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PERSPECTIVE
The bamboo that bends is stronger than the oak that resists. - Proverb

Tripura Woman Gets Life Term for Murdering Husband

AGARTALA
A court in Tripura's Dhalai district has sentenced a 26-year-old woman to life imprisonment after finding her guilty of murdering her husband in 2023. The Court of the Additional District Judge at Kamalpur on Friday convicted Jhuma Marar, a resident of Jagannath Gour Para in Chulubari under Kamalpur Police Station, under Section 302 of the Indian Penal Code for the murder of her husband, Mohan Marar. In addition to rigorous imprisonment for life, the court imposed a fine of Rs 5,000 on the convict. Failure to pay the fine will result in an additional two months of simple imprisonment. According to prosecution records, the case originated from a complaint lodged by Mahesh Marar, the father of the deceased, on May 28, 2023. He informed police that his 27-year-old son, Mohan Marar, was found dead on a bed inside their residence at Jagannath Gour Para. The complainant stated that a dark mark was visible on the victim's neck and alleged that his daughter-in-law had strangled her husband to death. Acting on the complaint, Kamalpur Police registered a murder case under Section 302 of the IPC and launched an investigation into the incident. Following the investigation, Sub-Inspector Debraj Datta of Kamalpur Police Station filed a charge sheet against the accused on November 30, 2023. During the course of the trial, the prosecution presented evidence linking Jhuma Marar to the crime. After examining the evidence and hearing submissions from both the prosecution and the defence, the court held the accused guilty of murdering her husband.

WHO SAID WHAT

NEITHER I NOR ITALY EVER BEG.
~ Giorgia Meloni, Prime Minister of Italy

Agartala-Karimganj Electric MEMU Service Set for Launch as Sabroom-Guwahati Rail Electrification Nears Completion

AGARTALA
Railway connectivity in the North-east is poised for a major boost with the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) preparing to launch an electric Mainline Electric Multiple Unit (MEMU) train service between Agartala and Karimganj, while completing the electrification of the rail corridor linking Sabroom in Tripura to Guwahati in Assam. Announcing the developments during a press conference at Agartala Railway Station on Friday, NFR General Manager Chetan Kumar Srivastava said the proposed MEMU service would be introduced shortly and would be the first electric MEMU train to operate under the Northeast Frontier Railway network. The new service is expected to significantly improve passenger mobility between Tripura and southern Assam. MEMU trains are designed for short and medium-distance travel and offer faster acceleration, higher passenger capacity and improved operational efficiency compared to conventional train services.

"The introduction of the MEMU service will provide a modern and efficient travel option for daily commuters and other passengers travelling between Agartala and Karimganj," Srivastava said. In another key announcement, the NFR General Manager said railway electrification from Sabroom, Tripura's southernmost railhead, to Guwahati has been completed. The achievement marks a major milestone in the region's railway modernisation programme and is expected to reduce reliance on diesel locomotives while enhancing the efficiency of both passenger and freight transportation. Srivastava was in Tripura to review railway infrastructure projects and inspect ongoing development works. During the visit, he highlighted the extensive redevelopment of Agartala Railway Station under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme. A new three-storey station building is currently under construction as part of the project. The first phase, estimated at Rs 48 crore, is expected to be completed by March



2027. According to railway officials, the redeveloped station will feature modern passenger amenities, upgraded waiting halls, improved accommodation facilities and expanded infrastructure, including additional platforms to accommodate rising passenger traffic. The NFR chief also reviewed progress at Udaipur Railway Station in Gomati district and Kumarghat Railway Station in Unakoti district, both of which are being upgraded under the Amrit Bharat initiative. He said modernisation work at the two stations is progressing rapidly and is expected to be completed by September this year. During his inspection of Agartala Railway Station, Srivastava inaugurated newly installed lifts on Platforms 1 and 2 aimed at improving accessibility for senior citizens, persons with disabilities and passengers requiring assistance. He also inspected key passenger facilities, including waiting rooms, ticket booking counters, toilets, Automatic Ticket Vending Machines (ATVMs), security screening systems and retiring rooms. Highlighting freight operations in the state, the General Manager said goods trains are operating regularly through Nischintapur Railway Station, strengthening Tripura's logistics and cargo connectivity. He further informed that infrastructure projects being executed jointly by Indian Railways, Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) and the State Public Works Department at Sekerkot Railway Station are nearing completion and are expected to be finished by August next year. On future expansion plans, Srivastava said railway authorities are addressing a minor power supply issue on the New Haflong section. He also revealed that plans are under consideration for constructing a double railway line between Badarpur and Agartala to increase capacity and further improve rail connectivity across the Northeast. The NFR General Manager was accompanied during the visit by Lumding Divisional Railway Manager Sameer Lohani and other senior railway officials.

Dialogue Only Way Forward, Meiteis, Kukis and Nagas Must Coexist for Manipur's Progress: Khemchand Singh

IMPHAL
Manipur Chief Minister Y. Khemchand Singh reiterated that dialogue remains the only sustainable solution to the ongoing conflict in the state, urging Meiteis, Kukis and Nagas to live together in harmony for the future progress and prosperity of Manipur. The Chief Minister made the remarks while inaugurating the Girls' Hostel of the Mission Blind School at Heikakpokpi in Tengnoupal district, a region inhabited by both Kuki and Naga communities. Addressing the gathering, Singh said the government has been engaging with various communities and stakeholder groups in an effort to restore peace and normalcy in the state after years of unrest. "Many groups from different communities regularly visit my official residence to discuss ways to bring peace. If Meiteis, Kukis and Nagas continue to think only about themselves and remain in conflict, the state can never progress," he said.



Emphasising the importance of unity, the Chief Minister noted that Manipur's history and territorial integrity have been shaped by the collective sacrifices and contributions of all communities living in the state. "Since historical times, the 36 communities of Manipur have stood together to defend the state.

The present boundaries of Manipur were built and protected by all communities, and we must honour and preserve this legacy," Singh said. He observed that signs of normalcy have begun to emerge in different parts of the state, with people from various communities gradually resuming travel and social interactions that had been disrupted by the conflict. However, Singh acknowledged that sporadic incidents in certain hill areas have slowed the pace of the peace process. He stressed that violence cannot provide a lasting solution and called for resolving differences through dialogue, reconciliation and mutual understanding. "Even within a family, disagreements occur. But we must learn to forgive, move forward and think about the future generations," he said. Highlighting the broader impact of the unrest, the Chief Minister said prolonged conflict has adversely affected livelihoods, development projects and economic growth across Manipur. He appealed to all sections of society to support efforts aimed at restoring peace and stability. Drawing a comparison with Singapore's development journey, Singh said progress becomes possible only when people rise above divisions and work collectively under a shared identity. He added that peaceful coexistence, mutual respect and unity are essential for building a stronger future for Manipur. Later, in a post on social media, the Chief Minister said the newly inaugurated girls' hostel would enhance accommodation facilities for visually impaired students studying at the Mission Blind School and contribute significantly to their educational development and well-being. He also reaffirmed the state government's commitment to inclusive development, stating that efforts would continue to ensure welfare, opportunities and growth for every section of society. The programme was attended by local leaders, government officials, community representatives, students and residents of the area.

