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PERSPECTIVE

It's better to know and be disappointed, than to never know and always wonder.

Tripura to Receive Rs 1,040 Crore Under Centre's New VB-GRAM G Rural Employment Scheme

AGARTALA
Tripura has been allocated Rs 1,040 crore under the Centre's newly launched Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-GRAM G) for the current financial year, Social Welfare Minister Tinku Roy announced on July 2.

Roy joined the national launch of the scheme virtually from Rabindra Bhavan in Agartala, while Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan formally inaugurated the programme from Andhra Pradesh. Describing the initiative as a major impetus for the rural economy, Roy said the new scheme broadens the scope of rural employment by incorporating development activities that were either limited or not covered under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). According to the minister, the programme places greater emphasis on works such as land levelling, construction of earthen drains, water conservation measures and flood protection projects, aiming to address the wider developmental requirements of rural areas. Responding to criticism from opposition parties, Roy dismissed allegations that the BJP-led Centre intended to phase out MGNREGA. He maintained that the newly introduced scheme would provide enhanced benefits and employment opportunities for rural workers.

Roy pointed out that Tripura received approximately Rs 1,100 crore under MGNREGA during the previous financial year. In comparison, the state has been sanctioned Rs 1,040 crore under VB-GRAM G for the remaining nine months of the current fiscal year.

WHO SAID WHAT

"Terrorism is evolving, and so must we." ~ Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General, United Nations

Assam Pushes Fast-Track Approval for Silchar Greenfield Airport



NEW DELHI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the state government is working to fast-track major aviation infrastructure projects after a 'very productive' meeting with Union Civil Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu



Kinjarapu in New Delhi.

In a post on X following the meeting at the Union Minister's office in Rajiv Gandhi Bhavan, the Chief Minister said both leaders shared the vision of transforming Assam into a key aviation and logistics hub in the Northeast.

The meeting reviewed the status of six proposed greenfield airports in the state - at Silchar, Manas, Umrangso, Majuli, Diphu and Charaideo - as well as a proposed heliport at Haflong.

Sarma said the state has completed most of the preparatory work for the proposed greenfield airport at Silchar and urged the Union Ministry of Civil Aviation to expedite the approval process.

For the remaining proposed airports, the Chief Minister said both sides agreed to accelerate the ongoing pre-feasibility studies so that the projects can move to the next stage at the earliest.

The meeting also reviewed the ongoing expansion plan of Rupsi Airport, which has emerged as an important regional aviation facility in western Assam.

"Just concluded a very productive meeting with Hon'ble Union Minister Shri @RamMKN j, who enthusiastically shares our vision to transform Assam into a key aviation and logistics hub. We had a discussion on the status of 6 proposed greenfield airports in Assam- Silchar, Manas, Umrangso, Majuli, Diphu and Charaideo and a heliport in Haflong. On Silchar's new airport we have completed most of the preparatory work and I have requested the Ministry to expedite the process. For the other proposed airports we agreed to accelerate the ongoing pre-feasibility studies," CM Sarma posted.

Describing it as an exciting phase for the state's aviation sector, Chief Minister Sarma said the government's objective extends beyond improving air connectivity. He said

the expansion of airport infrastructure would help create new economic opportunities, strengthen logistics, promote tourism and support the state's long-term development.

"During our meeting we also reviewed the ongoing expansion plan of Rupsi Airport. It is indeed an exciting time for the aviation sector in Assam. We are not only improving connectivity but aiming to create new opportunities for our people," he said.

The proposed greenfield airports are expected to improve regional connectivity, enhance access to remote areas and complement Assam's broader efforts to emerge as a major transportation and logistics gateway in Northeast India.

The meeting was attended by Secretary, Civil Aviation, Samir Kumar Sinha, Additional Chief Secretary to the Chief Minister, Dr K K Dwivedi, and Resident Commissioner, Assam Bhawan, Kavitha Padmanabhan.

Fresh Tensions Grip Manipur as Kuki Body Alleges Armed Attack

IMPHAL

Fresh violence was reported from Manipur's Noney district with a Kuki civil society organisation alleging that armed attackers raided and set fire to Leikot Kuki Village in the early hours of the day, raising fears of a further escalation of unrest across the state's hill districts.

The incident comes amid a series of violent episodes reported from different parts of Manipur over the past two days. On Wednesday, Phaimol Kuki Village in Kamjong district was reportedly set ablaze, while reports also emerged of an alleged retaliatory attack on Thana Tangkhul Village. The latest developments indicate that tensions, which have affected parts of Ukhrul, Kamjong and Kangpokpi districts, may now be spreading to Noney district as well.

In a statement issued on Thursday, the Kuki Inpi Jiribam, Tamenglong and Noney (JTN) alleged that suspected cadres of the NSCN-IM launched a heavily armed assault on Leikot Kuki Village at around 5 am. The organisation claimed that the attackers subsequently set the village on fire, causing extensive destruction to homes and property.

Describing the incident as an "unprovoked act of aggression", the Kuki apex body said local village volunteers attempted to resist the attack despite being equipped only with licensed single-barrel firearms and limited resources. According to the organisation, the defenders were unable to withstand the superior firepower allegedly used by the attackers.

The Kuki Inpi JTN further alleged that automatic weapons and mortar shells were used during the assault, forcing local volunteers to retreat before the village was allegedly torched.

Condemning the incident, the organisation termed the alleged attack a serious threat to peace and security in the region. It said attacks targeting civilian settlements were unacceptable and required strong condemnation from all stakeholders.

The body also expressed concern over what it described as inadequate security arrangements in vulnerable parts of Noney district. It alleged that recurring security lapses had contributed to repeated incidents of violence and stressed that protecting civilians remained the primary responsibility of the government and security agencies.

Calling for immediate intervention, the Kuki Inpi JTN urged both the Centre and the Manipur Government to order a comprehensive and impartial investigation into the incident. It demanded that those responsible be identified and prosecuted at the earliest and that security deployments in sensitive areas be strengthened to prevent further attacks.

The organisation warned that failure to address the concerns of affected communities and ensure accountability could aggravate the already fragile situation and undermine ongoing efforts to restore peace and stability in the state. Reaffirming its support for the residents of Leikot Kuki Village, the Kuki Inpi JTN said it stood in solidarity with those affected and would continue to advocate for the security, rights and welfare of the Kuki community.

There was no immediate response from security agencies or the Manipur Government regarding the allegations at the time of filing this report. Independent verification of the claims was not immediately available.

Assam Budget Session to Begin July 6, Full State Budget Scheduled for July 10

GUWAHATI

The Assam Legislative Assembly's Budget Session will commence on July 6, with the state government's full Budget for the financial year 2026-27 set to be presented on July 10, according to the provisional business calendar issued by the Assembly Secretariat.

Finance Minister Jayanta Malla Baruah will table the Annual Financial Statement, outlining the government's revenue and expenditure estimates for the current financial year. The budget is expected to provide a detailed roadmap for the state's development priorities and fiscal strategy following the recently concluded Assembly elections.

The session is scheduled to continue until July 31 and will comprise 16 sittings, during which legislators are expected to deliberate on key financial proposals, government policies and legislative business.

The upcoming budget assumes particular significance as it will be the first full-fledged financial statement of the Himanta Biswa Sarma-led government after securing a second consecutive term in office. Earlier this year, ahead of the Assembly elections, the state government had presented a vote-on-account budget to meet essential expenditure requirements until a full budget could be placed before the House.

