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PERSPECTIVE

"Nothing in the world is ever completely wrong. Even a stopped clock is right twice a day." ~ Paulo Coelho

Assam to Set Up FIFA World Cup 2026 Fan Parks in Guwahati, Dibrugarh

GUWAHATI

Football fans in Assam will get the opportunity to experience the excitement of the FIFA World Cup 2026 in a community setting, with dedicated fan parks set to be established in Guwahati and Dibrugarh for live match screenings.

Announcing the initiative on Sunday, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the fan parks are being organised by the Assam Tourism Development Corporation under the "CM FIFA Fan Park" programme to bring football enthusiasts together during the global tournament.

According to the Chief Minister, the fan park at Latasil Playground will open on June 29, while a second venue at Chowkidangee Field will become operational from June 30.

The venues will feature large-screen live broadcasts of FIFA World Cup matches, allowing supporters to enjoy the action alongside fellow football fans in a festive atmosphere.

Sarma said the initiative is aimed at creating a unique viewing experience and fostering a sense of community among football lovers. He also invited fans from across the country to participate, noting that watching World Cup matches collectively would make the tournament even more memorable.

The fan parks are expected to serve as major gathering points for football enthusiasts throughout the competition, reflecting the growing popularity of the sport in Assam and the wider North-east region.

WHO SAID WHAT



Nature is our greatest ally – holding the climate steady, cradling life & sustaining millions. Protecting nature is a legal & moral responsibility. Let's honour that duty by investing in nature's recovery & ensuring that people & planet thrive together for generations to come.

~ Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General, UN

Prominent citizens join hands to shape Barak Valley's development roadmap; Minister Kaushik Rai outlines plans for flood mitigation, civic infrastructure and early Silchar Municipal Corporation polls



SILCHAR

The Assam Government has invited the active participation of eminent citizens, professionals and civil society representatives in shaping the future development of Barak Valley, with Guardian Minister of Cachar and Minister for Barak Valley Development Department, Krishnendu Paul on Sunday assuring that public suggestions would play a key role in the region's development planning.

Addressing an interaction programme with prominent citizens at Cachar Club, Silchar, organised by the

Barak Valley Development Department, the Minister said the State Government, under the leadership of Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, is committed to ensuring balanced and inclusive development across Assam, with Barak Valley occupying an important place in that vision.

The consultation brought together leading personalities from different walks of life, including intellectuals, retired civil servants, academicians, lawyers, scholars, social activists, doctors, professionals and representatives of civil society. The interactive session

provided an open platform for participants to share their views, identify local priorities and suggest practical measures for the district's long-term development.

Minister Krishnendu Paul said the purpose of the meeting was to listen directly to the people and benefit from their experience and knowledge. He assured the gathering that every constructive suggestion received during the consultation would be examined carefully and incorporated into future planning and implementation wherever feasible.

Expressing his gratitude to the Chief Minister for entrusting him with the responsibility of the Barak Valley Development Department, the Minister said the department would work with dedication to accelerate development across the region in close coordination with all stakeholders.

Referring to the State's ongoing development initiatives, he said Assam is steadily progressing towards becoming one of the leading economic centres of the Northeast through programmes such as Atmanirbhar Assam. He also highlighted the expansion of rural road connectivity under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), stating that several projects are under implementation while

many more are in the pipeline.

The Minister also spoke about the proposed development of Son Beel, saying the initiative has the potential to expand fish production, encourage exports and generate new livelihood opportunities for local communities while strengthening the rural economy.

Highlighting key welfare initiatives, Minister Krishnendu Paul said the Government aims to provide safe drinking water to every household by 2028 under the Jal Jeevan Mission with a targeted supply of 55 litres of potable water per family each day. He also stressed the continued importance of the Swachh Bharat Mission in improving sanitation, hygiene and public health.

While addressing the gathering, Minister for food Public Distribution, Consumer Affairs Housing and urban affairs and Cooperation, Kaushik Rai said the Barak Valley Development Department has been entrusted with monitoring and coordinating the implementation of development projects across different government departments to ensure timely execution and effective delivery of public services.

Speaking on one of Silchar's major civic concerns, Minister Kaushik Rai said urban flooding remains

among the Government's highest priorities. He observed that large-scale encroachment on natural drainage channels and khals has aggravated waterlogging across the town, making eviction drives necessary for restoring the drainage network.

"It will take time, but the encroachments will be cleared," the Minister said while outlining the Government's approach to resolving the long-standing problem.

Minister Rai also informed that elections to the proposed Silchar Municipal Corporation are likely to be held before Durga Puja, adding that preparation of electoral rolls is already in progress.

Providing updates on major infrastructure projects, he announced that work on the proposed Silchar flyover is expected to commence shortly. Preliminary activities, including soil testing by the Public Works Department, will begin before construction starts. He further informed that repair work on the Birbal Bazaar-Silchar Medical College and Hospital road would also commence shortly to improve connectivity for commuters and patients.

The interaction witnessed active participation from members of the audience, who offered suggestions

on infrastructure, urban planning, public services, environmental management, education, healthcare and employment generation. Participants welcomed the initiative, describing it as a constructive platform for direct dialogue between policymakers and the public.

The meeting was attended by the Silchar Member of Parliament, Parimal Suklabaidya, Silchar MLA, Dr. Rajdeep Roy, Borkhola MLA, Kishor Nath, Sonai MLA, Aminul Haque Laskar, Katigora MLA, Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha, Udharbond MLA, Rajdeep Goala and Dholai MLA, Amiya Kanti Das, Padma Shri awardee and eminent oncologist Dr. Ravi Kannan, former Silchar MLA Dipayan Chakraborty, former Udharbond MLA, Mihir Kanti Shom, former Dholai MLA, Nihar Ranjan Nath, senior officials and several distinguished citizens from across the district.

The programme was organised by the Barak Valley Development Department under the supervision of Additional Secretary Aditya Vikram Yadav, IAS.

This is stated in a press release issued by Regional office of Information & Public Relations Barak valley Zone Silchar Assam.

NEW DELHI/GUWAHATI

India's northeastern region is facing a growing narcotics challenge as drug trafficking networks linked to the Golden Triangle expand their operations, with Assam emerging as the leading state in opium seizures, according to the Narcotics Control Bureau's (NCB) Annual Report 2025.

The report, released on Friday, indicates a significant shift in global narcotics trafficking patterns, with the Golden Triangle-covering parts of Myanmar, Laos and Thailand overtaking the Golden Crescent as the primary source of illicit drugs entering India.

The NCB noted that while opium cultivation in the Golden Crescent region, comprising Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, has witnessed a dramatic decline, Myanmar has recorded a sharp increase in illicit poppy cultivation, creating new challenges for India's eastern frontier.

According to the report, Afghanistan's illicit opium cultivation dropped from nearly 2,33,000 hectares in 2022 to around 10,000 hectares in



2023. In contrast, Myanmar saw a 56 per cent increase in opium cultivation between 2021 and 2023, expanding from 30,200 hectares to 47,100 hectares.

The report identifies India's eastern borders as the most vulnerable entry points for narcotics originating from this expanding production zone.

Reflecting this trend, Assam recorded the highest opium seizures among all northeastern states during 2025. Authorities seized 371 kilograms of opium in the state, while morphine seizures reached 46.51 kilograms, second only to Manipur's 139.95 kilograms.

The state also registered the seizure of 152 kilograms of amphet-

amine-type stimulants (ATS) and one kilogram of cocaine, underscoring the presence of multiple trafficking routes and networks operating through Assam.

The report highlights distinct trafficking patterns across the Northeast. While traditional narcotics such as opium and morphine continue to dominate seizures in Assam and Manipur, synthetic drugs are increasingly flowing through Mizoram and Tripura.

Mizoram emerged as the country's largest ATS interception state, accounting for 1,477 kilograms of ATS seizures—approximately 42 per cent of the national total of 3,485 kilograms. Manipur recorded 535 kilograms of ATS seizures, while Tripura reported 129 kilograms.

Elsewhere in the region, Arunachal Pradesh seized 27 kilograms of opium, Nagaland recovered 16 kilograms, and Meghalaya reported 25 kilograms of ATS.