Assam Orders Fast-Track Highway Repairs in Barak Valley



GUWAHATI
The Assam government has directed highway construction agencies to accelerate ongoing infrastructure projects and immediately repair damaged road stretches across Barak Valley and Dima Hasao, following a high-level review meeting convened to assess the status of key connectivity projects in the region. The review was conducted on the instructions of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and attended by Barak Valley Development Minister Kaushik Rai, legislators, senior district officials, and representatives of the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) and the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL). During the meeting, officials examined the progress of major National Highway projects and reviewed public concerns over deteriorating road conditions, traffic bottlenecks and delays in project implementation. A key decision taken during the meeting was the directive to NHAI to complete the strategically important Narimbunglo-Jatinga Junction road stretch in Dima Hasao by July 31. Officials noted that both the district administration and the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC) have been extending necessary support to facilitate timely completion of the project. Road conditions in the Barak Valley districts of Cachar, Sribhumi and Hailakandi also came under scrutiny. NHAI and NHIDCL were instructed to undertake immediate repair and restoration work on severely damaged stretches, particularly at Balachera, Rangpur, Capital Point-Rangirkhari and Malidaha-Kalain, where commuters have been facing persistent difficulties due to potholes, poor road surfaces and traffic congestion. The meeting further discussed allegations related to the construction of so-called "ghost houses" within certain NHIDCL project areas. Taking note of the issue, the government directed the Cachar District Commissioner to investigate the matter and initiate appropriate action against individuals found responsible. Officials also reviewed the proposed widening of the Panchgram-Bhairabi road corridor, a key connectivity route linking parts of southern Assam. In addition, discussions focused on the recurring waterlogging problem in the Malua area along the Silchar-Churaibari highway project. To address the issue permanently, NHIDCL was instructed to expedite drainage and allied infrastructure works in the affected area to prevent future flooding and disruptions to vehicular movement. Several legislators attending the meeting, including Rajdeep Goala, Kishor Nath, Dr Rajdeep Roy, Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha and Jakaria Ahmed Panna, raised constituency-specific concerns related to road infrastructure and connectivity and urged authorities to ensure timely intervention. Senior representatives from the Barak Valley Development Department, NHAI, NHIDCL, NCHAC and the district administrations of Cachar, Sribhumi and Hailakandi were also present during the review. The Assam government reiterated its commitment to strengthening road infrastructure, improving connectivity and ensuring the timely completion of critical transport projects to support economic growth and development across Barak Valley and Dima Hasao.

Centre Approves Tripura's First Ayurvedic Medical College

AGARTALA
Tripura is set to strengthen its medical education and traditional healthcare infrastructure after the National Commission for Indian System of Medicine (NCISM) under the Ministry of AYUSH approved the establishment of the state's first government Ayurvedic medical college and hospital at Udaipur in Gomati district. The approval marks a significant milestone for the northeastern state, paving the way for the launch of the Tripura Government Ayurvedic Medical College and Hospital with an intake capacity of 60 students from the 2026-27 academic session. Announcing the development on Friday, Chief Minister Prof. Dr. Manik Saha described the decision as a landmark achievement for Tripura and a major step towards expanding opportunities in traditional medicine and healthcare education. Sharing the news through a social media post, the Chief Minister said the National Commission for Indian System of Medicine had accepted the state's proposal to establish the institution, enabling students from Tripura and neighbouring regions to pursue professional education in Ayurveda within the state. "I am delighted to share that the National Commission for Indian System of Medicine under the Ministry of AYUSH, Government of India, has accepted our application for the establishment of the Tripura Government Ayurvedic Medical College and Hospital at Udaipur with an intake capacity of 60 seats from the academic session 2026-27," Dr. Saha stated. The Chief Minister expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for supporting initiatives aimed at strengthening healthcare services and medical education across the country. He said the Centre's approval reflects the government's commitment to promoting traditional systems of medicine while expanding access to quality healthcare.

Shiv Sena Eyes 35+ Seats in Manipur Polls

IMPHAL
The Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena faction has announced plans to field candidates in more than 35 constituencies in the upcoming Manipur Assembly elections, signalling an ambitious push to expand its political footprint in the northeastern state ahead of the 2027 polls. The announcement was made by Shiv Sena's Manipur unit president M. Tombi Singh during a press conference on Friday, where he outlined the party's electoral strategy and its vision for the state. "We will field more than 35 candidates in the coming Assembly elections. We want to protect the land and bring developmental projects to the state. Since other political parties have failed to deliver meaningful outcomes in resolving the ongoing crisis, alternative political forces such as Shiv Sena should be given an opportunity to contribute towards saving lives and protecting properties," Singh said. The Manipur Legislative Assembly comprises 60 seats, including 40 in the Imphal Valley and 20 in the hill districts. By planning to contest in more than half of the constituencies, the party is positioning itself as a significant player in the state's evolving political landscape. Expressing confidence in the party's prospects, Singh said Shiv Sena aims to secure a two-digit tally in the Assembly elections and establish a stronger organisational and political presence across Manipur. "We are working to strengthen our organisational base throughout the state and are optimistic about achieving a significant electoral performance," he said. Apart from the Assembly elections, the party is also preparing for the long-awaited Panchayat elections. According to Singh, Shiv Sena intends to field more than 30 candidates if the local body polls are conducted as scheduled. The Panchayat elections are expected to be held on October 1, marking the first rural local body elections in the state since the previous elected panchayat institutions completed their tenure in 2022. The party's announcement comes amid heightened political activity in Manipur, where various parties have begun grassroots outreach and organisational campaigns ahead of the Assembly elections scheduled for February next year. Manipur continues to face challenges arising from prolonged ethnic tensions and political uncertainty, making the forthcoming elections particularly significant for the state's future governance and stability. Political observers expect campaigning to intensify in both the valley and hill districts in the coming months as parties seek to consolidate support and present their vision for peace, development and reconstruction. With less than a year remaining before voters head to the polls, Shiv Sena's decision to contest a substantial number of seats underscores its intention to emerge as a viable alternative in Manipur's increasingly competitive political arena.



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REIMAGINING THE I.N.D.I.A BLOC

The opposition's I.N.D.I.A alliance finds itself at a critical crossroads. What was once projected as a formidable coalition capable of mounting a nationwide challenge to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been left weakened by a series of electoral setbacks, internal contradictions, and leadership rivalries. The recent defeats suffered by the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal and the DMK in Tamil Nadu have exposed the fragile foundations upon which the alliance was built and have reignited questions about its future viability.

The alliance was conceived as a broad anti-BJP platform, bringing together parties with diverse ideologies and regional interests under a common objective: countering the political dominance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP. Yet, from its inception, the grouping struggled to establish a coherent political identity. Personal ambitions often overshadowed collective goals, and key regional leaders appeared reluctant to accept the realities of coalition politics.

The current predicament of the alliance is, in many ways, the culmination of these unresolved contradictions. Several regional leaders who were expected to provide strategic direction instead focused on preserving their own political turf. The result has been a coalition lacking both unity of purpose and organisational discipline.

The transformation in the political posture of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is particularly telling. Once sceptical of the alliance and often dismissive of Congress's central role within it, she has now emerged as one of its most vocal proponents. Political necessity has forced a recalibration. Electoral reverses, defections, and organisational challenges within her party have underscored the value of opposition unity. Her recent participation in alliance meetings after a prolonged gap reflects the changing dynamics of Indian politics and the recognition that isolated regional forces may find it increasingly difficult to confront the BJP's expansive political machinery.

At the same time, ideological and tactical disagreements continue to haunt the opposition camp. The friction between the Congress and Left parties, particularly in states such as Kerala, demonstrates the difficulties of maintaining national unity while pursuing state-level electoral battles. Such contradictions are not new, but the inability to manage them effectively has repeatedly undermined opposition efforts.