On February 17, then Finance Minister Ajanta Neog presented an interim budget with an outlay of ₹62,294.78 crore, enabling the government to continue routine spending and ongoing programmes during the election period.

The full budget presentation comes in the wake of the National Democratic Alliance's decisive electoral victory in the Assembly polls. The alliance secured 102 seats in the 126-member House, providing the government with a strong mandate for a second term.

Silchar Medical College Principal Clarifies Role in Spa Case, Says He and Wife Only Leased Out Premises



SILCHAR

Responding to allegations linked to the high-profile spa case under investigation in Silchar, Silchar Medical College Principal Dr. Bhaskar Gupta and his wife, Sharmishtha Gupta, have issued a clarification stating that they are not the owners or operators of the spa, but merely the landlords of the premises where the establishment functioned.

In a statement issued on Friday, the couple said the property had been rented out through a legally executed lease agreement and that they had no involvement in, or knowledge of, the activities conducted inside the spa.

They further stated that the rental agreement contained a specific clause prohibiting any

illegal activities on the premises and provided for immediate termination of the lease if such activities were found to be taking place.

According to the Guptas, the lease agreement has since been cancelled following the emergence of allegations surrounding the spa.

Expressing concern over the controversy, the couple said they were deeply distressed and embarrassed by the developments. They also reiterated their willingness to cooperate fully with the investigating authorities.

Calling for a fair, impartial and thorough probe into the matter, Dr. Gupta and his wife said they hoped the investigation would establish the facts and bring the truth to light.

Floods, Cloudbursts and Landslides Ravage Arunachal's Nari-Koyu Region

ITANAGAR

Heavy rainfall-triggered floods, cloudbursts and landslides have caused extensive damage across several villages in Arunachal Pradesh's 36-Nari-Koyu Assembly Constituency, disrupting connectivity and damaging critical infrastructure, agricultural land and residential properties.

The calamity, which struck on June 28, has left many villages isolated after roads were blocked and bridges washed away, hampering transportation and ongoing relief efforts.

According to preliminary damage assessment reports, at least six major bridges, including the Reme RCC Bridge, Koyu RCC Bridge, Sijo RCC Bridge, Sido Bridge and Doge RCC Bridge, were either severely damaged or completely washed away by floodwaters. Landslides have also blocked key road links connecting remote villages, affecting the movement of people, goods and emergency services.

Among the worst-affected areas are Lipin, Mane, Tene, Sipo, Kakki, Koyu, Rotte, Kadu, Rina, Sido, Korang and Tabi Ripu villages, where widespread destruction has been reported. Hundreds of wet



rice cultivation (WRC) fields, orange orchards, arecanut plantations, fish ponds and irrigation canals were damaged or washed away.

Several houses suffered partial damage or inundation, while drinking water

pipelines, electricity infrastructure and other public utilities sustained significant losses.

In Kadu village, authorities reported extensive agricultural damage, destruction of multiple homes and complete dis-

ruption of road connectivity. Nearly 1,000 cattle and goats are estimated to have been swept away by the floodwaters.

In Korang village, the strategically important Reme Bridge, which serves as a vital link between East Siang and Lower Siang districts, was badly damaged and has been declared unsafe for public use.

The disaster also affected schools, healthcare centres, community facilities and government buildings across the region. Local panchayat leaders said several villages remain cut off, with continuous rainfall and blocked roads making it difficult to assess the full extent of the damage.

Residents and village authorities have appealed for urgent government intervention, seeking immediate restoration of road and bridge connectivity, compensation for losses, relief and rehabilitation support, restoration of electricity and drinking water supply, and deployment of heavy machinery to clear landslide debris.

Officials said assessment and rescue operations are continuing in the affected areas, while the state government is closely monitoring the evolving situation and coordinating response measures.

Manipur Transporters Seek Probe into NHIDCL Over NH-37 Project Delays, Road Conditions

IMPHAL

The Transporters' and Drivers' Council (TDC) has urged the Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) to initiate an immediate inquiry into the implementation of the National Highway-37 project by the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL), alleging poor construction quality and prolonged delays.

In a memorandum submitted to the Secretary of MoRTH, the council raised concerns over the deteriorating condition of the Imphal-Jiribam highway, stating that several stretches have become nearly unmotorable, especially during the monsoon season. The TDC alleged that despite years of construction work and the allocation of substantial public funds, many sections of the highway have shown little improvement. According to the council, the poor state of the road has led to frequent vehicle breakdowns, longer travel times, accidents and considerable financial losses for transport operators.

The organisation further claimed that inadequate monitoring of construction activities has contributed to recurring landslides at multiple

locations during the rainy season, often leaving both loaded and unloaded vehicles stranded in areas vulnerable to security and law-and-order challenges. The council also alleged that NHIDCL subcontracted major portions of the project to several contractors without sufficient oversight, resulting in poor workmanship and weak accountability mechanisms.

Questioning the utilisation of public funds, the TDC said the lack of visible progress despite significant expenditure warranted a comprehensive investigation. It called for a time-bound inquiry by an independent high-level committee and sought technical as well as financial audits of the project.

Describing NH-37 as Manipur's "second lifeline," the council said the highway's deteriorating condition has severely impacted the transport sector, leading to vehicle damage, delays in the movement of goods, accidents, financial losses and incidents of looting by miscreants.

The TDC urged the Ministry to fix responsibility and take action against any officials or contractors found guilty of negligence or misuse of public funds.



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EDUCATION, THE OTHER SHINKANSEN TRACK



Little did India imagine that the Shinkansen high-speed rail network launched in Tokyo in 1964 would one day carry a million passengers a day. Even farther would have been the thought that one day the technology could be used to connect Mumbai and Ahmedabad. Yet today this signals the beginning of a fresh collaborative journey between India and Japan, going by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for building more high-speed rail (HSR) routes.

If history remembers the partnership only for the HSR, both would have settled for far less. For the Shinkansen, which literally means 'new trunk line', is not just about tracks for trains, but the starting point of new journeys too. Education is another track on which this journey can take both nations towards a mutually rewarding destination.

The strategic trust between India and Japan has a legacy that is not driven just by trade and geopolitics. There is also a strong undercurrent of their shared social values, civilisational commons and, more importantly, the contrarian demographic crossroads that bestow on them a rare complementarity.

Let's begin with demography. Over half of India's population today is below the age of 30. Every year, lakhs of young Indians graduate from universities to seek meaningful opportunities. On the other hand, Japan's ageing population is threatening its might as one of the world's foremost technological powers. It is the solution to this demographic conundrum that the coming together of the two nations through an educational-civilisational mix can achieve.

For this, higher education offers perhaps the biggest untapped opportunity to blend both STEM knowledge and non-STEM aspects such as culture and values. The imbalance between the global mobility of Indian students westwards, to North America and Europe, and eastwards, especially to Japan, needs to be addressed.

The deafening silence of the Indian diaspora in business and higher education that I heard during a recent visit to Japan convinced me that a clarion call is needed at the policy level to pivot eastwards. There may be exceptional outliers in both nations, but India-Japan collaboration in such strategically complimentary areas needs a futuristic outlook.

While looking forward, we can learn from traditions too. One way Japanese industries have demonstrated their global competitiveness is through kaizen, the idea of continuous improvement, and monozukuri, the spirit of craftsmanship. Together, they lead to uncompromising quality standards.