The NCB observed that India's ATS seizures have surged by 140 per cent between 2020 and 2025, with 8.2 tonnes of synthetic drugs confiscated

in 2024 alone. The agency described the rise as a clear indicator of the evolving nature of drug trafficking networks operating along the eastern border.

"India's eastern borders at present are the most direct and porous entry point for this expanding production base," the report noted, warning that the growing volume of synthetic drugs represents a serious security and law-enforcement challenge.

The report identified Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland as states facing the greatest frontline exposure due to their proximity to Myanmar and the existence of difficult-to-monitor border stretches.

According to the NCB, porous border mechanisms, including the erstwhile Free Movement Regime (FMR) along the India-Myanmar border, have enabled drug syndicates to transform these states from transit points into active staging grounds for narcotics distribution across the country.

The report also mapped key trafficking corridors used by organised criminal networks.

One of the most significant routes is the Champhai corridor in Mizoram, which borders Myanmar's Chin State. Narcotics entering through this route are transported through Aizawl and adjoining road networks before reaching Silchar in Assam's Barak Valley.

From Silchar, consignments are moved onward through Meghalaya to Guwahati, which the report identifies as an increasingly important distribution hub for the Indian hinterland.

Another major trafficking route passes through Manipur, where National Highway-102 serves as a critical land corridor for heroin and methamphetamine tablets entering India from Myanmar.

The findings underscore the growing strategic importance of the Northeast in India's anti-narcotics efforts and highlight the need for enhanced border surveillance, inter-state coordination and intelligence-driven operations to counter increasingly sophisticated trafficking networks operating from the Golden Triangle region.

Tripura Government Doctors Demand Pay Parity, Career Reforms After Private Practice Ban



AGARTALA

Doctors attached to Agartala Government Medical College (AGMC) and Govind Ballabh Pant (GBP) Hospital have called for a revision of service rules, improved salary structures, and time-bound promotions following the Tripura government's decision to prohibit private practice by doctors serving at the state's premier government healthcare institution.

While welcoming the government's objective of strengthening public healthcare services, doctors' associations said the ban should be accompanied by long-pending reforms related to pay, career progression, and service benefits.

The demand comes after nearly 350 doctors at AGMC and GBP Hospital discontinued private consultations from Sunday in compliance with the government directive. The move, aimed at ensuring greater availability of doctors in public hospitals, has reportedly created difficulties for patients who previously relied on private consultations.

Addressing the issue, AGMC Teachers' Forum president Dr. Tapan Majumder said that if the government intends to develop AGMC and GBP Hospital on the lines of the prestigious All India Institute of Medical Sciences

(AIIMS), corresponding improvements in remuneration and service conditions are essential.

"The government wants to transform the state's largest healthcare institution into an AIIMS-like facility. In that case, salaries, allowances and other service benefits should also be aligned with similar standards," he said.

In response to the government order, the All Tripura Government Doctors' Association (ATGDA), the AGMC Teachers' Forum and the Indian Medical Association (IMA) convened an emergency meeting to discuss the implications of the ban and formulate a collective response.

Following the meeting, the associations resolved to seek discussions with Chief Minister Dr. Manik Saha and senior officials of the Health Department to press for their demands, including revised service rules and a structured promotion policy.

ATGDA General Secretary Dr. Kanak Chowdhury said government doctors remain committed to providing quality healthcare and meeting public expectations. However, he stressed that the concerns of medical professionals must also be addressed to ensure a motivated and efficient workforce.

According to the doctors' bodies, both the Chief Minister and the Health Services Secretary are currently outside the state. The associations plan to meet them upon their return and are hopeful that constructive discussions will lead to an early resolution of the issues.

The development highlights growing calls from the medical fraternity for a balanced approach that strengthens public healthcare delivery while ensuring fair compensation and career advancement opportunities for government doctors.

Sharda Devi Sworn In as Rajya Sabha MP



IMPHAL

Manipur BJP president Adhikarimayum Sharda Devi was sworn in as a Member of Parliament in the Rajya Sabha on Monday after being elected unopposed to the state's lone seat in the Upper House.

The oath was administered by Rajya Sabha Chairman and Vice President of India, C. P. Radhakrishnan, during a ceremony held in the Rajya Sabha Chamber. Sharda Devi was among seven newly elected and re-elected members who took oath on the day.

Sharda Devi took her oath in Manipuri, becoming the only representative from Manipur among the members sworn in. The remaining parliamentarians were elected from Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan.

The ceremony was attended by several senior leaders and dignitaries, including Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Harivansh, Union Health Minister and Leader of the House J. P. Nadda, Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijju, Minister of State for Law and Justice Arjun Ram Meghwal, Rajya Sabha members Jairam Ramesh and Praful Patel, along with senior officials of the Rajya Sabha Secretariat.

Her unopposed election to the Upper House is being viewed as a significant political achievement for the BJP in Manipur, further strengthening the party's presence in Parliament from the northeastern state.

Congress Seeks Answers Over Amit Shah's Meeting With Manipur Naga MLAs, Questions CM's Absence

IMPHAL

The Congress Legislature Party (CLP) in Manipur has questioned the recent meeting between a delegation of Naga legislators from the state and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, raising concerns over the absence of Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh from the discussions.

Addressing a press conference in Imphal on Saturday, CLP leader Keisham Meghachandra Singh described the development as unusual and sought an explanation from the BJP-led state government regarding the circumstances surrounding the meeting.

According to Meghachandra, the delegation of Manipur Naga MLAs met the Union Home Minister under the leadership of Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio. He questioned why issues concerning Manipur were discussed without the participation of the state's chief minister.

The Congress leader argued that excluding the chief minister from such discussions raised questions about the role and authority of the state government in matters concerning Manipur.

"It is unprecedented that a delegation of legislators from Manipur met the Union Home Minister under the leadership of another state's chief minister while the Chief Minister of Manipur was absent," Meghachandra said.

He further alleged that the development undermined the institutional dignity attached to the office of the chief minister and reflected deeper political issues within the ruling establishment.

Meghachandra also questioned the participation of Deputy Chief Minister Losli Dikho in the delegation and claimed that the meeting suggested a lack of confidence among Naga legislators in the leadership of Chief Minister Khemchand Singh.

"The meeting symbolises that Deputy Chief Minister Losli Dikho and the Naga legislators have no trust in the present BJP Chief Minister of Manipur," he alleged.

The Congress leader maintained that matters concerning the state should be addressed through collective representation involving the elected leadership of Manipur. He called upon the government to clarify why the state was not represented as a unified entity during discussions with the Union Home Minister.

In addition to raising concerns over the meeting, Meghachandra criticised the functioning of the BJP-led government, alleging a lack of transparency and collective decision-making in governance.

Referring to Deputy Chief Minister Nemcha Kipgen, he questioned her continued functioning from New Delhi and argued that senior members of the state government should remain actively engaged within Manipur.

"A deputy chief minister should govern from the state. Operating from Delhi signifies the absence of effective governance," he alleged.

Escalating his criticism, Meghachandra described Chief Minister Khemchand Singh as a "paper tiger" and claimed that the chief minister lacked the authority required to effectively lead the administration.



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BEYOND GDP

For more than seven decades, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has occupied a near-sacred place in economic policymaking. Governments have celebrated rising growth rates, international institutions have ranked nations according to economic output, and political leaders have often equated higher GDP figures with national success. Yet a growing global consensus now suggests that this measure, while useful, is no longer sufficient to capture the true state of human progress.

The United Nations' recent report, A Compass for Progress for People and Planet, represents a significant challenge to the long-standing dominance of GDP as the principal measure of development. By proposing a broader framework of 31 indicators that assess health, education, social cohesion, inequality, environmental sustainability, poverty and subjective well-being, the UN is urging the world to rethink what prosperity actually means in the twenty-first century.

The argument is both timely and compelling. GDP was never designed to measure the quality of life. Developed in the 1930s and widely adopted after the Second World War, it was intended to quantify economic activity by calculating the value of goods and services produced within a country. While it remains an important indicator of economic performance, GDP tells us little about how wealth is distributed, whether citizens enjoy access to quality healthcare and education, or whether economic growth is being achieved at the expense of environmental sustainability.