The challenges confronting the opposition extend beyond electoral competition. Recent controversies surrounding Rajya Sabha nominations have once again raised concerns about institutional impartiality and procedural consistency. Allegations of differing standards being applied in separate cases have fuelled suspicions among opposition parties regarding the functioning of democratic institutions. Whether these concerns are fully justified or not, they have contributed to a growing perception among opposition leaders that the political playing field is increasingly uneven.

Simultaneously, the BJP has demonstrated its continued ability to dominate political narratives. Through a combination of organisational strength, strategic communication, and relentless campaigning, the ruling party has maintained its advantage even when facing criticism on governance and economic issues. The opposition, by contrast, often appears reactive rather than proactive.

This reality should have injected a greater sense of urgency into the alliance's deliberations. Yet the outcomes of recent opposition meetings suggest that the leadership has not fully grasped the magnitude of the challenge. While discussions on institutional reforms, judicial accountability, and constitutional safeguards are undoubtedly important, they do not by themselves constitute a compelling political programme capable of mobilising voters.

What remains conspicuously absent is a unifying narrative. Successful political movements are built not merely on opposition to a ruling party but on a positive vision that inspires public confidence. The I.N.D.I.A bloc has yet to articulate such a vision. Voters dissatisfied with aspects of the Modi government's performance may be open to alternatives, but they are unlikely to rally behind an alliance perceived as fragmented, uncertain, and lacking direction.

The decision to institutionalise meetings every two months illustrates this dilemma. While regular consultations are welcome, the pace appears out of sync with the urgency of the political environment. In contemporary politics, perception often shapes reality. The BJP has mastered the art of projecting decisiveness and momentum. The opposition, by comparison, risks appearing hesitant and bureaucratic.

Paradoxically, the recent setbacks of several regional parties have strengthened the position of the Congress within the opposition ecosystem. Despite years of criticism from alliance partners, the Congress remains the only opposition party with a nationwide organisational presence. The political landscape now appears to be pushing the alliance toward an unavoidable conclusion: any serious challenge to the BJP will require a stronger Congress at its centre.

This does not imply unquestioned dominance by the Congress, but it does require a realistic assessment by regional allies. A fragmented opposition, in which every party seeks primacy within its own sphere while weakening the Congress elsewhere, ultimately benefits the BJP. The experiences of recent years have demonstrated the limits of such an approach.

For the Congress, however, greater responsibility also means greater accountability. The party cannot rely solely on the failures of its allies to regain relevance. Organisational reform remains an urgent necessity. The leadership must address long-standing concerns regarding decision-making, accountability, and grassroots mobilisation. Revitalising state units, empowering younger leaders, and eliminating organisational inertia are essential if the party hopes to reclaim its position as the principal anchor of opposition politics.

Rahul Gandhi's role will be particularly significant in this regard. Whether one agrees with his politics or not, the Congress requires clarity of leadership and a defined organisational roadmap. Ambiguity serves neither the party nor the broader opposition movement. A structured effort to strengthen party institutions and build a coherent leadership team could provide the foundation for wider opposition consolidation.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

If you want to live a happy life, tie it to a goal, not to people or things. - Albert Einstein

BEYOND CROPS: A NEW ECONOMIC FREEDOM FOR FARMERS

India's New Agricultural Journey: Beyond Crops, Towards Prosperity



SHRI SHIVRAJ SINGH CHOUHAN

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, Indian agriculture has over the past 12 years entered a completely new era. Earlier, our biggest concern was ensuring that the country did not face a shortage of foodgrains and that hunger could somehow be prevented. Today, Prime Minister Modi's visionary leadership and farmer-centric policies have transformed agriculture from being merely a "sector of production" into an integrated foundation for farmers' prosperity, risk protection, nutritional security, green technology and rural development. For the first time since the Green Revolution, policy focus has shifted from simply asking "how much production" to deeper questions such as "what is the farmer's actual income, how sustainable is agriculture, and how strong is the rural economy." It is with this broader thinking that the Pulses and Oilseeds Mission, Cotton Mission, National Mission on Natural Farming, Pradhan Mantri Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana (PM-DDKY), Khet Bachao Abhiyan, digital agriculture and research-led innovation are all being connected through one comprehensive vision for agricultural transformation and rural prosperity.

Beyond Production: Income, Security and the Rural Economy

Today, India has achieved a record foodgrain production of 376.563 million tonnes, the highest in the nation's history. Paddy, wheat, maize, pulses and oilseeds have all registered remarkable growth. This is not merely a story of increased production; it is evidence of the expansion and strengthening of the overall rural economy. Alongside this, the Modi government has placed equal emphasis on farmers' risk protection and income security. Under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN), more than Rs 4.27 lakh crore has so far been directly transferred into farmers' bank accounts through 22 installments, providing regular annual income support to over nine crore farmer families across the country. At the same time, the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) has provided a strong insurance shield to crores of farmer applicants by protecting them against crop losses caused by natural disasters and other adverse conditions.

Investments in irrigation, rural roads, agricultural infrastructure, warehouses and cold-chain systems have strengthened all three critical pillars of agriculture - production, storage and market access. Agriculture today is no longer confined to the boundaries of farmland alone. Dairy, fisheries, poultry, horticulture, beekeeping, food processing, storage systems, rural industries, solar energy and the service sector are all combining to create a new and diversified rural economy. This transformation is generating employment opportunities, increasing rural incomes and building resilience among farming communities. The government's vision is not merely to support farming activity, but to create an entire ecosystem where agriculture becomes the foundation of economic growth, entrepreneurship and rural development.

Pulses, Oilseeds and Cotton Missions: Self-Reliance and Price Security

For a long time, the sectors of pulses, edible oils and cotton remained below their full potential. India remained dependent on imports for pulses and edible oils, while cotton farmers frequently had to face volatility in global markets. Recognising the strategic importance of these sectors, the Modi government has accorded them special priority and launched separate missions to address their challenges in a comprehensive manner.

Through the National Pulses Mission, work is being carried out across the entire value chain - from seeds to markets - in order to increase both the cultivated area and productivity of tur, urad, masoor, gram and other pulses. This includes the promotion

of high-yield varieties, cluster-based farming, processing units, a strengthened MSP (minimum support price) framework, government procurement systems, storage facilities and export support. The objective is clear: India should become fully self-reliant in pulses, reduce its import bill and ensure that farmers receive sustainable incomes from these high-value crops.

Similarly, under the Oilseeds Mission, special emphasis is being placed on crops such as mustard, soybean, sunflower, sesame and palm oil. This is not merely a programme aimed at increasing production. It is part of a larger national strategy to achieve self-reliance in edible oils, strengthen the country's oil security and provide better prices to farmers. The mission seeks to improve productivity through scientific interventions, modern agricultural practices and improved market linkages.

Alongside these efforts, the Cotton Mission is focusing on high-yield and pest-resistant cotton varieties, advanced farming systems, integrated pest management, crop diversification, better integration with the textile value chain and quality improvement measures. Cotton is a major cash crop for millions of Indian farmers, and the mission aims to ensure that farmers not only increase production but also receive stable incomes, better market value and globally competitive quality standards. Through these initiatives, the government seeks to reduce dependence on imports while simultaneously strengthening farmers' incomes and India's agricultural economy.

National Mission on Natural Farming: A New Path for One Crore Farmers Across 75 Lakh Hectares

Rapidly increasing dependence on chemicals, declining soil health and growing pressure on groundwater resources are warning signs that farming methods must change. Recognising this challenge, natural farming is being advanced as a national mission under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Our commitment is to sensitise one crore farmers towards natural farming practices, actively prepare around 18 lakh farmers to adopt natural farming and gradually bring nearly 75 lakh hectares of land under natural cultivation practices in a phased manner.