Introducing Japanese standards of safety, precision and civic discipline to Indians would not be a one-way street. We can infuse the best of Japanese ways to fuel India's progress towards a Viksit Bharat by 2047.

India's manufacturing ambition can soar with Japanese participation to build globally competitive industries in sectors as crucial as semiconductors, electric vehicles, batteries, renewable energy, machine tools, medical devices, aerospace and defence.

Civilisational connections between the two have been forged for over a thousand years through the spread of ideas linked to Hinduism and Buddhism. Today, yoga, ayurveda, Indian classical arts, cuisine and cinema attract huge audiences in Japan. Equally popular among Indians is Japanese anime, manga, martial arts, architecture, cuisine and design.

The three-day bilateral summit between Prime Minister Modi and his Japanese counterpart Sanae Takaichi starting today solidifies the Modi-Shinzo Abe friendship that brought the two democracies closer for engaging in stronger collaborations.

The relationship can be further cemented through catalysing agents such as higher education institutions and industry partners. Universities are comprehensive canopies for students, artists, entrepreneurs, researchers, innovators and cultural ambassadors. Corporate houses can also be bilateral evangelists capable of accelerating educational-cultural ties. It would require a tripartite coalition of government agencies, universities and companies in India and Japan to uncork the synergies.

Increasing two-way student mobility between Indian and Japanese universities, regular staging of cultural festivals, youth policy and social leadership programmes, language learning initiatives, heritage conservation projects, industry-academia collaborations, endowed schemes for cross-border employability and innovation can effectively strengthen people-to-people bonds.

Given the excellent diplomatic ties but widening trade and social deficits, stronger multidimensional connections can improve regional stability and global economic resilience at a fraught geopolitical moment.

India and Japan can today think of 'bullet trains' to promote collaborative learning, innovations and investment in people. The challenge is to convert goodwill into a comprehensive partnership that transforms education, research, manufacturing, innovation, culture, trade and human capital. While India strives to be a developed nation, Japan, the first Asian nation to earn the tag, can offer deep learning.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

If you bungle raising your children, nothing else much matters in life. - Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis

NARI SHAKTI, FROM PROMISE TO DELIVERY: INDIA'S CONTRIBUTION TO BRICS



SMT. ANNPURNA DEVI

India assumed the BRICS Chair-ship on 1 January 2026 under the theme "Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability." On the women's track, our contribution is a specific one. We are not bringing merely a slogan or a gallery of success stories to admire. We are bringing a working architecture, one that has reached hundreds of millions of women, and one that does not end with India but begins there, ready to be built upon wherever it travels.

That distinction is the point. For more than a decade, under the leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, India has pursued women-led development as a national mission, on a scale few countries can match. During our G20 Presidency in 2023, India helped shift the global vocabulary from "women's development" to "women-led development," not a change of phrase but a change of premise, from treating women as beneficiaries to treating them as decision-makers. The question we bring to Kochi is the one that follows that shift: once the promise is made, how do you deliver it, at scale, to the last woman in the last village? India has spent ten years answering that in practice rather than merely in principle.

This disposition is not new to Bharat; it is old. Long before the language of development, our Sanskriti envisioned the feminine as the very source of power, knowledge, and prosperity, the three faculties on which any society rises, revered as the Goddesses Durga, Saraswati, and Lakshmi. Divine

power itself is named Shakti, and an oft-quoted Sanskrit verse holds that where women are honoured, the Gods themselves rejoice. Nor was this veneration only symbolic: women seers such as Lopamudra and Ghosha composed hymns of the Rig Veda, and philosophers such as Gargi and Maitreyi held their own in the great debates of the Upanishads. For Bharat, then, women-led development is not a borrowed idea but the contemporary form of an ancient one.

Begin with decision-making itself. Nearly half of all elected representatives in India's Panchayati Raj Institutions are women, among the largest pools of elected women leaders anywhere, and the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023, reserves a third of the seats in Parliament and the State Assemblies for women. Representation is not where women-led development ends; it is where it begins. A model that delivers services to women but excludes them from the decisions that shape those services is not women-led at all. The delivery architecture rests on three components that work only in combination. The first is reach: Digital Public Infrastructure places benefits directly in women's hands, with Aadhaar-linked transfers removing the intermediaries that once diverted support before it arrived. The Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana shows this reach in practice; over 4.26 crore mothers have received more than ₹20,060 crore in maternity benefits transferred directly to their Aadhaar-seeded accounts. The second is institutions: under DAY-NRLM, more than 10.05 crore rural

women have been organised into over 90.90 lakh Self-Help Groups, the largest network of women-led community institutions in the world. The third is mobility, a deliberate path upward rather than a permanent seat at the bottom of the value chain. India now deploys 65,949 SHG women as Business Correspondent Agents, the BC Sakhis, who carry deposit, credit, remittance, and pension services into remote areas. The woman who once queued for a benefit now delivers it.

Together, these turn participation into income and ownership. Under the Lakhpati Didi initiative, 1.48 crore SHG women had reached an annual income of at least ₹1 lakh by June 2025, and a National Campaign on Entrepreneurship launched in January 2026 aims to train 50 lakh more through 50,000 Community Resource Persons. The same upward path runs through formal enterprise: 69 per cent of loans under PMMY and 84 per cent of Stand-Up India beneficiaries are women, and of the 2.12 lakh startups recognised by DPIIT, more than 1.02 lakh have at least one-woman Director or partner, many of them in smaller cities rather than the metros. What we offer BRICS is not these brand names but the sequence beneath them: reach first, then institutions, then a structured route from beneficiary to entrepreneur.

The numbers track this shift. India's female labour force participation has risen from 23.3 per cent in 2017-18 to 41.7 per cent in 2023-24, and female unemployment has fallen from 5.6 to 3.2 per cent over the same period. With more women now in the workforce than ever before, our focus is turning to the next stage further improving the quality and income of their work.

This year's women's track has identified four priority areas, and one maps directly onto our experience: the role of women in climate action, food security, and nutrition. Here, the evidence is unambiguous: when women participate in decision-making, nutrition improves, and communities absorb shocks better. This is not abstract. Women farmers in Jharkhand hold the knowledge of seed varieties that survive dry spells; women pastoralists in Rajasthan know the migration routes that carry livestock through drought. India's task has been to build institutions that use this expertise rather than bypass it. Mission Poshan 2.0 runs through the Anganwadi network, staffed by women who are its trusted last mile; climate adaptation runs the same way, from the high-altitude water-harvesting structures built by women in Ladakh to the mangrove-protection committees on the Odisha coast. And women increasingly operate the technology of adaptation rather than merely receive it: under the Namu Drone Didi scheme, SHG women are trained

to fly agricultural drones—a deliberate move into higher-skilled, higher-income work.

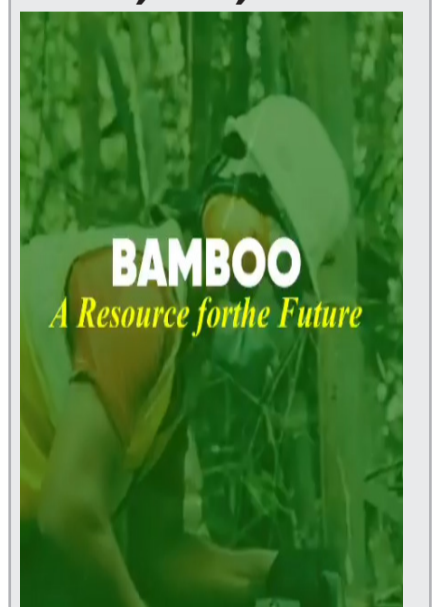
One thread is distinctly India's own. Through One District One Product, now spanning 1,102 products across 761 districts, women's collectives turn local specialties—handlooms, GI-tagged crafts, regional foods into branded, increasingly export-bound goods, with the State laying the market

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Bamboo will play a big role in powering Assam's bio economy.