A nation may post impressive GDP growth while millions remain trapped in poverty. Economic output may expand even as air quality deteriorates, forests disappear, water sources become polluted and social inequalities deepen. Indeed, activities that contribute to environmental degradation can paradoxically increase GDP in the short term, while the long-term costs of ecological destruction remain largely invisible in national accounts.

This limitation has become increasingly evident across the world. In many countries, rising GDP has not necessarily translated into greater social well-being. Income inequality has widened, public trust has weakened and environmental pressures have intensified. As climate change accelerates and economic disparities become more pronounced, the question confronting policymakers is no longer simply how fast economies grow, but who benefits from that growth and at what cost.

For India, this debate carries particular significance.

The country has emerged as one of the fastest-growing major economies in the world and is frequently projected as a future global economic powerhouse. Such achievements deserve recognition. However, alongside impressive growth figures persist serious challenges that cannot be ignored. Air pollution remains among the worst globally. Public healthcare infrastructure continues to face enormous pressure. Educational outcomes often lag behind aspirations. Gender disparities persist in many sectors, and income inequality remains a growing concern.

These realities highlight the distinction between economic growth and human development. Growth is undoubtedly necessary for a developing nation seeking to improve living standards and generate employment opportunities. Yet growth alone cannot be the ultimate objective of public policy. Development must be judged by its impact on people's lives, particularly those who remain economically and socially vulnerable.

The comparison with China often illustrates this point. Despite ongoing criticism regarding political freedoms and human rights, China has achieved notable gains in areas such as technical education, manufacturing capability and poverty reduction. Its experience demonstrates that economic performance cannot be evaluated solely through aggregate output figures. Social indicators matter because they reveal whether economic expansion is translating into broader societal benefits.

The United Nations' proposed framework seeks precisely this broader understanding of development. By incorporating measures of health, educational attainment, environmental sustainability and social inclusion, it offers a more balanced assessment of national progress. Such indicators acknowledge that prosperity is multidimensional. A society cannot be considered truly successful if economic gains are accompanied by deteriorating public health, environmental collapse or widening social divisions.

The growing urgency of climate change further strengthens the case for moving beyond GDP. Traditional economic measures often treat environmental resources as inexhaustible assets. Forests, rivers, biodiversity and clean air are rarely assigned adequate economic value until they are damaged or depleted. Consequently, national accounts can present an illusion of prosperity even as the ecological foundations of future growth are being eroded.

The challenge is particularly acute for developing countries seeking to balance economic expansion with environmental responsibility. The Global South understandably aspires to achieve living standards comparable to those enjoyed in advanced economies. Yet replicating the carbon-intensive development pathways followed by industrialized nations is neither environmentally sustainable nor economically prudent.

It is in this context that the ideas advanced by renowned economist Thomas Piketty deserve attention. Piketty argues that addressing global inequality and climate change requires a new framework of international cooperation and justice. His proposal for a global wealth tax on the world's wealthiest individuals may remain politically contentious, but it highlights a broader truth: the resources required to finance climate adaptation, renewable energy transitions and sustainable development will not materialize without innovative approaches to global finance.

His observation that a moderately warmer world with decent living standards is preferable to a dramatically hotter planet with higher incomes underscores a crucial reality. Economic prosperity loses meaning if the environmental conditions necessary for human survival and well-being are compromised. Rising incomes cannot compensate for unlivable temperatures, severe water shortages or increasingly frequent climate disasters.

The debate therefore extends beyond economics into questions of democracy, equity and global governance. The concentration of wealth and resources in the hands of a small global elite has increasingly come under scrutiny. Calls from countries such as Brazil and South Africa for greater international cooperation on taxation and climate finance reflect a growing demand for a more equitable global order. India, as a leading voice of the Global South, has a vital role to play in shaping these discussions.

At the national level, the principle of inclusive development remains central. Long before modern economists began questioning GDP, Mahatma Gandhi articulated a simple yet profound test for policymaking: consider the impact of every decision on the poorest and most vulnerable person in society. That principle remains as relevant today as it was during India's freedom struggle.

Economic progress that benefits only a small segment of society cannot be regarded as genuine national advancement. The success of a nation should be measured not by the fortunes of a few billionaires but by the opportunities available to ordinary citizens. Access to quality healthcare, good schools, clean drinking water, dignified employment and a healthy environment are the true markers of development.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

You can't just ask the customers what they want and then try to give that to them. By the time you get it built, they'll want something new. - Steve Jobs

BJP'S AGGRESSIVE CAMPAIGN: CAN CONGRESS SURVIVE?



POONAM I. KAUSHISH

Politics in New Delhi these days resembles a battlefield. Political parties are busy accusing one another and pointing fingers. Public morality and practical politics appear intertwined in a curious mix, where defections, shifting loyalties, and broken alliances are becoming the new norm. The destination is power, and the route taken matters little.

The results of recent Assembly elections and the splits within the Trinamool Congress, Shiv Sena, and Aam Aadmi Party have provided the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) with an opportunity to further weaken its principal rival, the Congress. After showing signs of revival in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, Congress once again finds itself under pressure from the BJP. The BJP's long-standing goal of creating a "Congress-free India" remains an important part of its political agenda. Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently described Congress as a "parasitic party," alleging that it could betray even its allies.

The BJP's aggressive approach is also linked to its weaker-than-expected performance in the 2024 elections and the difficulties it faced in securing adequate support for the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, which sought to link women's reservation with delimitation. These developments have encouraged the BJP to strengthen its parliamentary position.

As part of this strategy, the BJP appears focused on attracting MPs from dissatisfied regional parties, encouraging divisions within opposition ranks, and politically isolating Congress. Simultaneously, efforts are underway to limit the political acceptability of Rahul Gandhi and weaken Congress's traditional support base.

However, this task is not easy. Congress remains influential in Karnataka, Kerala, and Telangana, while it enjoys support from allies in Tamil Nadu. It also governs Himachal Pradesh. Nevertheless, the BJP's strong presence across much of northern and western India continues to pose a major challenge for Congress.

There is little doubt that Congress is in a better position today than it was a decade ago. By winning 99 seats in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the party achieved its best performance since 2014. It remains the largest opposition party nationally and the principal pillar of the INDIA alliance. Yet tensions within the alliance have increased, particularly after developments involving the Trinamool Congress and the DMK.

Supporters of Rahul Gandhi argue that under his leadership Congress has regained its political identity and activism. Campaigns such as the Bharat Jodo Yatra helped restore the party's visibility. They contend that despite constant criticism and social media attacks, Gandhi has remained steadfast in his ideological commitments.

Critics, however, continue to demand leadership change within the party. They argue that Congress must move beyond its excessive dependence on the Gandhi family. According to them, the

party's internal culture remains heavily influenced by nominations and loyalty politics, where dissent is often viewed as disloyalty.

Another major challenge facing Congress is factionalism. Recent developments have highlighted leadership disputes, public disagreements, and organizational weaknesses. In several states, defections and weak party structures have hurt Congress. Relations with allies have also shown signs of strain, as illustrated by disagreements with the DMK.

It is clear that Congress's future will depend on how effectively it manages internal divisions, maintains opposition unity, expands beyond its traditional strongholds, and presents a coherent ideological and organizational alternative to the BJP.

Merely changing leadership will not solve the party's problems. Congress must cultivate strong state-level leaders and bring forward new political faces capable of attracting young voters and regional allies. Many analysts believe the party's challenges are structural: weak grassroots organization, a shortage of influential regional leadership, and an inability to convert anti-incumbency sentiment into votes.

Congress's ability to challenge the BJP nationally also depends on the strength and unity of regional parties. If regional parties continue to weaken or if their influential leaders join the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA), Congress could face even greater difficulties. Such developments would fragment opposition votes, weaken local organizational networks, and reinforce the perception of the BJP as the natural center of Indian politics.

The current political landscape is increasingly defined by competition between the BJP and a fragmented opposition. As various parties prioritize

state-level interests over a coordinated national strategy, maintaining a united opposition front becomes difficult. This is one reason why the INDIA alliance periodically faces internal tensions.