This transformation is being carried out gradually, on the basis of scientific evidence and farmers' own experiences. Small farmers are being encouraged to experiment with natural farming models on a portion of their land. They are being provided training, locally sourced input packages, certification support, branding assistance and market connectivity. The broader objective is to improve soil fertility, reduce chemical input costs, make crops more resilient against climate-related shocks and provide consumers with healthier and more nutritious food.

Natural farming is also being viewed as a sustainable response to climate change. By reducing excessive chemical usage and promoting ecological balance, the mission seeks to preserve biodiversity, conserve water and restore long-term productivity of agricultural land. The government believes that the future of Indian agriculture lies not only in higher production but also in sustainability, environmental protection and improved health outcomes for both farmers and consumers.

Pradhan Mantri Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana and Focus on 100 Low-Productivity Districts

In a vast country like India, some regions progress rapidly while others continue to lag behind for various reasons. To reduce this imbalance, the Pradhan Mantri Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana has been conceptualised. Under this initiative, nearly 100 low-productivity districts have been identified where per-hectare yields remain significantly below the national average and farmers are unable to obtain expected returns from agriculture.

In these districts, convergence of 36 schemes from 11 departments is being implemented through an integrated devel-

opment package. This includes irrigation, soil health management, seeds, fertilisers, crop diversification, animal husbandry, horticulture, agricultural equipment, skill development, infrastructure and market linkages - all being brought together under one coordinated framework. The central idea is that government schemes should not function in isolated 'silos'; instead, they should work collectively with the farmer and the village at the centre of planning and implementation.

This marks an important shift in policy thinking. The focus is no longer limited to 'how much production is taking place', but also on identifying areas where productivity remains low and ensuring that targeted investments and interventions help increase yields and raise farmers' incomes. The scheme seeks to create balanced agricultural growth and reduce regional disparities in rural development.

'Khet Bachao Abhiyan': Balancing Soil, Water and Farmers' Interests

In the race to increase production, pressure on soil and water resources has intensified in many regions. Imbalanced fertiliser use, excessive extraction of groundwater and limited crop rotation have adversely affected the health of agricultural land. If corrective measures are not taken in time, future generations may inherit weakened soils and degraded farmlands.

Keeping this challenge in mind, the Khet Bachao Abhiyan has been launched. This campaign is not merely about protecting soil; it is about safeguarding farmers' incomes, ensuring food quality and securing the country's long-term food security. The campaign carries five key messages. Every farmer should use fertilisers based on soil testing; excessive dependence on DAP (diammonium phosphate) and urea should be reduced while balanced NPK (nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium) use, micronutrients, bio-fertilisers and nano-fertilisers should be promoted; green manure, organic manure and integrated nutrient management should be encouraged; farmers should remain vigilant against fake seeds, fertilisers and pesticides and immediately inform authorities about such cases; and organised movement towards natural farming and climate-resilient agricultural practices should be strengthened.

The objective is not to abruptly reduce fertiliser usage, but to ensure that every farmer uses the right quantity, at the right time and in the right combination. This will help maintain long-term soil health, reduce cultivation costs and protect productivity. The campaign also seeks to create awareness among farmers about sustainable farming methods that balance profitability with environmental conservation.

Science, Digital Agriculture and the Role of ICAR

Science, research and digital technology form the backbone of all these efforts. Between 2014 and 2025, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and the National Agricultural Research System (NARS) developed nearly 3,000 climate-resilient crop varieties capable of withstanding drought, floods, heat waves, salinity and other environmental stresses. In total, more than 3,800 high-yield varieties and over 200 bio-fortified varieties have been released, strengthening not only productivity but also nutritional security.

Under the Digital Agriculture Mission and 'AgriStack', systems such as Farmer IDs, digitisation of crop plots, drone-based services, pest and disease monitoring, weather-based advisories and location-specific recommendations are being developed. These initiatives are rapidly reducing the gap between laboratories and farms, and between data collection and decision-making.

Through platforms such as e-NAM, Kisan Saathi, Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) networks, mobile messaging services, WhatsApp groups, community radio and social media, scientists, extension workers and farmer leaders are now able to communicate directly with farmers. Agriculture

and rural development are increasingly being viewed together through a holistic lens. Roads, electricity, internet connectivity, Self-Help Groups, Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), rural industries and skill-development programmes can accelerate employment generation, entrepreneurship and social transformation in villages only when they move in step with agricultural development.

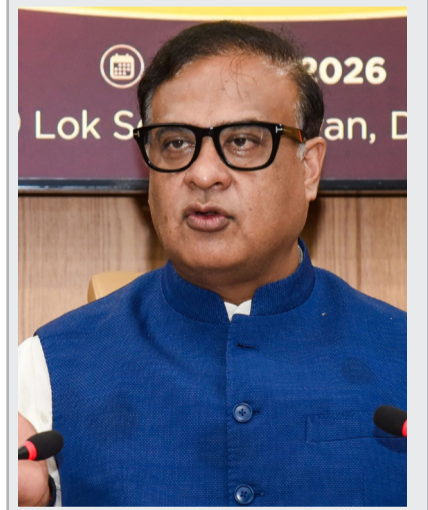
Technology is also helping create transparency and efficiency in governance. Digital systems are making subsidies, insurance benefits and advisory services more accessible to farmers. The integration of modern research with grassroots implementation is enabling Indian agriculture to become more competitive, sustainable and resilient in the face of future challenges.

Beyond the Quantity of Crops: Concrete

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

A national benchmark in public healthcare.

Within a week, Assam will order a Proton Beam Therapy machine for GMCH, making it India's first public sector hospital to offer this advanced cancer care and bringing world-class, life-saving technology to our citizens. ~ Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM Assam



Steps Towards Farmers' Confidence

In the coming years, India will have to further strengthen its agricultural system amid global food, nutrition and climate challenges. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision is clear - farmers' incomes must rise, their hard work must receive proper value and respect, and self-reliance in pulses, oilseeds and cotton must strengthen nutritional, edible oil and textile security.

Through PM-KISAN, PMFBY, natural farming, the Khet Bachao Abhiyan and climate-resilient technologies, the government seeks to ensure the protection of soil, water and farmers themselves. Through the Pradhan Mantri Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana, targeted investment in low-productivity districts will reduce regional disparities and help every farmer progress. Science, research and digital technology will make farming more efficient, resilient, sustainable and globally competitive.

When the farm survives, the farmer survives. When the farmer survives, agriculture survives. And when agriculture survives, India's future will remain secure, prosperous and self-reliant. Under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, this is the essence of India's new agricultural journey - moving beyond crops towards the confidence of farmers and the prosperity of rural India.

(The Author is Union Minister for Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare, and Rural Development)

Northeast Can Lead India's Growth Story Through Sustainable Agriculture, Says Nirmala Sitharaman

SHILLONG

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday asserted that the Northeast has the potential to become India's next major growth engine by leveraging its strengths in sustainable agriculture, organic farming and environmentally responsible development.

Speaking at the inauguration of the Northeast's largest organic spice processing plant established by the Eastern Ri-Bhoi Organic Farmer Producer Company Ltd. at Bhoiryong in Meghalaya's Ri-Bhoi district, Sitharaman said the region is uniquely positioned to benefit from the growing global demand for premium, traceable and sustainably produced agricultural products.

Addressing farmers, entrepreneurs, government officials and stakeholders from the agriculture sector, the finance minister said the future of agriculture would be shaped



not by the scale of production alone but by the quality, authenticity and trust associated with agricultural products.