We are working towards improving the livelihoods of our bamboo farmers in unlocking the value of this "green gold"—creating rural livelihoods and driving sustainable industry.

This value chain will turn our strength into global economic opportunity. ~ dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM, Assam.



NARI SHAKTI VIKSHIT BHARAT

CELEBRATING WOMEN'S
EMPOWERMENT FOR A
DEVELOPED INDIA



rails: reserved retail space at airports under the AVSAR scheme and a dedicated GeM storefront for women-led enterprises under Vocal for Local. This is sustainability in its most literal sense—local materials, local skills and local supply chains that keep value inside the community and a form of growth that does not require a woman to leave her district to reach a market.

Under the visionary leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, women-led development is not just an aspiration a government announces; it is a system it builds, component by component, until it reaches the last woman it was meant for. At the Ministerial meeting in Kochi this July, India will present this architecture as a contribution, not a prescription offered for what others might learn from it and adapt to conditions of their own. That system, and the evidence that it works, is what India brings to BRICS. The exchange runs both ways: India comes to Kochi ready to learn from the best practices its BRICS partners bring, and to share its own.

(The author is the Union Minister for Women and Child Development, Government of India.)

Manipur Launches Rural Livelihood Scheme, Enhances Daily Wage to Rs 300

IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister Y. Khemchand Singh launched the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB G-RAM-G), a rural employment and livelihood initiative aimed at strengthening economic opportunities in villages and improving the welfare of rural households across the state.

Launching the scheme at a programme organised by the Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, the Chief Minister said the initiative would contribute to the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047 by promoting sustainable livelihoods, generating employment and



accelerating rural development.

A key announcement made during the launch was the enhancement of the daily wage rate under the scheme from Rs 283 to Rs 300, a move expected to provide greater financial support to rural workers and improve household incomes.

Addressing officials and stakeholders, Singh said the programme seeks to improve livelihood security for rural communities while ensuring inclusive growth and equitable development. He noted that strengthening the rural economy remains central to the state's development strategy and is essential for improving living standards in villages.

The Chief Minister expressed confidence that the scheme would

create new opportunities for employment and self-reliance, particularly among economically vulnerable sections of society, while supporting the broader goal of sustainable development.

According to officials, the VB G-RAM-G scheme is designed to enhance rural livelihoods through increased employment opportunities and targeted development interventions, with a focus on improving economic resilience in rural areas.

The programme aligns with the Centre's vision of creating a developed India by 2047 and is expected to complement ongoing efforts to strengthen rural infrastructure, employment generation and community-based development initiatives.

The launch event was attended by senior officials of the Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Department, along with representatives involved in the implementation of the scheme.

Officials said the enhanced wage rate and expanded livelihood support measures are expected to benefit a large number of rural workers, while also contributing to the state's efforts to strengthen grassroots development and economic growth.

With the rollout of the VB G-RAM-G scheme, the Manipur government aims to bolster rural employment, improve income security and create a stronger foundation for long-term socio-economic development in the state's rural regions.

Assam's Sewa Setu Crosses 1.5 Crore Online Services, Strengthens Digital Governance

GUWAHATI

The Assam government has announced that its flagship digital governance platform, Sewa Setu, has delivered more than 1.5 crore government services online, marking a significant milestone in the state's efforts to enhance citizen access to public services through technology.

Sharing the achievement, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the government remains committed to bringing governance to the fingertips of every citizen through digital initiatives aimed at improving service delivery and ease of living.

According to official data, Sewa Setu currently offers more than 800 online services across 47 government departments and three Autonomous Sixth Schedule Councils, making it one of the state's most comprehensive digital service platforms.

The government stated that the portal has maintained a service disposal rate of over 90 per cent, reflecting improved efficiency in processing applications. It has also addressed more than 94,000 public grievances, achieving a grievance resolution rate of 86 per cent.

To enhance accessibility, Sewa Setu has been integrated with DigiLocker and is available through the UMANG application, allowing citizens to access government services and documents digitally from any location.

The achievement was highlighted as part of the nationwide #11YearsOfDigitalIndia campaign, with the state government describing Sewa Setu as a cornerstone of Assam's digital transformation journey and its push towards citizen-centric governance.

Officials said the platform continues to play a crucial role in expanding access to public services, streamlining administrative processes and strengthening transparent, technology-driven governance across the state.

Assam Reiterates 10-Lakh-Litre Daily Milk Production Goal, Strengthens Dairy Sector Push

GUWAHATI

The Assam government has reaffirmed its commitment to achieving daily milk production of 10 lakh litres as part of a broader strategy to make the state self-sufficient in dairy production, enhance rural livelihoods and reduce dependence on milk imports from other states.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said the government is implementing a series of measures aimed at transforming the dairy sector, with more than 25,000 dairy farmers currently receiving subsidies to improve productivity, adopt modern farming techniques and increase household incomes.

Highlighting the economic and nutritional importance of dairy farming, the Chief Minister said the sector plays a crucial role in strengthening rural communities while contributing to food security.

"Every glass of milk nourishes a family and strengthens the rural economy. Our mission is to produce 10 lakh litres of milk every day,"

Sarma said in a social media post.

The target forms part of a long-term roadmap unveiled by the state government last year to expand milk production and build a sustainable dairy ecosystem across Assam. During the inauguration of Purabi Dairy's expansion project in Guwahati in July 2025, Sarma had announced plans to establish 4,000 milk cooperative societies across the state to support the production goal. At the time, he had said the government was focused on achieving self-sufficiency rather than competing with leading dairy-producing states. "Initially, we aim to produce 10 lakh litres of milk daily. For this, we plan to set up 4,000 milk cooperatives across the state," the Chief Minister had stated.

Since then, the government has rolled out multiple initiatives aimed at strengthening the dairy value chain through financial support, scientific breeding programmes, improved livestock management practices and enhanced veterinary healthcare services.

Rahul Gandhi Blames Centre Over Fresh Manipur Arson, Says Violence Reflects 'Divisive Ideology'

NEW DELHI

Congress leader and Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Thursday strongly criticised the Centre following fresh incidents of arson in Manipur, alleging that the continuing violence in the state was a consequence of the Narendra Modi government's "divisive ideology."

His remarks came a day after fresh unrest was reported in Manipur's Kamjong district near the India-Myanmar border, where several houses were set ablaze in multiple tribal villages, further escalating tensions in the conflict-hit state.

In a post on social media, Gandhi said Manipur continued to suffer from recurring violence despite the imposition of President's Rule and the presence of both state and central administrations.

"Manipur has been burning for years, and once again homes have been reduced to ashes in the fire of hatred and violence," Gandhi said, expressing concern over the prolonged crisis and its impact on local communities.



The Congress leader alleged that the situation in the state had steadily deteriorated despite repeated assurances from the government. He said thousands of lives had been affected by the conflict, with many families displaced and communities continuing to bear the consequences of persistent unrest.

Targeting the Centre, Gandhi claimed that the ongoing turmoil reflected what he described as the government's politics of division.

