruah of Apollo Hospitals said the theme of World Hypertension Day 2026 calls for collective responsibility among institutions, families, and communities. He stressed that regular screening and awareness are especially important among young adults as stress and lifestyle-related health risks continue to rise. The panelists described hyperten-

sion as a silent disease that can damage vital organs including the heart, kidneys, brain, and eyes if left uncontrolled. They advised people to adopt healthier lifestyles through balanced diets, regular exercise, stress management, and avoiding tobacco and harmful alcohol consumption. A major highlight of the programme was the active involvement of RGU NSS volunteers, who managed registration, participant coordination, and assistance across screening stations and discussion sessions. Organisers said the initiative reflected the spirit of youth-led community service and preventive healthcare awareness. The organisers further stated that the programme aligns with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Goal 3 on Good Health and Well-Being and reaffirmed their commitment to continuing awareness campaigns and preventive healthcare initiatives in the region.



GUWAHATI
Marking World Hypertension Day 2026, the National Service Scheme (NSS) Cell of The Assam Royal Global University, in collaboration with the Cardiologists Society of India - North East Chapter and Cardiologists Society of Assam, organized a free cardiac health check-up camp and expert panel discussion at the university campus on Friday.

The programme was aimed at creating awareness about hypertension, widely known as the "silent killer," and its growing role as a major risk factor for cardiovascular diseases. The day-long initiative saw active participation from RGU faculty members,

staff, students, residents from nearby villages, and members of neighboring institutions, including Royal Global School. A total of 131 people benefited from the free health screening services conducted by cardiologists and clinical teams from CSINE and CSA.

The medical camp included blood pressure monitoring, blood sugar testing, lipid profile examination, and ECG services, helping participants identify potential health risks at an early stage. The screenings were conducted free of cost with support from Sun Pharmaceutical Industries and IPCA Laboratories.

An interactive panel discussion on the theme "Controlling Hypertension Together... Defeat the Silent Killer" was also held at the Seminar Hall of RGU's D Block. Eminent cardiologists including Dr. D.J. Dutta, Dr. Rituparna Baruah, Dr. B. B. Kukreja, Dr. Dinesh Agrawal, and Dr. M. K. Sutradhar shared medical insights and practical guidance on preventing hypertension and maintaining heart health. Moderating the session, Dr. B. B. Kukreja



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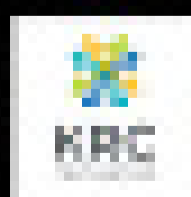


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