"The future of agriculture increasingly belongs not to those who produce the most, but to those who produce the best - cleaner, more traceable, more trusted and more premium," Sitharaman said.

She highlighted Meghalaya's growing prominence in the organic farming sector and noted that the state's traditional agricultural practices provide it with a significant advantage in both domestic and international

markets. According to her, the trust associated with produce grown through environmentally sustainable methods has become a valuable asset in the global marketplace.

"The world is entering an age where trust commands a premium, and Meghalaya is uniquely positioned for this future because it possesses trust that is rooted in nature, community and generations of ecological knowledge," she said.

The finance minister observed that Meghalaya's expanding spice economy serves as an example of how economic development can be achieved without compromising environmental sustainability. She stressed that growth and conservation must go hand in hand, particularly in ecologically sensitive regions such as the Northeast.

"We have to live and cohabit with nature," she remarked, emphasising the need for development models that protect natural resources while generating livelihoods and

economic opportunities. Referring to India's aspiration of becoming a developed nation by 2047, Sitharaman said the vision of "Viksit Bharat" can only be realised through the active participation of every state and region. She underscored the importance of the Northeast in this national journey, describing the region as a key contributor to India's future growth. Echoing the developmental aspirations articulated by Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma, the finance minister said she envisions the Northeast emerging not merely as a participant in India's progress but as a leader.

"I want the country to say that the Northeast will lead all of India," she said.

Sitharaman also outlined the importance of creating greater value for farmers through processing, branding and market linkages. She said investments in modern infrastructure, producer cooperatives and value-addition facilities would help local producers

secure better returns and establish globally recognised brands based on the region's unique agricultural products.

Particular emphasis was placed on empowering women farmers and traditional agricultural communities by integrating them into value chains that connect local produce with national and international markets. According to the finance minister, strengthening farmer-producer organisations and expanding processing capabilities can significantly enhance rural incomes and entrepreneurship.

The newly inaugurated spice processing plant is expected to play a pivotal role in strengthening Meghalaya's organic agriculture ecosystem. The facility will support the processing and marketing of high-value crops such as Lakadong turmeric, ginger and black pepper, while helping farmers improve product quality, storage and market access.

Officials believe the plant will boost agri-

cultural exports, encourage value addition within the state and create sustainable livelihood opportunities for thousands of farmers associated with organic cultivation. It is also expected to enhance Meghalaya's position as a leading producer of premium organic spices and agricultural products.

The project is being viewed as a significant milestone in the state's efforts to promote sustainable agriculture, strengthen farmer collectives and expand export-oriented agri-businesses. With growing global demand for organic and ethically sourced products, policymakers see the Northeast as well-positioned to emerge as a hub for high-value agricultural production.

Sitharaman's remarks come amid increasing emphasis by the Centre on developing the Northeast as a strategic growth region through investments in infrastructure, connectivity, agriculture and entrepreneurship.

USTM Launches Scholarship Programme for 50 Students from Nagaland

DIMPUR

The University of Science and Technology Meghalaya has announced a special scholarship and fellowship programme for 50 deserving students from Nagaland, aimed at expanding access to higher education and supporting academically talented students from the state.

The announcement was made by USTM Chancellor Mahabub Hoque during a press conference in Dimpur on Friday. He said the initiative forms part of the university's educational outreach and student empowerment efforts in Nagaland.

According to Hoque, 50 students will be selected for different categories of financial assistance based on academic merit. The scheme is intended to benefit meritorious students as well as those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, enabling them to pursue higher studies without financial hardship.

Under the programme, 10 students with exceptional academic records, including state toppers and other high achievers in qualifying examinations, will receive full scholarships covering their academic fees. In addition, 15 students will be granted a 50 per cent waiver on tuition fees, while another 25 students will receive a monthly scholarship of Rs 2,000 to help meet educational expenses.

Hoque said the university aims to encourage talented students from Nagaland to pursue higher education opportunities at USTM and assured that financial limitations should not become a barrier to academic advancement.

He added that students securing at least 80 per cent marks in their qualifying examinations and meeting the university's prescribed selection criteria would be eligible to apply for the scholarships.

Meanwhile, USTM will host the Institutional Excellence Award 2026, a lecture on "NEP 2020 and Career Opportunities," and a felicitation programme for the 2026 Higher Secondary School Leaving Certificate (HSSLC) toppers of the Nagaland Board of School Education at Dimpur Town Hall on Saturday.

CPI(M) in Decline Due to Rise of Identity Politics, Says MA Baby

AGARTALA

CPI(M) General Secretary M.A. Baby on Friday acknowledged that the party is passing through a period of political decline and attributed the setback largely to the growing influence of identity-based politics across the country. Addressing a press conference after a meeting of the party's state committee in Agartala, Baby said the CPI(M) was confronting an unprecedented situation, with the Left no longer heading any state government in India. Describing the current phase as a significant challenge for the party, he said the CPI(M) had not experienced such circumstances in the past five decades. Recalling an earlier period in the party's history, Baby noted that a senior Left leader had once been considered for the post of Prime Minister, but the party had declined the proposal after internal deliberations.

Despite electoral setbacks, Baby asserted that the CPI(M) would continue its engagement with the people regardless of whether it occupied the

treasury benches or sat in the opposition. He said the party remained committed to addressing public issues, adding that it would work to resolve people's problems if voted to power and continue raising their concerns if entrusted with the role of opposition. Acknowledging the party's diminishing electoral influence, Baby said the CPI(M) viewed the rise of identity politics as one of the principal factors behind its decline. According to him, caste and community-based political mobilisations, along with attempts to create divisions between tribal and non-tribal populations, have weakened democratic political discourse.

He said the party was consistently working to counter such tendencies and striving to build unity across social and ethnic lines.

The CPI(M) leader also criticised the Union government over a range of national issues, including the recent deaths of Indian sailors and recurring incidents of examination paper leaks.

Assam Seeks District-Wise SC Certificate Data for Central Panel Examining Conversion and Caste Status

GUWAHATI

The Assam government has directed all District Commissioners to submit detailed information on Scheduled Caste (SC) certificates issued in their respective districts, along with records of complaints related to such certificates, following a request from a Central inquiry commission examining issues concerning SC status and religious conversion.

The directive was issued by the Social Justice and Empowerment Department, which has asked district administrations to review official records and furnish the required information within ten days.

The move follows a communication from the commission headed by former Chief Justice of India Justice K.G. Balakrishnan. Constituted by the Central government under the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952, the panel was established through a notification issued on October 6, 2022, to examine matters related to

the eligibility of individuals claiming Scheduled Caste status after converting to religions not covered under the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950.

According to officials, the commission is currently in the final stages of preparing its report and recommendations for submission to the Central government. As part of the exercise, it has sought state-wise information from all states and Union Territories regarding the issuance of Scheduled Caste certificates and related complaints.

In its communication to district authorities, the Assam government instructed District Commissioners to compile and submit details of SC certificates issued by competent authorities in a prescribed format. The report is also required to include information on complaints, if any, received concerning the issuance of such certificates.

Officials have been directed to

SHILLONG/GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has urged the Centre to provide northeastern states greater access to funding through Externally Aided Projects (EAPs), highlighting the region's strong record in implementing large-scale development initiatives supported by international financial assistance.

Speaking after attending a seminar on "Leveraging Externally Aided Projects in North-Eastern States" in Shillong on Friday, Sarma said he appealed to Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to enhance the funding limits available to the region under EAP mechanisms.

The Chief Minister said externally aided funding has become a critical instrument for financing major infrastructure and development projects in Assam, particularly those requiring substantial capital investment.