"This is the result of the Modi government's divisive ideology, which divides people in the name of religion, caste, language, region and identity," he said. The former Congress presi-

dent further alleged that people across the country had lost hope of meaningful intervention from the Prime Minister on the Manipur issue.

"Today, not just Manipur, but the entire country has given up hope of even a few words of empathy from the Prime Minister, let alone decisive action," Gandhi stated. Calling for unity and reconciliation, he asserted that lasting peace in Manipur could only be achieved through efforts aimed at bringing communities together.

"Manipur deserves better, and for that, uniting India is the only way forward," he added.

The remarks follow reports of fresh violence on July 1 in Kamjong

district, where multiple houses were reportedly torched in tribal settlements located near the international border. According to local reports, Phaimol, a Kukli village, and Kongkan Thana and Shangkalok, two Tangkhul Naga villages, were among the areas affected by the latest incidents. Several homes were reduced to ashes, though the extent of property damage and any possible casualties could not be independently verified at the time of reporting. The incidents have triggered renewed tensions between Kukli and Tangkhul Naga groups, with organisations representing both communities issuing statements accusing the other side of carrying out coordinated attacks. Security forces have intensified monitoring in the affected areas to prevent further escalation, while authorities continue to assess the situation on the ground. The latest episode of violence has once again highlighted the fragile security situation in Manipur, where ethnic tensions and sporadic incidents of arson and clashes have continued to challenge efforts aimed at restoring normalcy.

Hagrama Mohilary Criticises BTR Accord Implementation, Alleges Recruitment Irregularities Under Previous BTC Regime

KOKRAJHAR

Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Chief Hagrama Mohilary on Thursday raised concerns over the implementation of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) Accord, alleging that key issues relating to financial allocations and administrative expansion were not adequately addressed, while also accusing the previous BTC administration of irregularities in recruitment.

Mohilary made the remarks while speaking to journalists after a review meeting involving the Public Works Department (PWD), Panchayat and Rural Development (P&RD) Department, and the Urban Development Department at the BTC Secretariat ahead of the upcoming Assam Budget Session.

Referring to the expansion of the Bodoland Territorial Region under the BTR Accord, Mohilary said several Bodo-inhabited areas from the



districts of Biswanath, Sonitpur, Darrang and Nalbari were incorporated into the council's jurisdiction, resulting in a significant increase in both geographical area and population.

However, he alleged that the financial resources allocated to the BTC had not been revised to reflect the enlarged jurisdiction.

According to Mohilary, the council's annual budget is determined largely on the basis of population, and the inclusion of additional areas should have been accompanied by a proportionate increase in financial

assistance. He contended that the issue was not adequately addressed during the formulation of the BTR Accord, leading to fiscal constraints that continue to affect the functioning of the present BTC administration. "The territorial area and population of the BTR have increased considerably, but the corresponding budgetary allocation has not been enhanced. This has created several administrative and developmental challenges," Mohilary said.

The BTC chief maintained that the absence of additional funding despite the expanded responsibilities of the council has affected its ability to effectively implement development programmes and deliver public services across the region.

Mohilary also levelled allegations against the previous administration led by former BTR Chief Pramod Boro, claiming that appointments were made through irregular means during its tenure.

He alleged that certain recruitments were carried out in exchange for money and said the matter is currently under examination. However, he did not provide specific details regarding the alleged irregularities or identify any particular recruitment process under scrutiny.

The remarks come at a time when the BTC administration is reviewing the performance of key departments and preparing its priorities ahead of the Assam government's Budget Session.

The review meeting focused on infrastructure development, rural development initiatives and urban governance, with officials assessing ongoing projects and future requirements across the Bodoland Territorial Region.

There was no immediate response from former BTR Chief Pramod Boro or his party regarding the allegations at the time of filing this report.

Tripura Accelerates Preparations for Destination Tripura Business Conclave 2026

AGARTALA

The Tripura government has stepped up preparations for the upcoming Destination Tripura: Business Conclave 2026, with a high-level review meeting held on Thursday to assess readiness and coordinate arrangements for the state's flagship investment promotion event. The meeting was chaired by Industries and Commerce Minister Santana Chakma at the auditorium of the Hapania International Fair Ground in Agartala and attended by senior government officials and stakeholders involved in organising the conclave. During the review, officials evaluated the overall preparedness for the event and discussed measures to ensure its smooth and successful conduct. Key areas of focus included inter-departmental coordination, logistical planning, infrastructure arrangements and visitor management.

The conclave is expected to bring together investors, entrepreneurs, business leaders and industry representatives from across the country, providing a platform to showcase Tripura's investment potential and emerging business opportunities.

Officials said the event would highlight opportunities across multiple sectors, while promoting the state's strengths in industry, trade, infrastructure and entre-

preneurship. The conclave is also expected to facilitate interactions between government agencies and potential investors, helping identify avenues for future collaboration and investment.

The state government views the event as a significant step towards attracting fresh investments and accelerating economic development. It is expected to serve as a platform for presenting Tripura's policy initiatives, industrial infrastructure and business-friendly reforms to prospective investors. Reiterating its commitment to fostering a conducive investment climate, the government said efforts are being made to strengthen ease of doing business, encourage industrial growth and generate employment opportunities for the state's youth.

Officials noted that the conclave forms part of Tripura's broader strategy to position itself as a competitive investment destination in the Northeast, leveraging its strategic location, improving connectivity and growing industrial ecosystem.

As preparations gather pace, the administration is working to ensure seamless coordination among departments and stakeholders so that the event can effectively project Tripura's economic potential and attract long-term investments.

Assam Launches Mega Plantation Drive, Targets One Crore Saplings by August 14

MORIGAON

The Assam government has set an ambitious target of planting one crore saplings across the state by August 14 as part of a large-scale afforestation campaign that will involve nearly 10 lakh students and focus on strengthening environmental conservation efforts.

The statewide plantation drive was announced by Forest Minister Jayanta Mallabuarah during a Van Mahotsav programme held at the Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary in Morigaon district on Thursday.

According to the minister, students from Class IX onwards will play a central role in the initiative, which is being positioned as one of the state's largest community-based plantation campaigns.

"We want to involve our students in this mega plantation drive," Mallabuarah said while outlining the government's plan to expand public participation in environmental protection activities.

As part of the registration process for participation in the programme, students will be required to submit the name of one Job Card holder under the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G-RAM-G) scheme.

The Forest Department aims to com-



plete the plantation of one crore saplings before Independence Day, with educational institutions, local communities and government agencies expected to contribute to the campaign.

The minister also announced plans to modify the state's annual plantation calendar from next year by advancing the programme to April, allowing saplings to benefit from a longer growing period before the monsoon season.

In addition, the department intends to place greater emphasis on indigenous and fruit-bearing species as part of its long-term ecological restoration strategy.

"From next year, we have planned to start this drive in April. We have planned

to plant one crore saplings of indigenous fruits next year," Mallabuarah said.

The focus on native species is expected to support biodiversity conservation, improve ecological balance and provide additional benefits to local communities through fruit production and habitat enhancement.

In another significant announcement, the minister revealed that the Forest Department would undertake a pilot aerial seeding project in Assam's Char-Chaporri riverine regions.

The initiative will involve dispersing seeds from the air in selected areas to accelerate vegetation growth and improve green cover in difficult-to-access

locations.

"This year, the state forest department is planning aerial seeding in Char-Chaporri areas as a pilot project. If it proves successful, the programme will be expanded to other regions," he said.