If regional parties continue to fragment and drift toward the BJP, Congress's path back to national power will become even more challenging. Ultimately, however, the outcome will depend less on alliance arithmetic and more on how successfully Congress expands and strengthens its own organization.

Debate over Rahul Gandhi's leadership also continues. Critics argue that his leadership has not yet delivered a decisive national revival for Congress. The party has struggled to expand its voter base in several states and remains heavily dependent on the influence of the Gandhi family.

History shows that successful political parties periodically renew themselves through leadership changes, organizational reforms, and the emergence of strong regional leaders. Whether Congress develops leadership beyond the Gandhi family remains to be seen, but it is evident that the party needs a broader leadership structure.

If Indian politics were compared to a cricket match, the BJP-led camp is currently batting from a position of strength. Congress has regained some credibility since 2024, but it has not yet convinced voters that it can serve as a credible national alternative to the BJP.

Congress remains relevant and is visibly engaged in a process of revival, but it cannot yet be described as fully rejuvenated. The party must recognize that a healthy political system is built on regular, independent, and fair internal elections. In the long run, dynastic politics can prove damaging to any political party.

The time has come for Congress to en-

gage in serious introspection. The question is not merely what role the Gandhi family should play, but whether Congress can build a leadership structure larger than the family itself. Until it provides a

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Yes, we had a disappointing weekend in cricket.

But at the same time, I often find myself rubbing my eyes in disbelief at India's growing competitiveness in sports where I never imagined we'd even be globally competitive.

Volleyball. Fencing. Gymnastics. Rowing. Athletics. The list keeps growing.

Yes, we're far from the top step of the podium yet.

However, something's clearly changing at the ground level.

Years of effort by governments, both state and central, (outstanding example being Odisha) along with private sector organisations like OGQ and many others, may finally be starting to pay off..

But it is the individual sportspersons, this new generation of champions with grit, resilience and self-belief, who are my #MondayMotivation.

~ Anand Mahindra, Chairman, Mahindra Group



clear answer to that question, the party's future will remain uncertain.



Pulse polio campaign begins across Cachar

SILCHAR

Cachar district recorded an encouraging start to the National Immunization Day (NID) Pulse Polio campaign on Sunday, with more than 1.9 lakh children receiving the Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) on the opening day. The district administration and the Health Department launched the campaign through ceremonial programmes at Urban Primary Health Centre (PHC), Silchar, and Kalain Community Health Centre (CHC), where public representatives, health officials and frontline workers joined hands to mark the beginning of one of the country's largest child immunization drives.

At Urban PHC, Silchar, the campaign was formally inaugurated by Hon'ble MLA Sri Rajdeep Roy. Additional Deputy Commissioner (Health) Sri Monojyoti Kutum, Joint Director of Health Services, Cachar, Dr. Sumona Naiding, WHO Surveillance Medical Officer Dr. Arkodev Kar, District Immunization Officer Dr.



Abdul Salam Sheikh, SDM&HO (Headquarters) Dr. Anindita Chanda, Medical & Health Officer-I of Urban PHC Dr. Kamoli Kay Dea, along with healthcare personnel.

Lady Health Visitors (LHVs), Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) and ASHA workers, attended the programme.

Welcoming the gathering, Dr. Sumona Naiding spoke about the continued importance of routine immunization and the Pulse Polio campaign in safeguarding children against vaccine-preventable diseases. Addressing parents and health workers, MLA Rajdeep Roy appealed to families to ensure that every eligible child receives the vaccine, describing immunization as one of the most effective public health interventions for protecting future generations from poliomyelitis.

A similar programme was held at Kalain Community Health Centre, where Hon'ble MLA Sri Kamalakshya Dey Purkayastha inaugurated the campaign by administering two drops of the Oral Polio Vaccine to a child. The event was attended by Additional Chief Medical & Health Officer (Family Welfare), Cachar, Dr. M. I. Barbhuiya, Deputy Superintendent of Kalain CHC Dr. M. S. Bhowmik, Dr. P.

Rangmai, Dr. Chiroree Deb, Dr. Biswajit Nath, members of the Block Programme Management Unit (BPMU) and frontline health workers. Dr. M. I. Barbhuiya welcomed the gathering and highlighted the role of coordinated field-level efforts in ensuring successful implementation of the campaign. Cachar has set a target of vaccinating 2,78,073 children in the 0-5 years age group during the Pulse Polio campaign. By the end of the first day, more than 1,90,000 children had received the vaccine, accounting for nearly 70 per cent of the district target.

The Health Department has deployed an extensive network to cover every corner of the district. A total of 1,312 Pulse Polio booths have been established, supported by 5,228 frontline workers, 267 supervisors, medical officers, two mobile teams, 1,187 general booths, 59 difficult booths, 28 institutional booths and 38 transit booths. Special arrangements have also been made for children living in remote and difficult-to-access areas,

with dedicated teams visiting locations where access to healthcare services is often limited.

Vaccination booths remained open from 9.00 am to 4.00 pm on Sunday. Following booth-based vaccination, health teams began house-to-house visits in the evening to identify children who could not attend the booths. The door-to-door campaign will continue over the next two days, with field workers visiting households across the district to ensure that no child below five years of age is left out of the immunization drive.

Health officials also expressed confidence that sustained field mobilisation, community participation and the commitment of thousands of frontline workers would help the district achieve complete coverage by the end of the campaign.

This is stated in a press release issued by the Regional Office of Information & Public Relations Barak valley Zone Silchar Assam.

Global Pineapple Festival Opens in Delhi, Tripura Eyes Bigger Global Market for GI-Tagged Queen Pineapple

NEW DELHI/AGARTALA

Tripura launched the Global Pineapple Festival 2026 in New Delhi, marking a major push to promote its Geographical Indication (GI)-tagged Queen Pineapple in domestic and international markets while expanding opportunities for farmers and exporters.

The three-day festival was inaugurated by Tripura Chief Minister Dr. Manik Saha at the Major Dhyanchand Stadium in the national capital. The event brought together policymakers, traders, exporters, entrepreneurs, and agricultural stakeholders to showcase the state's flagship horticultural product and strengthen its presence in global markets.

Union Minister of State for Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) Dr. Sukanta Majumdar, Tripura Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Minister Ratan Lal Nath, Rajya Sabha MP Rajib Bhattacharjee, senior government officials, farmers, and industry representatives attended the inaugural session.

Addressing the gathering, Chief Minister Saha described the festival as a celebration of Tripura's agricultural achievements and the contribution of pineapple growers who have helped establish the Queen Pineapple as one of the country's most recognised fruit brands.

He said the event would serve as a platform to connect farmers with buyers and exporters, improve market access, and create new business opportunities. According to the Chief Minister, strengthening value chains and expanding export networks remain key priorities for the state government as it seeks to improve incomes for pineapple cultivators.

The festival features nearly 25 exhibition stalls displaying a wide range of products and initiatives, including Tripura's agricultural produce, tourism potential, handicrafts, rural industries, and government development programmes.

Mizoram Electoral Roll Revision Removes Over 46,000 Names; Voter Count Falls to 8.29 Lakh

AIZAWL

More than 46,000 names have been deleted from Mizoram's electoral rolls following the completion of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), reducing the State's electorate to 8,28,877 voters, election officials said on Sunday. The revision exercise, which began on May 20, concluded with the digitisation of all enumeration forms submitted across the State, according to Joint Chief Electoral Officer Ethel Rothangpui. Officials said a total of 46,191 names were removed from the electoral rolls after verification. The deletions were made on grounds including death, permanent migration, duplicate enrolment and inability to trace voters. Of the names removed, 21,290 belonged to deceased voters, while 13,992 individuals had permanently relocated either to other States or abroad. Another 8,352 voters could not be traced during the verification process, and 2,245 names were identified as duplicate entries.

The exercise also revealed that 312 eligible voters chose not to enrol

or re-enrol in the electoral rolls due to their religious beliefs. According to election officials, these individuals were either listed in the 2025 electoral rolls or had family members who participated in the previous revision exercise. Following the completion of the revision, Mizoram's electorate now stands at 8,28,877, representing 94.72 per cent of the more than 8.75 lakh voters recorded in the State's 2025 electoral rolls.