"On behalf of Assam and our sister states in the Northeast, I



made a passionate appeal to the Finance Minister to allow our governments access to enhanced limits through Externally Aided Projects," Sarma said in a post on social media platform X.

According to him, projects worth nearly Rs 53,000 crore are currently being implemented in Assam through EAP funding. These initiatives span a wide range of sectors, including transport infrastructure, power generation, healthcare, robotics, bridges, embankments and other public development projects.

verify all information against official records before submission to ensure accuracy and consistency. The department has emphasised that the data should be comprehensive and supported by available documentation. District administrations where no complaints have been recorded regarding SC certificates have been instructed to submit Nil reports. In cases where specific information is unavailable, officials have been asked to provide appropriate remarks explaining the absence of data. The Social Justice and Empowerment Department has further directed district administrations to designate responsible officers, wherever necessary, to coordinate the collection, verification and timely submission of information.

The communication was issued by the Secretary to the Government of Assam, Social Justice and Empowerment Department, and copies were forwarded to relevant

authorities, including the Office of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

The inquiry commission headed by Justice Balakrishnan has been tasked with examining legal, constitutional and social aspects relating to Scheduled Caste status and the impact of religious conversion on such classification. The panel's findings are expected to inform future policy discussions and recommendations on the issue at the national level.

Officials indicated that the information sought from states and Union Territories will form part of the evidence and documentation being considered by the commission as it finalises its report. The collection of district-level data is aimed at providing a clearer picture of the implementation of provisions relating to Scheduled Caste certification and the nature of complaints received across different regions.

Himanta Urges Centre to Expand Externally Aided Project Funding for Northeast States

Sarma noted that the benefits of EAPs extend beyond financial support, as they also facilitate the adoption of international best practices, advanced technologies and improved project management systems within government institutions.

He said the seminar provided an important platform for policymakers, administrators and stakeholders to discuss ways to strengthen coordination and improve the planning and execution of externally funded projects across the Northeast. Highlighting Assam's experience in executing such projects, the Chief Minister cited the successful completion of the Lower Kopili Hydroelectric Project, which was implemented with EAP support and completed within three-and-a-half years.

He also referred to major infrastructure initiatives such as the Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu and the under-construction Dhuri-Phulbari Bridge while showcasing the state's capacity to effectively utilise externally aided

funding for transformative development.

Officials from the Chief Minister's Office said Sarma emphasised that northeastern states have consistently demonstrated their ability to execute externally funded projects efficiently and therefore deserve greater flexibility and enhanced funding support from the Centre.

Externally Aided Projects are financed through loans and assistance provided by multilateral development banks and international financial institutions. These projects are implemented through collaboration between state governments, the Centre and funding agencies, and are often used to support large-scale infrastructure and socio-economic development initiatives.

The Chief Minister expressed confidence that increased access to EAP funding would help accelerate development across the Northeast and strengthen the region's contribution to India's overall economic growth.

IIT Guwahati Secures Top 10 Spot Among Indian Institutions in QS World University Rankings 2027



GUWAHATI

The Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati (IIT Guwahati) has been ranked among the top 10 higher education institutions in India in the QS World University Rankings 2027, reaffirming its position as the leading academic and research institution in Northeast India.

According to the latest rankings released by QS, IIT Guwahati secured the ninth position among Indian institutions and achieved a global rank of 349, reflecting its growing international recognition in higher education, research, and innovation.

Among Indian universities and institutes, IIT Delhi emerged as the highest-ranked institution in the country with a global ranking of 118. It was followed by IIT Bombay at 134 and IIT Madras at 170. IIT Kharagpur secured the fourth position nationally with a global rank of 205, while the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru, and IIT Kanpur shared the next positions with global rankings of 221.

The University of Delhi ranked seventh among Indian institutions at 332 globally, followed by IIT Roorkee at 335. IIT Guwahati's placement at 349 globally enabled it to claim the ninth spot nationally, underscoring its steady rise in global academic standings.

The ranking reflects the institute's performance across key parameters, including academic reputation, employer reputation, research impact, faculty strength, industry engagement, and international collaboration. Since its establishment in 1994, IIT Guwahati has grown into one of India's premier technological institutions and continues to lead the higher education landscape in the Northeast.

Shoolini University of Biotechnology and Management Sciences also featured among India's top-performing institutions with a global

rank of 452. Other Indian universities appearing in the rankings include IIT (BHU) Varanasi, Anna University, Chandigarh University, IIT Indore, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), BITS Pilani, IIT Hyderabad, Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT), Symbiosis International University, and Jamia Millia Islamia.

On the global front, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) retained its position as the world's leading university for the 15th consecutive year, earning a perfect overall score. Imperial College London and Stanford University jointly occupied the second spot, followed by the University of Oxford, Harvard University, and the University of Cambridge.

Other institutions featuring in the global top 10 include the California Institute of Technology (Caltech), ETH Zurich, University College London (UCL), and the National University of Singapore (NUS), highlighting the continued dominance of universities from the United States, the United Kingdom, and key Asian education hubs.

The latest rankings also underscore India's expanding footprint in global higher education. While only a handful of Indian institutions currently feature among the world's top 200 universities, several universities have improved their standing in recent years amid increased focus on research excellence, innovation, graduate employability, and international partnerships.

Education analysts note that the consistent rise of institutions such as IIT Guwahati signals the growing competitiveness of Indian higher education on the global stage. They, however, stress that sustained investments in research infrastructure, faculty development, global collaborations, and innovation ecosystems will be essential for more Indian universities to break into the world's top 100 rankings.

Widely regarded as one of the most influential assessments of global higher education, the QS World University Rankings evaluate institutions based on indicators such as academic reputation, employer reputation, faculty-student ratio, research citations, and international engagement. For IIT Guwahati, the latest achievement marks another milestone in its journey towards becoming a globally recognised centre of academic excellence and technological innovation.

Three Tezpur University Scientists Ranked Among World's Top 5% Researchers in SciRank Index

AGARTALA

Three faculty members from the Department of Chemical Sciences at Tezpur University have earned global recognition after being ranked among the world's top five per cent scientists in the 2025 SciRank Global Scientist Index.

The researchers recognised in the prestigious international ranking are Professor Utpal Bora, Professor Pankaj Bharali and Professor Bipul Chandra Sarma. Their inclusion in the global top five per cent reflects their significant contributions to scientific research and academic scholarship.

The SciRank Global Scientist Index is an internationally recognised ranking system that evaluates researchers based on several performance indicators, including scholarly publications, citation impact, research productivity and overall scientific contributions. The index uses a comprehensive bibliometric framework to analyse millions of active researcher profiles and scientific publications worldwide.

According to Tezpur University, the ranking identifies scientists whose research has made a substantial impact within their respective fields and the broader scientific com-



munity. The recognition of the three faculty members highlights the growing research excellence emerging from the university and underscores the institution's contribution to advancing scientific knowledge.

University officials stated that the achievement reflects the high-quality research being undertaken within the Department of Chemical Sciences, which has established itself as one of the university's leading centres for scientific investigation and innovation.

The ranking also reinforces Tezpur University's reputation as one

of Northeast India's prominent institutions of higher education and research. Over the years, the university has increasingly gained recognition for its contributions in diverse fields of science, technology, engineering, humanities and social sciences.

Academic experts note that global rankings such as the SciRank Global Scientist Index serve as important indicators of research influence and scholarly impact. Researchers are assessed not only on the volume of their publications but also on how frequently their work is cited and utilised by the international scien-

tific community. The recognition of Professors Bora, Bharali and Sarma places them among an elite group of scientists whose work has achieved notable visibility and influence at the global level. Their research accomplishments are expected to further enhance the profile of Tezpur University and encourage greater collaboration with national and international institutions.