Officials believe the experiment could offer an innovative and cost-effective method of afforestation, particularly in ecologically sensitive and geographically challenging landscapes.

Apart from environmental issues, Mallabuarah also spoke about the upcoming Budget Session of the Assam Legislative Assembly, noting that it would be the first state budget presented under his tenure as Finance Minister.

He expressed confidence that the budget would address public priorities and support the government's development agenda.

Responding to questions on land encroachment and demographic concerns, the minister said the state government would continue its eviction drives against illegal encroachments.

He reiterated the government's commitment to safeguarding the rights and interests of indigenous communities while enforcing land protection measures.

The plantation campaign forms part of Assam's broader efforts to increase forest cover, promote climate resilience and encourage public participation in environmental stewardship. Officials said the involvement of students and local communities is expected to create greater awareness about conservation while contributing to the state's long-term sustainability goals.

Quest!

Someone who suffers from "misophonia" will often be made angry by very small things - Such as a person who eats or breathes too loudly.

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Indian Navy scores second Somali piracy bust in a fortnight



NEW DELHI

Indian Navy stealth frigate INS Trikand foiled a piracy attack on a merchant vessel in the Gulf of Aden by deploying MARCOS commandos to secure the ship after suspected Somali pirates damaged it and forced all 21 crew members, including an Indian national, to take refuge inside the vessel's citadel.

The merchant vessel, MV Golden Arsenal, flagged in St Vincent and the Grenadines, was sailing from Aden in Yemen when it came under attack on Wednesday, around 300 nautical miles east-northeast of Djibouti.

Sources in the defence and security establishment told that the mission was launched after an American P-8 maritime patrol aircraft detected suspicious activity over an open communication channel late on Wednesday. The alert was relayed through the Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) in Gurugram, following which mission deployed INS Trikand was diverted to intercept the vessel.

As the frigate closed in, it broadcast warning messages twice to both the merchant crew and the suspected pirates. By then, the attackers had already damaged the vessel's bridge superstructure

and adjoining compartments, sources said.

"The 21 crew members had locked themselves inside the ship's citadel and were reported safe. The saferoom is designed to provide basic control and communication facilities and can be secured from within during piracy attacks," a source said.

With the crew sheltered inside, a MARCOS boarding team from INS Trikand boarded the vessel on Thursday morning to eliminate any remaining threat.

"Following a thorough search, no suspicious personnel were found onboard. The crew subsequently exited the citadel safely and, along with Indian Navy personnel, commenced an assessment of the vessel's condition," the Navy said.

An Indian Navy P-8I long range maritime reconnaissance aircraft simultaneously maintained aerial surveillance over the area, strengthening maritime domain awareness and supporting the anti piracy operation.

Declaring the mission complete, the Navy said the vessel had been sanitised, the immediate threat neutralised and MV Golden Arsenal had resumed its onward voyage.

"The Indian Navy remains committed to safeguarding merchant shipping, countering

piracy and ensuring the safety and security of all seafarers in the region, irrespective of nationality," it said.

The latest attack underlines a worrying resurgence of Somali piracy after years of relative dormancy. Networks that had been largely dismantled through sustained multinational naval operations are once again targeting commercial shipping across the western Indian Ocean, extending their reach far beyond the Horn of Africa.

The growing threat has prompted renewed concern among maritime security agencies. The Joint Maritime Information Centre raised its piracy threat assessment to "severe" in May following a string of hijackings involving fishing dhows and merchant vessels.

According to the Pretoria based Institute for Security Studies, Somali pirate groups are now operating more than 1,000 nautical miles from their coastline, using hijacked vessels as motherships to launch attacks deep into the Arabian Sea.

The fresh operation marks INS Trikand's second anti piracy intervention in less than two weeks. Last month, the Russian built Talwar class frigate responded to a distress call from MV Fareeda 5 following a suspected piracy attempt in the western Indian Ocean.

In May, guided missile destroyer INS Kolkata similarly thwarted an attempted hijacking of MV Mashallah 1 near the Gulf of Aden.

The Navy has maintained an uninterrupted anti piracy deployment in the Gulf of Aden since 2008 and currently keeps multiple warships deployed under Operations Sankalp and Sanchet to secure critical sea lanes across the Indian Ocean Region.

India, Japan unveil economic partnership framework, defence pact after Modi-Takaichi talks

NEW DELHI

With an emphasis on economic cooperation and technology partnerships, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday held summit talks with Japanese counterpart, Sanae Takaichi, focusing on resilient semiconductor supply chains and critical technologies.

Following the talks at the Hyderabad House, the two sides unveiled a raft of initiatives, including an economic partnership framework and a defence pact to co-develop military hardware.

The two sides also rolled out measures to solidify their cooperation in key sectors such as energy and critical technology.

Speaking to the media after the talks, PM Modi addressed the Japanese prime minister as his "younger sister."

"Your Excellency, and 'meri chhoti behen' (my younger sister) Prime Minister Takaichi, delegates of the two countries, members of the media, Namaskaar! Konnichiwa," Modi said as he began his address.

Konnichiwa is a Japanese word used when greeting someone.

"I am delighted to welcome Prime Minister Takaichi on her first visit to India for the India-Japan Annual Summit. She is also Japan's first female Prime Minister, and a visionary and popular leader. Furthermore, she hails from Japan's Nara Prefecture, a very important centre of shared Buddhist heritage of India and Japan," Modi said.

The Indian prime minister ended his speech using both Hindi ('bahut bahut dhanyawad') and Japanese ('arigatou gozaimasu') words for expressing thanks.

In her address in Japanese, which was simultaneously translated in English, Takaichi acknowledged Modi's remarks describing her as his "younger sister."

"The small meeting before and the big meeting... we confirmed that we are on the same page to develop this relationship as brother and sister," she said.

The Japanese prime minister further said she and Modi in their talks, agreed to "deepen strategic cooperation" between the two countries to achieve the common goals they have set.



"I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Prime Minister Modi and the people of India for your warm hospitality on the occasion of my visit to your country," she said in her address at the joint press meet.

Modi in his address to media also said, "We are delighted that next year we will celebrate the 75th anniversary of India-Japan diplomatic relations. On this important occasion, we will deepen connection through cooperation in culture, tourism and the creative economy."

In a statement issued after the talks, PM Modi said, "The economies of India and Japan are complementary. From cultural values to modern technology, there is a similarity in our thinking and approach as well."

"And above all, the foundation of our relations rests on unbreakable mutual trust," he said, reflecting the growing congruence in ties between the two countries.

Modi said the two sides have prepared a joint roadmap for economic security.

"Through this, we will strengthen supply chain resilience in strategic areas such as semiconductors, quantum, and advanced materials," he said.

The prime minister said India and Japan have also taken several important

decisions in the field of energy security.

"Through the India-Japan bio-gas initiative, we will set up one thousand bio-gas and organic fertiliser plants in India.

This will give new strength to sustainability, prosperity, and rural livelihoods in India's villages," he said.

Ahead of the meeting, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) described the India-Japan partnership as one "built on trust" and rooted in shared values.

"Taking forward a partnership anchored in trust, shared values and strategic convergence," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on social media.

The Japanese prime minister is on a three-day visit to India. She was accorded a warm ceremonial welcome at the forecourt of the Rashtrapati Bhavan in Delhi on Thursday morning. There has been an upswing in India-Japan ties.

The relationship was elevated to a Special Strategic and Global Partnership in 2014.