The Election Department will publish the draft electoral rolls on July 4. Citizens will then have an opportunity to submit claims and objections between July 5 and August 4 before the rolls are finalised. The revision exercise comes amid growing demands from the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) for a detailed verification of electoral rolls in Chakma-majority areas of southern Mizoram.

The student organisation recently alleged a sharp increase in voter numbers in the region, claiming that the electorate had grown by 121 per cent and that 97 new villages had emerged over the years.

GUWAHATI

Assam Police on Sunday said they had foiled a major terror plot allegedly planned by the banned insurgent outfit ULFA (Independent) after arresting two suspected cadres and two alleged civilian collaborators in Tinsukia district.

Addressing a press conference, Tinsukia Superintendent of Police Mayank Kumar said the operation was carried out based on specific intelligence inputs, leading to the apprehension of two suspected ULFA(I) members, both residents of Tinsukia.

According to police, the duo had been linked to earlier attacks on security force camps and kidnapping incidents in the region. Investigators alleged that they were preparing to enter Tinsukia town to carry out indiscriminate firing and grenade attacks targeting civilians.

"We were able to thwart this plan before it could be executed. Security has been strengthened and all agencies remain on high



alert," Kumar said.

During the operation, security personnel recovered two AK-series rifles, 172 rounds of ammunition, two grenades, backpacks, jungle survival equipment, food supplies, medicines and cash from the suspects.

In a subsequent operation, po-

lice arrested two alleged civilian accomplices identified as Bitu Bora and Kalpa Bora for reportedly providing logistical support to the militants.

Police said Bitu Bora, a resident of Panitola, owned a Swift car bearing registration number AR20A5892, which was allegedly

used by the suspected ULFA(I) cadres. Kalpa Bora, also from Panitola and serving as Assistant General Secretary of the All Assam Motok Yuva Chatra Parishad, has been accused of assisting the outfit.

Investigators claimed that during questioning, the two alleged accomplices admitted that the vehicle had been arranged on the instructions of ULFA(I) senior leader Aiseng Asom.

Following the arrests, security has been intensified across Tinsukia district as police continue their investigation into the alleged conspiracy. Officials said efforts are underway to identify other individuals who may have been involved in supporting the planned attack and to uncover the wider network linked to the outfit. The arrests are being viewed as a significant breakthrough in counter-insurgency efforts in Upper Assam, with authorities maintaining heightened vigilance to prevent any retaliatory or related militant activity.

Promod Boro Urges Full Implementation of BTR Accord, Pushes for Sixth Schedule Reforms



CHIRANG

Rajya Sabha MP and United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) president Promod Boro has called on the government to fully implement all provisions of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) Accord, asserting that the success of the peace agreement depends on its execution rather than its signing. Addressing an interaction programme with UPPL workers at Kajalgaon in Chirang district on Saturday, Boro said the BTR Accord was designed to resolve long-standing issues in the

region, strengthen constitutional institutions and ensure lasting peace. "The BTR Accord is a peace accord. It was not signed to weaken or harm anyone. It was signed to address long-pending concerns, strengthen the Sixth Schedule and create a foundation for permanent peace. Signing an accord alone is not enough; its implementation is the real test," he said.

Boro cautioned against allowing the agreement to suffer the same fate as several other accords that remain only partially implemented. While acknowledging that implementation may take time, he stressed that the responsibility ultimately lies with the government. A major focus of his address was the long-pending 125th Constitutional Amendment Bill, which seeks to strengthen the powers and functioning of autonomous councils under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

Boro argued that several Sixth

Schedule councils, including some established decades ago, continue to function without adequate constitutional and financial powers necessary for effective governance.

"While policing may remain under the state government, the Constitution provides scope for granting greater financial autonomy to autonomous councils. That is why we have consistently demanded the passage of the 125th Constitutional Amendment," he said.

The UPPL leader noted that the Bill was introduced in the Rajya Sabha on February 6, 2019, but has remained pending without substantive discussion. He said MP's supporting the cause are engaging with leaders of various national parties to build consensus and ensure the Bill is taken up in both Houses of Parliament. "Strengthening Sixth Schedule councils is vital not only for the Bodo community but for all communities residing in the BTR. Greater autonomy and stronger institutions are

essential for balanced and inclusive development," Boro added.

The Rajya Sabha MP also raised concerns over allegations that employees recruited during the UPPL-led administration were facing intimidation under the current government.

He maintained that appointments made during the party's tenure followed established recruitment procedures, including interviews, selection processes and financial approvals.

"Those jobs were not given by any political party. They were earned through merit by eligible candidates belonging to different communities. It is unfortunate if employees are now being threatened or pressured for money," he alleged.

Calling for accountability, Boro urged affected individuals to come forward with complaints and encouraged the media to continue highlighting issues of public concern.

Third Body Recovered in Arunachal Flash Flood Tragedy; Seven Districts Remain Isolated



ITANAGAR

Rescue teams on Sunday recovered the body of a third victim from a stream nearly 10 kilometres downstream of the site of a devastating cloudburst in Arunachal Pradesh's Keyi Panoyr district, even as large parts of the state remain cut off by landslides and flood-damaged roads.

The victim was swept away after a cloudburst struck Poosa village on June 24, triggering flash floods and massive landslides that caused widespread destruction in the district.

The disaster severely impacted the NEEPCO colony in the area, where 18 residential quarters were destroyed by the force of the floodwaters and debris. The incident claimed three lives, bringing the death toll from the cloudburst to three.

Meanwhile, the aftermath of the disaster continues to disrupt connectivity across central and upper Arunachal Pradesh, with at least seven districts remaining inaccessible

through several key road routes. Authorities said fresh rainfall has once again blocked the Kimin-Potin road, worsening transportation challenges and hampering relief and restoration efforts.

The Hoj-Potin Road, part of National Highways 13 and 713A, remains completely closed due to extensive mudslides, flash floods and major road washouts caused by relentless monsoon rains. The highway serves as a vital transport corridor linking central and upper regions of the state.

The road closure has effectively severed access to several districts, including Keyi Panoyr, Lower Subansiri, Kurung Kumey, Kra Daadi, Kamle and Upper Subansiri, disrupting the movement of residents, emergency services and essential commodities.

In view of the unstable terrain and the continuing threat of landslides, the local administration has advised commuters to avoid all non-essential travel along the affected stretch until conditions improve.

Papum Pare Deputy Commissioner Lobsang Tsering visited the damaged sections of the Hoj-Potin road on Sunday to review ongoing restoration work despite adverse weather conditions.

Officials said the scale of destruction at multiple locations is extensive, and restoring normal traffic movement will take considerable time. According to the Deputy Commissioner, reopening the highway is likely to take more than a week.

A New Skyline for Imphal: Rs.3,692-Crore Elevated Corridor Set to Transform Manipur's Capital

WAARI SINGBUL NETWORK NEPRAM TOMBI MEITEI

IMPHAL: Amid years of challenges and uncertainty, Manipur is poised to witness one of the most ambitious urban infrastructure projects in its history—a 25-kilometre-long elevated corridor that promises to reshape the skyline of Imphal and redefine mobility across the state's capital.

In a major boost for the state's development aspirations, the proposed Imphal Elevated Corridor project has moved a significant step closer to reality, with the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) transferring the Detailed Project Report (DPR) to the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL) for further action and implementation.

According to NHIDCL Deputy General Manager (Manipur), Rafique Ahmad Choudhury, the DPR is likely to receive approval before the Manipur Legislative Assembly elections scheduled for March–April 2027. Choudhury said several rounds of video conference meetings have already been held between officials of MoRTH, NHIDCL and the Nagpur-based consultancy firm, M/s K&J Projects Private Limit-



ed, to carry out the technical appraisal of the project.

Estimated to cost 3,691.81 crore, the four-lane elevated corridor is expected to become the largest urban road infrastructure project ever undertaken in Manipur. More than just a flyover, it represents a long-term investment in the future of Imphal—a city that has witnessed rapid growth in population, commerce and vehicle numbers over the past two decades.