The achievement also highlights the growing contribution of universities in Northeast India to global scientific research. Institutions in the region have increasingly focused on strengthening research infrastructure, promoting innovation and expanding academic collaborations, enabling faculty members to compete successfully on international platforms.

University officials expressed satisfaction over the recognition, describing it as a reflection of the dedication and academic excellence of the faculty members. They noted that such achievements inspire young researchers and students to pursue high-quality scientific research and contribute to the advancement of knowledge. As global competition in research and innovation continues to intensify, the inclusion of three Tezpur University scientists among the world's top-performing researchers marks a significant milestone for both the institution and the broader academic community of the Northeast. The recognition underscores the university's growing role in producing impactful research and fostering scientific excellence on the international stage.

Quest!

Alexithymia describes a person who has a difficult time expressing their feelings to others

NEET aspirant from Nagpur gets Abu Dhabi exam centre a day before retest



NEW DELHI

A NEET-UG aspirant from Nagpur was left in distress after his admit card showed an examination centre in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, despite him selecting Nagpur as his preferred test city. The issue surfaced just a day before the medical entrance examination scheduled for June 21, leaving the student and his family uncertain about whether he would be able to appear for the test.

The student had earlier been allotted a centre at Saraswati Vidyalaya in Nagpur for the original NEET examination. However, after the exam was rescheduled following the paper leak controversy, the student downloaded his revised admit card and found that his centre had been changed to Abu Dhabi Indian School in the UAE.

According to the family, Nagpur was the student's first preference while filling the application form, followed by Wardha and Bhandara.

The family said they were

shocked to see an overseas centre mentioned on the admit card. "We are completely unable to send our child abroad for the exam. He does not even have a passport, and there is no time left to make travel arrangements," said the student's father, Mohammad Talib.

The family approached the National Testing Agency (NTA) helpline and lodged a complaint. They claimed that the agency acknowledged the error and assured them that a revised admit card would be issued after verification.

Former Maharashtra Education Minister Dr Anees Ahmed criticised the incident, calling it a major lapse by the examination authority. He urged the NTA to immediately correct the error and allot the student a centre in Nagpur or a nearby city. The incident comes amid continued scrutiny over the NTA's handling of major examinations, including concerns related to examination security and administration.

Meanwhile, the NTA has announced extensive

arrangements for the NEET-UG 2026 re-examination, scheduled to be held on June 21. The agency said confidential examination material is being transported under strict security measures through GPS-enabled vehicles accompanied by police personnel. Examination centres have also been equipped with CCTV surveillance, Aadhaar-based biometric authentication and real-time monitoring systems.

More than two lakh personnel, including city coordinators, observers, centre superintendents, invigilators, district officials and police personnel, have been deployed for the examination. The NTA has advised candidates to report to centres between 11 am and 1:30 pm, with entry gates closing at 1:30 pm.

The examination will be conducted in pen-and-paper mode from 2 pm to 5:15 pm across 551 cities in India and 14 cities abroad. More than 22.79 lakh candidates are expected to appear for NEET-UG 2026.

Over 70 lakh employed under PM-VBRY: Modi

NEW DELHI

Over 70 lakh people got employment across the country under Pradhan Mantri Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana (PM-VBRY) so far, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday as he disbursed incentives worth Rs 2,400 crore to support 15 lakh new jobs.

The Government's flagship employment-linked incentive scheme, aimed at helping first-time job seekers and expanding social security coverage across sectors, was launched in August last year.

At an event here, Modi transferred Rs 2,400 crore to eligible beneficiaries' bank accounts through the direct benefit transfer mode as incentives to support the creation of 15 lakh employment opportunities.

Sharing the achievements of the scheme, Modi said that nearly 70 lakh new jobs have been created so far, and an equal number of first-time employees have been brought under the ambit of social security.

He further noted that close to 20 lakh young people have completed six months in their first jobs, while around 10 lakh beneficiaries have already received incentives under the scheme upon completing this milestone.

According to Modi, the support is more than financial assistance; it reflects the nation's recognition of the hard work of its youth and its confidence in their future.

"Employment generation gains momentum when the Government, industry, and youth work together. The initiative is a reflection of a new India where young people receive opportunities, industries receive encouragement, and employment generation becomes a national mission," Modi said.

"Prime Minister Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana is much more than an employment scheme. It is an initiative designed to strengthen the aspirations of young people entering their first jobs while



creating a robust bridge between industry and the workforce", Modi remarked.

He observed that while many schemes are typically focused either on employees or employers, this programme simultaneously supports both.

The Government stands with young people beginning their professional journeys and encourages institutions that create new employment opportunities, he added.

Modi emphasised that over the past twelve years, the Government has worked to strengthen every pathway to employment. "Significant efforts have been made across sectors ranging from infrastructure and innovation to manufacturing, the digital economy, space technology, and start-ups. Initiatives such as 'Make in

India', 'Vocal for Local', efforts to take local products to global markets, and 'Mission Manufacturing' have expanded avenues for both employment and self-employment," Modi said.

The Government is focused on linking employment with security, dignity, and social protection, the prime minister said, adding that the technology is being leveraged to modernise the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), simplify pension systems, and expand access to health insurance and affordable healthcare for millions of workers. "The same philosophy guides labour reforms undertaken by the Government."

The Prime Minister also highlighted the growing contribution of women to India's economic and social development. "Reforms relating to night-

shift employment, the promotion of work-from-home opportunities, and the strengthening of workplace safety mechanisms are intended to enhance women's participation in the workforce further," Modi underscored.

He also emphasised the importance of skilled talent, innovation, and quality in determining economic success in the twenty-first century.

According to him, countries possessing these strengths will attract the greatest opportunities, and India has unprecedented potential in all three areas.

In the 21st century, opportunities will belong to nations that nurture skilled talent, foster innovation and uphold the highest standards of quality, he said, adding that India has unprecedented capability in these three areas.

INTERNATIONAL

Meloni rejects Trump's claim she 'begged' for photo with him as Italy's top diplomat cancels US trip



ROME

The Italian government closed ranks on Friday to slam US President Donald Trump over his claim that Premier Giorgia Meloni had "begged" for a photo with him during the recent G7 summit, a pushback that suggested the longtime US ally had had enough of Trump's boasting.

Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani abruptly cancelled a planned trip to the United States this weekend, calling Trump's claims "serious and offensive" toward Meloni and all of Italy.

Meloni, for her part, posted a video calling Trump's claims "completely fabricated" and expressing astonishment that he would invent such things about an ally. She concluded: "Italy and I do not beg."

Trump had made the comments in an interview broadcast Friday morning on the La7 network. The La7 correspondent had asked Trump about Ukraine, but Trump raised Meloni and the conversation turned to her

meeting during the just-concluded G7 meeting in Evian-les-Bains, France. Meloni and Trump were filmed speaking at several moments, including alone on a small sofa.

According to La7, Trump said Meloni had "begged" him for a photo-op. Trump said he wasn't obliged to do it but that he felt sorry for her and agreed, La7 said. The broadcaster has a dubbed version of the conversation online, not the original English audio.

In her video, Meloni said she was responding to Trump's claims because "certain things deserve an immediate response."

"Donald Trump's statements are completely fabricated. I am frankly stunned," she said. "I don't know why the president of the United States behaves this way toward his own allies. After all, this isn't the first time this has happened."