As the two countries approach the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations in 2027, cooperation continues to deepen across a wide range of sectors, including trade and investment, economic security, defence and security, science and technology, culture, and people-to-people ties.

The bilateral framework now comprises over 70 dialogue mechanisms.

PM Modi visited Japan for the 15th Annual Summit in Tokyo in August last year.

The annual summit remains the flagship platform driving the strategic agenda of the partnership.

The Japanese prime minister had posted on X photos of her arrival, soon after landing in Delhi.

Sharing her post, Modi wrote, "A very warm welcome to India, Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi.

"We are delighted to host you on your first visit to India, and I look forward to our wide-ranging discussions tomorrow that will further deepen the India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership. Through our joint efforts, we will continue to advance peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. @takaichi_sanae."

Jaiswal on Wednesday said the visit marks an "important step" in taking forward the Special Strategic and Global Partnership between India and Japan.

"The Summit will provide an opportunity for both sides to review and strengthen the full spectrum of bilateral cooperation as well as exchange views on regional and global issues of mutual interest," the MEA earlier said.

INTERNATIONAL

125-year-old gurdwara demolished in Pakistan; MEA condemns act, Sikh groups seek intervention

CHANDIGARH

India has condemned the demolition of the 125-year-old Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha in Ferozabad, around 70km from Lahore in Pakistan, after reports that it was razed by a local businessman without obtaining the mandatory No Objection Certificate (NOC).

The demolition has prompted Sikh religious organisations, including the Sant Samaj and Dandami Takal, to write to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, urging the Union government to raise concerns over the condition of Sikh and Hindu religious sites, religious properties and the safety of minority communities in Pakistan with Islamabad and at international forums.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) described the incident as "deeply distressing" and strongly condemned what it called a "highly deplorable" and "targeted act of vandalism".

It also urged Pakistan to bring those responsible to justice.

Meanwhile, BJP leader Amit Malviya called the incident systematic neglect and deliberate erasure of Sikh heritage in Pakistan and calmed that "there is a message in this" for the ruling AAP government in Punjab. "The 125-year-old historic Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Sahib in Ferozabad a protected heritage site has been, brazenly demolished. This is not merely an act of vandalism; it is a stark reminder of the systematic neglect and deliberate erasure of Sikh heritage in Pakistan. The hypocrisy is impossible to miss. On one hand, Pakistan's agencies seek to mislead and provoke Sikhs against India. On the other, the Pakistani state is allowing the destruction of Sikh history, faith and identity within its own borders," Malviya wrote on X.



"But the Sikh community has seen through Pakistan's devious agenda. It knows who truly safeguards its faith, heritage and rights, and who seeks to exploit it for geopolitical ends. Pakistan and its collaborators in India will be reduced to political insignificance. There is a message in this for the ruling AAP as well," he added.

Sant Giani Harnam Singh Khalsa, head of Dandami Takal and president of the Sant Samaj, wrote to PM Modi and EAM Jaishankar, urging Centre to raise the issue with Pakistan and on international platforms. The letter refers to reported incidents of illegal encroachments and desecration of several historic gurdwaras and temples, including those at Hasan Abdal, Nankana Sahib, Lahore, Narowal, Rawalpindi, Sialkot and Kasur.

Khalsa said the incidents showed that Sikh and Hindu places of worship in Pakistan remained vulnerable and that the religious freedom, security and right of minority communities to manage their religious affairs were under threat. He appealed to the Union government to raise the issue during bilateral engagements with Pakistan and at the United Nations, the UN

Human Rights Council (UNHRC), UNESCO and other international forums.

The letter also called for the protection of all gurdwaras and temples in Pakistan, the removal of illegal encroachments, action against officials and the land mafia responsible, and an independent audit of the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB).

Meanwhile, a delegation from the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC) met officials from the Ministry of External Affairs and submitted a memorandum seeking the government's intervention. The delegation urged the Centre to ensure that no further damage was caused to the gurdwara in Ferozabad.

In a statement, the DSGMC said, "We also request the Government of India to lodge a strong diplomatic protest with the Pakistan government, conveying serious concern of the Sikh community over repeated unfortunate incidents and emphasising the need to ensure religious freedoms of minority communities."

The MEA said: "We have seen the deeply distressing reports regarding the demolition of the historic 125-year-

old sacred Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Sahib in Ferozabad, Pakistan. We strongly condemn this highly deplorable and targeted act of vandalism against a revered Sikh shrine. Its destruction, along with reports of no meaningful action being taken by local authorities or the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB), is a matter of grave concern."

"This is unfortunately not an isolated incident, as we have also seen similar reports earlier. The systemic targeting of religious minorities and their places of worship in Pakistan continues unabated," it added.

"We call upon the Government of Pakistan to expeditiously investigate this matter and bring the perpetrators of this despicable act to justice. The demolished portions of the Gurdwara Sahib should be restored and reconstructed at the earliest," the statement said.

The ministry said the incident was "not an isolated incident" and urged Pakistan to fulfil its obligations to ensure the safety and security of minority communities and safeguard their religious sites.

According to an official from Pakistan's Punjab government, the historic Gurdwara Singh Sabha in Ferozabad was recently demolished by a local businessman.

"The businessman had demolished the gurdwara without obtaining the required No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the department concerned. The department has not taken notice of it till the Sikhs of the area protested," he said, adding that Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz intervened after members of the Sikh community protested.

Pakistan Punjab's Minorities Minister Ramesh Singh Arora later visited the site along with district officials and announced that the gurdwara would be restored after hearing the grievances of local Sikhs.

Expanding conflict leaves over three million 'acutely food insecure' in northern Nigeria: WFP



ABUJA

Hunger across Nigeria's conflict-hit north is at levels not seen in a decade as violence spreads and aid shrinks, the UN's World Food Programme warned Thursday, with more than three million people "acutely food insecure".

The country has been battling a jihadist insurgency centred in the northeast since 2009, with a resurgence in violence since 2025. Jihadists have also been expanding into the northwest, which is already facing a separate, overlapping crisis from armed "bandit" gangs. "What concerns us most is how this crisis is expanding," WFP regional director for west and central Africa, Kindy Samba, said in a statement, noting the spread of violence "across a much wider area and forcing people from farmland, driving displacement and restricting humanitarian access".

Aid cuts under US President Donald Trump and other western countries have hit some of Nigeria's poorest households in recent years.

At the same time, the International Monetary Fund reported last month

that poverty has risen under President Bola Tinubu, who has embarked on a raft of economic reforms supported by economists but which have also driven punishing inflation.

As conflict in the country's troubled north has expanded, so has the number of areas too dangerous for WFP to operate in, it said. "The number of inaccessible locations has doubled: a further 15 areas are now considered partially inaccessible for WFP's frontline staff," it said. Government control is scanty outside urban centres, leaving swathes of rural areas prone to attacks from armed groups. More than 17 million people across northern Nigeria "are experiencing crisis, emergency, or catastrophic levels of hunger", WFP said. "Nigeria's food security crisis is worsening faster than previously anticipated," it said. "Conflict is driving hunger in some northern states, particularly the northeast, to levels not seen in almost a decade".

In Borno state, the epicentre of the jihadist conflict, more than three million people are "acutely food insecure", including 10,000 people facing "catastrophic hunger". But

WFP's footprint is shrinking amid a donor shortfall, it said. At the height of 2025 "lean season", when the previous year's foodstocks are running low but the current year's crops aren't ready for harvest, the agency delivered food and nutrition aid to 1.3 million people. Amid "extreme funding shortfalls", it has projected it will reach slightly over half that number this year. Arora said preliminary information from the Auqaf Department suggested that a local businessman had demolished the gurdwara without obtaining the required NOC.