The project was first proposed by the State Public Works Department (PWD) in early 2020 to ease mounting traffic congestion along the National Highways passing through the heart of the city. After the Centre sanctioned consultancy services in 2021, the DPR was prepared by the consultant and submitted to the Ministry in November 2022, a senior PWD official said.

Once implemented, the elevated corridor, with a vertical clearance of 5.5 metres, will stretch from Koirengai Junction along the existing alignment of NH-02 before bifurcating near Raj Bhawan Rotary. One arm will extend towards Manipur University along NH-102, while the other will proceed

towards Imphal International Airport along NH-02. An additional two-lane flyover will connect CM Traffic Rotary to the City Convention Centre, creating a seamless urban transport network.

Urban planners believe the corridor could fundamentally change how people experience the city. What often takes commuters an hour or more during peak traffic could be reduced significantly, improving connectivity between educational institutions, government offices, commercial centres and the airport.

Beyond convenience, the project is expected to deliver substantial economic benefits. Faster movement of goods and people, lower fuel consumption, reduced vehicle operating costs and improved logistics efficiency could enhance Imphal's attractiveness as a commercial hub for the wider region.

For ordinary citizens, the benefits may be felt in everyday life—shorter commutes, safer roads, less time spent in traffic and greater ease in accessing workplaces, markets and essential services.

The elevated corridor also carries symbolic significance. At a time when Manipur has endured prolonged social and political turmoil, large-scale infrastructure investments signal confidence in the state's future. They reflect a commitment to long-term development and create opportunities for employment, economic activity and urban modernization.

Infrastructure experts point out that elevated transport corridors have transformed the urban landscape of several Indian cities by easing congestion and improving connectivity.

Guwahati, for instance, has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past decade and is now widely regarded as a "city of flyovers" owing to its extensive network of elevated roads. With the proposed 25-kilometre elevated corridor, Imphal appears poised to embark on a similar journey, ushering in a new era of urban mobility and creating infrastructure that could serve the city for generations.

The corridor is also expected to contribute to a cleaner urban environment. Smoother traffic flow generally leads to lower emissions from idling vehicles and reduced fuel wastage, helping improve the overall quality of urban life.

The Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari, had first assured the people of Manipur of the Imphal Elevated Corridor during his visit to the state in 2022. The project subsequently emerged as one of the flagship components of the nearly 15,000 crore National Highway development package announced for Manipur.

More recently, during a meeting with Manipur Chief Minister Y. Khemchand Singh in June 2026, Gadkari reportedly reiterated his commitment to securing the project's early sanction, further reinforcing the Centre's resolve to fast-track this landmark urban infrastructure initiative.

As the final approval process advances, anticipation is steadily building among residents. If sanctioned and executed as planned, the Imphal Elevated Corridor will not merely connect roads—it will connect aspirations.

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‘Global terror financing goes digital,’ warns FATF in latest report



NEW DELHI

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF), headquartered in Paris, France, has warned that terrorist groups are increasingly exploiting social media, instant messaging and streaming platforms to raise and move funds, as digital technologies create new avenues for financing terror activities.

In a latest report, the global anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing watchdog said the rapid evolution of social media, messaging and streaming platforms (SMSPs) has significantly expanded the financial tools available to terrorist networks.

“Once used primarily for communication and propaganda, these platforms now incorporate payment systems, virtual assets, creator monetisation features and cross-border financial services, making them attractive channels for fundraising and financial transfers,” it noted.

The report, Detecting and Disrupting Terrorist Financing Activity Through Social Media, Instant Messaging Applications and Streaming Platforms (SMSPs), builds on the FATF’s 2025 Comprehensive Update on Terrorist Financing Risks and highlights a range of emerging financing methods employed by terrorist organisations.

“According to the FATF, terrorist groups are increasing-

ly using fraudulent humanitarian crowdfunding campaigns, creator-economy features, virtual asset donations, live-streaming and tipping functions to solicit funds,” the report highlighted.

“Such entities are also exploiting QR codes and rotating cryptocurrency wallets to receive donations while using encrypted messaging, disappearing content and coded language to evade law enforcement and financial intelligence agencies. In some cases, commercial entities are being used to disguise or facilitate terrorist financing activities,” the report read. The anti-terror global watchdog said the growing integration of artificial intelligence, decentralised finance (DeFi), virtual assets, encrypted communications and embedded payment systems have made terrorist financing more sophisticated, requiring stronger collaboration among governments, financial institutions and technology companies.

The report also found significant gaps in countries’ preparedness to address these evolving risks.

Fewer than 30 per cent of reporting jurisdictions currently include terrorist financing risks associated with social media, messaging and streaming platforms in their national risk assessments.

“Through its work, the FATF has found that less than

30 per cent of reporting jurisdictions are covering terrorist financing risks through SMSPs in their national risk assessments, so it is essential to step up global efforts to identify and counter this evolving threat,” it said.

FATF President Elisa de Anda Madrazo, in a statement, said the shift to digital platforms has dramatically expanded the reach of terrorist financing networks.

“Terrorist financing has gone digital, and with it, the ability to reach billions of people and magnify the impact of attacks has never been greater. No single jurisdiction or authority can address this threat alone, so we need to work closely together to prevent criminals from misusing these platforms to cause harm around the world,” she said. The FATF said it worked with major technology companies and specialist think tanks in preparing the report to better understand emerging vulnerabilities and develop practical responses. Among its recommendations, the watchdog called for stronger public-private partnerships, enhanced information sharing, improved coordination among national agencies, better understanding of platform monetisation features, more robust risk assessments and greater integration of financial and digital intelligence. While social media, messaging and streaming platforms themselves are not directly covered under FATF’s anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing standards, the organisation noted that financial activities conducted through these platforms may already fall within the scope of existing international regulations.

This underscores the need for countries to strengthen enforcement as terrorist financing increasingly shifts to the digital ecosystem.

PM Modi says Indian Ocean must become ‘ocean of opportunity’; India, Seychelles sign nine pacts

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said India envisions the Indian Ocean as an “ocean of opportunity” where maritime security goes hand in hand with economic prosperity, as India and Seychelles elevated their strategic partnership by signing nine agreements, including an extradition treaty.

Addressing a joint press interaction with Seychelles President Patrick Herminie after the wide-ranging talks, Modi said the Indian Ocean was a shared space whose security and prosperity depended on cooperation based on mutual trust rather than the size of nations.

“Our vision is to make the Indian Ocean an ocean of opportunity,” Modi said. “We believe the Indian Ocean is our shared home. Its security, sustainability and prosperity are our shared responsibility.”

He said the approach formed the core of India’s MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions) vision. “We believe the defence and security of India and Seychelles are integral to each other.”

The two sides signed nine agreements spanning security, connectivity, health, agriculture, digital payments, maritime cooperation, space and capacity building. The key pact was an extradition treaty aimed at strengthening cooperation against cross-border crime.

On economic cooperation, Modi said both countries would continue exploring new opportunities for industry and investment while improving connectivity.

“We will continue to explore new opportunities for the industries of both our countries. Work will also be done to enhance connectivity between India and Seychelles,” he said and added that India would share its successful experience in digital public infrastructure with the island nation. President Herminie said maritime security remained central to bilateral ties, with both countries reaffirming their commitment to combating piracy, drug trafficking, illegal fishing and other forms of transnational crime.

He also said discussions were pro-



gressing on a special economic package worth USD 175 million for Seychelles.

Earlier in the day, Modi received a ceremonial welcome at the State House and was conferred Seychelles’ highest honour for a foreign dignitary, the Special Presidential Distinction “Guardian of the Blue Horizon”, in recognition of his leadership on sustainability, the Blue Economy, climate action and ocean governance. It is the first time the award has been conferred.

Accepting the honour, Modi dedicated it to all countries committed to environmental conservation and combating climate change, saying it would further strengthen the special friend-

ship between India and Seychelles.

The agreements signed during the visit covered a wide range of sectors aimed at deepening strategic and development cooperation. Besides the extradition treaty, the two countries concluded pacts on the recognition and certification of seafarers, cooperation in agriculture and the Blue Economy, peaceful uses of outer space, preparations for a new Seychelles National Hospital, implementation of the Jan Aushadhi scheme through HLL Lifecare, and collaboration between the Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service and Seychelles’ Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The two sides also signed an umbrella Line of Credit agreement worth Rs 1,250 crore between the Government of Seychelles and the Export-Import Bank of India to finance development projects. Another agreement between NPCI International Payments Ltd and the Central Bank of Seychelles seeks to strengthen digital payments infrastructure.