It was an apparent reference to an interview Trump gave to Italian daily Corriere della Sera in April in which he criticized Meloni's refusal to back the US-Israel war in Iran. Meloni

didn't respond publicly at the time. By Friday, it appeared she had had enough of his boasts and broadsides.

"I can only say that it's a shame he doesn't show the same resolve toward the enemies of the West, toward the enemies of the United States — toward leaders with whom he, on the other hand, is much more accommodating," Meloni said Friday.

"But there's one thing he must remember: Italy and I do not beg."

The White House did not return an immediate request for comment on Meloni's remarks.

Meloni had initially sought to build on longstanding strong US-Italian ties when Trump began his second mandate, and had positioned herself as a "bridge" between Washington and the European Union. She was the lone EU head of state to attend his inauguration.

But relations have frayed over the US war in Iran, which Meloni has said was illegal, and Trump's position on Ukraine, which Italy strongly supports. Trump's tariffs and strong US support of Israel over its war in Gaza have been other points of contention.

By Friday afternoon, solidarity with Meloni had poured in from across the government and political spectrum, and included a call from President Sergio Mattarella, Italy's widely respected head of state.

"Whoever attacks @GiorgiaMeloni attacks all of us," posted Transport Minister Matteo Salvini.

Justice Minister Carlo Nordio referenced the sacrifice of American troops in World War II in underlining the harm to US-Italy relations caused by Trump. "The thousands of crosses marking the graves of American soldiers who died to free us from Nazi-Fascist dictatorship did not deserve such a painful blow to our fraternal ties," Nordio said on X.

Defense Minister Guido Crosetto said he didn't believe Meloni would

ever beg someone for a photo, "not even under threat."

"I can, however, imagine how much it cost her to set aside what Trump had said weeks ago, to serve the interests of Italy, of Europe, and of the West," Crosetto posted on X. "Jokes of this kind do no good to anyone: neither to the USA, nor to Italy, nor to the alliance."

Tajani had been due to travel to the US on Sunday to take part in an Italy-US business forum in Miami during which he was to have met with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, according to a US State Department announcement of the meeting.

Meloni had long been considered one of Trump's closest allies in Europe, trying to act as a mediator between the often conflicting interests of the US and the EU.

They had gotten off to a strong start, and the two leaders are ideologically aligned on many issues. As the head of a far-right party, Meloni backs curbing migration and promoting traditional values.

Weeks before Trump's 2025 inauguration, Meloni met Trump at his Mar-a-Lago retreat, a visit that she said went "beyond expectations." It was, she said at the time, "an opportunity to confirm a relationship that promises to be very solid," adding diplomatically, "I don't know if I can say privileged." In the months after, Trump had praised her repeatedly, as "fantastic," "incredible," "beautiful and a friend. But stark differences emerged over Ukraine, after Trump wavered in his support while Meloni kept backing Kyiv after Russia's invasion in February 2022.

More recently, she sharply warned against US threats to take Greenland by force, saying she didn't believe Washington would go so far and that regardless Italy would never support such a move.

Two trains collide north of London, killing driver and injuring dozens of passengers onboard



LONDON

Two trains collided north of London on Friday, killing a driver and seriously injuring dozens of people on board. A passenger described being thrown forward by the impact then seeing fellow travelers with broken bones and bloody injuries.

Both trains were traveling south to London St. Pancras station when they collided outside the town of Bedford around 5:15 p.m., according to information on rail tracking websites. Emergency services deployed a number of resources to the scene including an air ambulance and hazardous incident team from the East of England Ambulance Service.

"We know that a number of people have been injured and one person has very sadly died," police said in a statement. "A major incident has been declared, and officers are continuing to respond at the scene alongside col-

leagues from Bedfordshire Police and the local Fire and Rescue and Ambulance Services."

The East of England Ambulance Service later said that 11 people had very serious injuries, 22 were seriously injured and 56 had minor injuries.

Eddie Dempsey, the general secretary of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, said the fatality was a train driver.

Peter Knapp, a passenger, said he was in the rear train when the collision occurred without any warning.

"There was a moment of being flung into the chair in front, and then I saw smoke," Knapp said. "People were crying, screaming. People were so scared and confused."

"I got up and I saw a lot of people who were unable to speak, had broken legs," he added. "And then I managed to get out of the train and because I'm quite thin I was

able to squeeze out through the gap in the doors."

Photos and videos posted on social media showed dozens of people, some with bandages but many who appeared uninjured, standing and sitting among emergency vehicles parked on a road that runs parallel to the train tracks.

The RMT union, which represents many railway workers, said it was monitoring the situation and expressed its concern over reports of "serious injuries" sustained by both train staff and passengers.

East Midlands Railway said in a statement that the 4:40 p.m. train from Corby to St. Pancras had been involved in the collision with the 3:50 p.m. train from Nottingham to the same station. The company said it had canceled all trains to and from St. Pancras for the rest of Friday and it was unable to confirm the schedule for Saturday.

Gurucharan University students participated in community outreach programme at Haflong



DEBOMITA DAS

Twenty-five students of Gurucharan University, accompanied by their Head of Department, participated in a two day outreach programme on civic engagement and oral history organised by the university, in collaboration with 26 Assam Rifles from June 14 to June 16 at the Assam Rifles camp, Haflong.

The programme centred on youth leadership, civic responsibility and national integration, began with the arrival of the participants at the camp in vehicles arranged by 26 Assam Rifles. Following a welcome session and briefing on the schedule and camp regulations, students attended an interactive discussion on the history and role of Assam Rifles, followed by debates and conversations on a range of social and national issues.

The second day commenced with a morning physical training session and guided tour of the camp. Students visited various sections of the establishment, including the unit hospital, gaining an insight into the functioning of a military camp and the discipline associated with it.

Later, participants delivered presentation on different topics before attending a series of interactive sessions on leadership, civic responsibility and nation-building conducted by officials of 26 Assam Rifles. The discussions provided students with an opportunity to exchange ideas and engage in direct dialogue on contemporary issues.

Another key session featured Shhaurya Sharrma, Additional District commissioner of Dima Hasao, who interacted with the students on public administration, governance and civic participation. Students raised questions on administrative challenges, public service and leadership, making the session one of the most engaging segments of the programme.

The final day focused on oral history documentation.

A medical officer of 26 Assam Rifles shared her experiences and journey in service, offering students valuable material for documentation and reflection. Participants later presented their feedback on the programme and shared their experiences of living and learning within the camp environment.

The programme concluded with a group photograph involving students, faculty members and officials of 26 Assam Rifles before the participants departed from the camp.

Combining discussions, presentations, field exposure and interactions with military and civil administration personnel, the programme offered students a practical understanding of leadership, civic engagement and responsible citizenship while providing them with a memorable learning experience beyond the classroom.

(Debomita Das, 4th semester, Bachelor's of Arts (English Literature), Gurucharan



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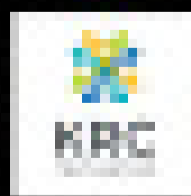


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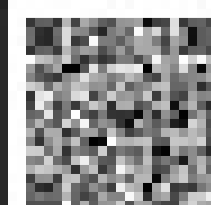


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Why e-paper

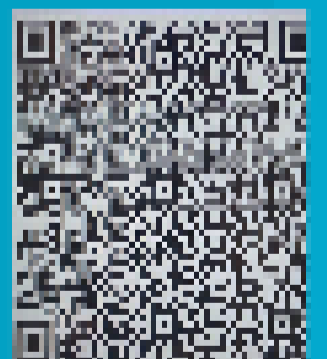
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