He said Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz had reiterated the government's commitment to protecting the rights of minorities and safeguarding their places of worship.

He also directed the Auqaf Department to investigate the ownership and status of the land on which the gurdwara stood, saying initial information suggested it was not registered as Auqaf land.

"I personally inspected the site and instructed the relevant authorities to submit a fact-based report at the earliest," he said.

The Death of Neighbourhood Store | Why Meghalaya is opposing 10-min delivery apps



NIBIR DEKA (EXRCEPTS TAKEN FROM NIBIR DEKA, SOCIAL MEDIA)

Meghalaya has done something that the rest of India will soon have to debate. The Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council has refused trading licences to quick-commerce companies, choosing instead to protect more than 4,000 local grocery stores.

The internet is divided. Some call it anti-business. Others call it protecting livelihoods.

I think both sides are right. This morning, it was pouring in Guwahati.

Instead of putting on my slippers and walking to Kalita Store for bread and



counts landed at my doorstep. The sandwich was ready.

Courtesy of a young boy riding through the rain for a modest income, and my mother waiting in the kitchen.

Halfway through breakfast, a thought crossed my mind. Kalita Store, you've finally met your match.

How does one neighbourhood shop compete with a company that is happy to lose money on every delivery?

It doesn't. Because this isn't really a battle between two grocery stores. It is a battle between your neighbourhood uncle and a spreadsheet in a venture capital office.

One knows your father's name. The other knows your purchase history.

The groceries are merely an excuse. The real business is your attention, your habits and eventually your loyalty.

America watched its mom-and-pop stores slowly disappear under the weight of big retail. We are watching the Tier 2 city version unfold in real time.

The old saying, "aku nohole gella maal

scientists, IIM graduates and algorithms that already know what you'll buy before you do.

And yet, I cannot bring myself to hate these apps.

I've seen boys from Narengi pay for college through delivery jobs. I've seen students earn their first income because someone wanted bread in ten minutes.

In towns where private jobs barely exist, these bikes have become employment of fices on two wheels.

That is what makes this debate so uncomfortable. One person's convenience is another person's livelihood. One person's discount is another person's business closing down.

But somewhere in all this efficiency, I fear we are losing something far more

valuable than a grocery store.

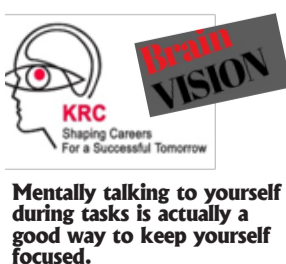
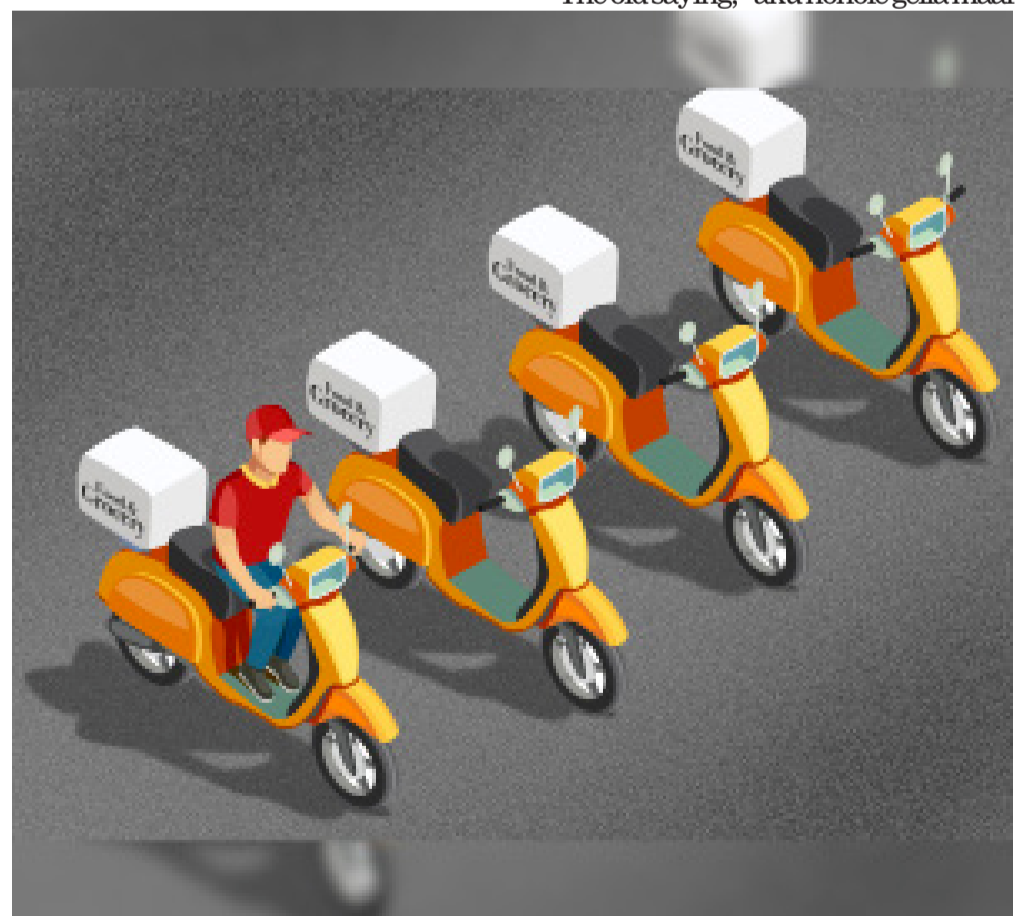
We are losing the human pause. The shopkeeper who knew my father. The uncle who quietly said, "Pay later."

The conversation that began with bread and somehow ended with cricket, politics and the weather. The recommendation, "Fruit & Nut lobo... Silk Nai", to growing older and telling them "Classic Mild rakhok".

An app doesn't recommend because it knows you. It recommends because it knows your data.

Perhaps Meghalaya isn't merely protecting grocery stores. Perhaps it is trying to protect the last remaining spaces where commerce still feels human.

Yours truly,
A loyal 10-minute delivery app user.



eggs, I lazily opened a 10-minute delivery app. Ten minutes later, bread, eggs and a few surprise dis-

or dukan khuli dim," once meant that if life didn't work out, you could always open a departmental store and make an honest living. Today, that sentence belongs in a museum. If you decide to open a grocery shop selling Sona Shakti rice tomorrow, you aren't competing with another Barman Store. You're competing with billions in venture capital, data

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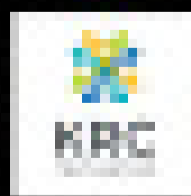


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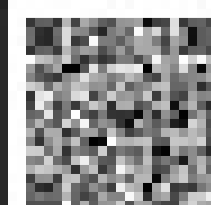


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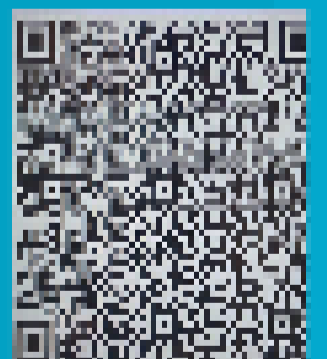
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