Modi’s visit coincides with the 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the two countries and Seychelles’ Golden Jubilee of Independence. Prime Minister Modi will be the Guest of Honour at the National Day celebrations on Monday.

INTERNATIONAL

France records around 1,000 additional deaths as extreme heat sets European records

BERLIN

France saw around 1,000 additional deaths last week at the height of its record-smashing heat wave, the country’s public health agency said Sunday, as new temperature highs sparked wildfires in Germany and Berlin police used water cannons to cool down the crowds.

Temperature records were toppled in several countries on the weekend as the heat wave slowly moved toward eastern parts of the continent.

In Germany, a new nighttime temperature record was reported Sunday in Kubschütz, in eastern Saxony, with 29.4 degrees Celsius (84.9 Fahrenheit). It came only hours after a daytime record of 41.5 C (106.7 F) in Mückem-Drewitz in Saxony-Anhalt, according to preliminary data by the German Weather Service DWD. The previous record was set a day earlier.

A new study from the World Weather Attribution, a Europe-based collaboration of scientists, reported Friday that the record-breaking heat and humidity in Europe this past week would not have been possible without climate change.

The rapid study found that the heat would have been virtually impossible just five decades ago, and is 200 times more likely today than it would have been 20 years ago.

France reported a surge in deaths last week at the height of a record-smashing heat wave, including a sharp increase at private homes, especially in the Paris region, the national public health agency said Sunday.

There were more than 1,200 deaths on Wednesday, when France was sweltering under its hottest temperatures, increasing to more than 1,400 deaths on each of the two following days, Public Health France said. In April and May, before the heat wave, France’s rate of deaths was about 900 to 1,000 per day.

The agency concluded that France experienced a total of at least 1,000 additional deaths during those three days



alone, an estimate it cautioned is likely to increase as more data is collected, including for deaths at home.

The increase was sharpest in areas under red warnings of extreme heat, it said. Those warnings blanketed about three-quarters of the country at the peak of the heat wave. The agency said that 85% of the deaths involved people aged 65 and above.

In Sweden, several people were injured when they were hit by lightning at an amusement park, the country’s IT news agency reported.

Three adults were taken to the hospital, among them a woman with serious injuries, after the lightning struck the Tossellilla Sommarland park in Tomelilla in the south of the country.

Across Europe, the extreme heat has been followed by severe thunderstorms. Heat sparks wildfires in forests contaminated with WWII ammunition

In Gohrischheide, in eastern Germany, a fire broke out in a large forest that’s still contaminated with ammunition from World War II, which made the firefighters’ efforts even more complicated.

Similarly, a major firefighting operation was underway in southwest Germany near the village of Traisen, where the heat sparked a forest fire in an area that also contained unexploded ordnance. Firefighters had to be temporarily stop after explosions took place and an ordnance disposal unit was brought in to continuously assess the situation, German news agency dpa reported.

The big cities’ fire departments were busy sending out ambulances to people suffering from heat-related illnesses. In Berlin, an additional 500 ambulance dispatches were reported on Saturday, most of them heat-related.

The German capital’s police found a

unique way to help suffering Berliners and tourists alike. They put up two huge water cannons—usually used to disperse unruly protesters—in front of the city’s iconic Brandenburg Gate and sprayed the cool water across the cheering crowd.

The heat also continued to damage the country’s infrastructure with the concrete surface on countless highways breaking up, and a weekend warning by national rail operator Deutsche Bahn to avoid all unnecessary train travel.

More than 600 passengers had to be evacuated from an overheated train in Brandenburg, after a tree fell onto an overhead power line during a storm on Saturday evening. The train, which was on its way from Hamburg to Prague, lost power. The air conditioners stopped working and the doors were locked until emergency responders forced them open. Two people were hospitalized with heat-related problems, dpa reported.

In the eastern city of Leipzig, no trams will be running until early Monday morning due to heat damage to tracks and switches. The Leipzig Public Transportation Authority said that the high temperatures had caused the joint sealant for asphalt and concrete in switches and tracks to run and clump together in many places throughout the city’s network.

In Greece, the Civil Protection agency warned of a “very high fire risk” in five regions of the country on Sunday. Wildfires are especially challenging in Greece, which has a dry mountainous mainland and over 100 inhabited islands, prompting authorities to introduce innovative space technology to help put them out quickly.

In Denmark, which marked new temperature records on Saturday, the extreme heat was followed by heavy thunderstorms.

By Sunday morning, the Nordic country had recorded 1,156 lightning strikes, according to public broadcaster DR.

Putin vows to ensure Russia’s security amid Ukraine’s retaliatory strikes



MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday vowed to ensure security and overcome challenges as Ukraine stepped up its retaliatory strikes inside Russia amid Moscow’s four-year war.

Kyiv calls the attacks fair retribution for Russia’s near-daily barrages on Ukrainian civilians and energy infrastructure since its February 2022 offensive.

“Yes, we see the problems, we are aware of them and are responding to them, but we will certainly ensure the security of both the country and our citizens, as well as the inviolability of Russia’s borders,” Putin said at the United Russia party congress. “We will undoubtedly overcome all the challenges facing us

today, including terrorist attacks on our territory and infrastructure facilities,” he added.

Putin’s speech came hours after a Ukrainian drone strike killed one person in Russia’s southern Krasnodar region and sparked a fire in a refinery, according to regional governor Veniamin Kondratyev.

Kyiv claimed the hit, with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky calling it a part of the “operations that weaken Russia’s ability to wage this war”.

“The Slavyansk oil refinery in the Krasnodar region was hit — about 300 kilometers from the frontline. We also reached a refinery in the Yaroslavl region, approximately 700 kilometers from our border,” Zelensky said on X on Sunday.

Last week, another Ukrainian attack caused a major fire at a refinery in the southeast of Moscow, shrouding the capital’s suburbs in plumes of thick black smoke.

Russian-annexed Crimea on Friday declared an “emergency situation” in a bid to ease the fallout from increasing Ukrainian aerial attacks on the peninsula.

The territory grapples with fuel shortages and power cuts triggered by Ukrainian attacks on logistics chains and oil facilities across Crimea, other Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine and southern Russia.

Russia seized and annexed Crimea in 2014, though the vast majority of countries — including many of Moscow’s allies — do not recognise the move.

“Bhupen Hazarika: The Great Ambassador of Music, Culture and National Integration”



COL. (DR.) ASHWANI KUMAR, MID, VSM (RETD.)

“Some artists entertain generations. A few inspire nations. Dr. Bhupen Hazarika belonged to the rare class of visionaries whose music became the conscience of society and whose voice echoed far beyond the boundaries of art.”

A Voice That United Hearts Beyond Borders.

India has produced many legendary singers, but very few have transformed music into a movement for humanity, social justice and national integration. Among them, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika occupies a place of singular distinction. Fondly remembered as the ‘Bard of the Brahmaputra,’ he was not merely Assam’s greatest cultural icon but one of India’s finest ambassadors of music, literature and cinema.

He was a singer, lyricist, composer, poet, filmmaker, writer, philosopher and humanist whose creations transcended language, religion and geography. Through his songs, he introduced the beauty of Assam and the spirit of the Northeast to the rest of India, while reminding the nation that unity is best nurtured not by politics alone but by culture and compassion.

A Childhood Blessed by Music.

Bhupen Hazarika was born on 8 September 1926 in Sadiya, in present day Tinsukia district of Assam. He was the eldest of ten children born to Nilakanta Hazarika and Shantipriya Hazarika. His parents nurtured a deep love for music, literature and Assamese folk traditions, and these early influences shaped the child who would later become the voice of an entire region.

His extraordinary talent appeared at an early age. At just ten years old, he wrote his first song and soon performed as a child artist in one of the earliest Assamese films. Even then, those around him recognised that this young boy possessed an uncommon gift.

Education That Broadened His Vision.

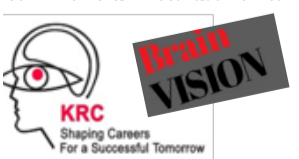
Bhupen Hazarika’s intellectual journey was as remarkable as his musical career. After completing his education in Assam, he earned a Master’s degree in Political Science from Banaras Hindu University. His quest for knowledge later took him to Columbia University in New York, where he obtained a doctorate in Mass Communication.

During his stay in the United States, he came into contact with renowned African-American singer and civil rights activist Paul Robeson. Robeson’s belief that music could become a powerful force for social transformation profoundly influenced Bhupen Hazarika’s thinking. Yet, despite his global exposure, he remained deeply rooted in the traditions of Assam. He returned to India with a larger vision to use music as a bridge between cultures and as a voice for ordinary people.

The Struggle Behind the Legend.

Success did not come easily. Artists from the Northeast often struggled for recognition beyond their own region. Linguistic barriers, geographical isolation and limited opportunities made the journey particularly difficult. Bhupen Hazarika faced these challenges with quiet determination.

Instead of pursuing commercial popularity, he remained committed to meaningful art. His songs reflected the lives of boatmen navigating the Brahmaputra, farmers toiling in the fields, labourers, tribal communities and ordinary citizens whose voices often went unheard. Over and above his songs



Be with someone who is good for your mental health.

were a motivational factors for soldiers sitting on the post. Author quite often used to listen his songs while sitting on the isolated post like Tusam



and Jessemi area.

He believed that music should not merely entertain but educate, inspire and awaken society. This conviction became the defining philosophy of his life.

Music That Spoke the Language of Humanity.

The greatness of Bhupen Hazarika lay not only in his melodious voice but also in the timeless messages carried by his songs. His celebrated Assamese composition ‘Manuhe Manuhor Babe’ is regarded as one of the finest expressions of universal humanism. The very title ‘Humanity Exists for Humanity’ is a profound reminder that compassion, mutual respect and love are the true foundations of civilisation.

Another masterpiece, ‘Bistirno Parore’ (Across the Vast Riverbanks), uses the mighty Brahmaputra as a metaphor to question social inequality, injustice and human suffering. Inspired by global humanitarian ideals yet deeply rooted in Assamese culture, the song continues to inspire listeners across generations.

His unforgettable rendition of ‘Dil Hoom Hoom Kare’ introduced millions of Indians to the emotional depth of his voice and remains one of the most cherished melodies in Indian cinema. Whether singing in Assamese, Hindi, Bengali or other languages, Bhupen Hazarika never lost sight of his central message that every human being deserves dignity, equality and compassion.

Cinema, Literature and Social Awakening.

Bhupen Hazarika’s genius extended far beyond music.

He wrote poetry, composed music, directed films, produced documentaries and authored literary works that explored themes of social justice, cultural identity and national integration. His films portrayed the struggles and aspirations of ordinary people with honesty and sensitivity. Unlike many artists who confined themselves to entertainment, Bhupen Hazarika used cinema and literature to preserve the cultural heritage of Assam while presenting it proudly before the nation and the world. For him, culture was not merely a matter of tradition, it was a means of strengthening democracy, fostering understanding and building a more humane society.

The Cultural Bridge Between the Northeast and India.

Perhaps Bhupen Hazarika’s greatest contribution was his role in emotionally integrating the Northeast with the rest of the country. Long before discussions about connectivity and infrastructure dominated public discourse, he built bridges through music. He did not merely bring Assam to India, he brought India closer to Assam. His songs reminded millions that the Northeast is not a distant frontier but an inseparable part of India’s civilisational heritage.

Through every composition, he celebrated India’s diversity while reinforcing the idea that unity does not require uniformity. It requires mutual respect, empathy and shared purpose.

Awards, National Recognition and an Enduring Legacy.

A nation expresses its gratitude to its great sons through recognition, but in the case of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, every honour he received merely acknowledged what millions of Indians had already accepted that he was one of the finest cultural ambassadors India had ever produced.

His remarkable contribution earned him numerous prestigious distinctions, including the Padma Shri (1977), the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (1987), the Dadasaheb Phalke Award (1992), the Padma Bhushan (2001), the Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship (2008), the Padma Vibhushan (posthumously in 2012), and finally India’s highest civilian honour, the Bharat Ratna (posthumously in 2019). These awards recognised not merely an accomplished singer, but a visionary who used music as an instrument of social reform, national integration and human dignity.

Beyond awards, his greatest achievement was that he gave the people of the Northeast

a national voice.

He ensured that the songs of Assam were heard across India and that the rest of the country understood the beauty, diversity and aspirations of the region.

His music carried no barriers of language or religion. It belonged equally to an Assamese villager, a Bengali listener, a Hindi-speaking family, or an Indian living thousands of kilometres away from the Brahmaputra. A Voice that Continues to Inspire till

5 November 2011, India lost one of its greatest cultural icons. Yet great artists never truly leave us. They continue to live through their work.

More than a decade after his passing, Bhupen Hazarika’s songs continue to inspire musicians, students, filmmakers and ordinary citizens. His music is still played at cultural festivals, universities, literary gatherings and national events because its message remains timeless.

In an age often marked by division and intolerance, his songs remind us that compassion is stronger than hatred, dialogue is more powerful than conflict and humanity must always remain above every other identity.

A Soldier’s Personal Tribute.

As a soldier, I had the privilege of serving for many years in Assam and other Northeastern States. My military assignments took me through the valleys of the Brahmaputra, the hills of Nagaland and Manipur, the forests of Arunachal Pradesh and the remote border regions where music often became a silent companion during long and demanding days.

It was during those years that I came

to appreciate the extraordinary genius of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika. His songs were not merely musical compositions, they were the voice of the people, echoing the hopes, struggles and indomitable spirit of the Northeast.

Among his many timeless creations, ‘Manuhe Manuhor Babe’ remains closest to my heart. Its central message that humanity exists to serve humanity is perhaps one of the most profound philosophies ever expressed through music. As a soldier entrusted with safeguarding India’s unity and integrity, I found in that song a reminder that compassion and mutual respect are as vital to nation building as courage and sacrifice.

Another unforgettable masterpiece is ‘Dil Hoom Hoom Kare.’ I heard it countless times during my tenure in the Northeast and even today when I am alone and need Sakoon. Every time its haunting melody floated through the air, it seemed to carry with it the mist-covered hills, the mighty Brahmaputra and the quiet dignity of the people who call this beautiful region home.

The song speaks of longing, hope and the deep emotions that bind human hearts. Listening to it after long operational days often brought a rare sense of peace and reflection.

Equally moving is ‘Bistirno Parore,’ where the mighty Brahmaputra becomes more than a river, it becomes a silent witness to human suffering, inequality and resilience. Through this remarkable composition, Bhupen Hazarika reminds us that progress has meaning only when it uplifts every section of society.

Even today, whenever I listen to Bhupen Hazarika’s music sitting in a concrete jungle of buildings, I am transported back to those unforgettable years of service in India’s Northeast. His voice remains inseparable from my memories of the region, a voice that united people beyond language, religion and geography.

I have often reflected that “I guarded India’s frontiers with a rifle in my hands, while Bhupen Hazarika guarded India’s soul with a song on his lips. Both served the same nation, each in his own way.”

Disclaimer:

This article is based on published historical and biographical sources along with the author’s personal experiences during military service in Northeast India. It is intended solely for educational, historical and editorial purposes to honour the life and legacy of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika. Any accompanying image is used only for editorial and commemorative purposes, with due respect to the rights of the respective copyright holder.

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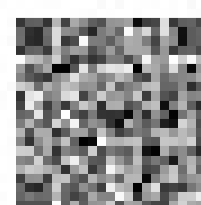


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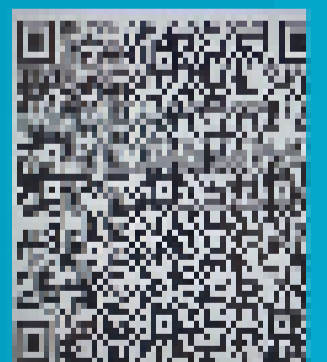
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