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PERSPECTIVE

Be a voice, not an echo.

Former IB Chief Tapan Deka Named to PM Modi’s Expert Panel on Examination Reforms

NEW DELHI
Former Intelligence Bureau (IB) Director Tapan Deka has been appointed to a high-powered task force constituted by the Centre to recommend comprehensive reforms to India’s examination system, with a focus on improving transparency, security and technological safeguards in national-level competitive examinations.

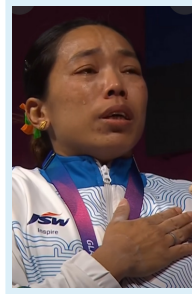
The multidisciplinary panel, headed by Infosys co-founder Nandan Nilekani, was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi amid growing concerns over examination irregularities, including the NEET-UG 2026 question paper leak and other alleged instances of malpractice.

The committee has been tasked with proposing structural and technology-driven reforms to make the country’s examination process more secure, reliable and tamper-proof.

Announcing the initiative in a video message, Prime Minister Modi said the government was committed to protecting students’ interests and strengthening the integrity of competitive examinations.

“The Government of India is continuously taking various measures for the future of students. Those who tampered with the students’ future are languishing in jail. We have already established fast-track courts. We are also moving towards enacting new legislation in Parliament that incorporates stringent legal provisions. However, we must look to the future. Our examination system needs to be reliable and transparent, and it must make maximum use of technology,” the Prime Minister said.

WHO SAID WHAT



My nation my pride

~ Padma Shri Saikhom Mirabai Chanu, Indian Wightlifter, 48 Kg category, World Champion, CWG

Assam Floods: Situation Improves, Over 5.24 Lakh Still Affected; Death Toll Rises to 68

GUWAHATI

The flood situation in Assam showed signs of improvement on Sunday, but more than 5.24 lakh people across nine districts continued to remain affected, while the overall flood-related death toll this season climbed to 68, according to the latest bulletin issued by the Disaster Reporting and Information Management System (DRIMS), Assam.

The bulletin stated that 524,733 people in 763 villages under 24 revenue circles across Charaideo, Golaghat, Jorhat, Sivasagar, Hojai, Kamrup, Kamrup (Metro), Nagaon and Dibrugarh districts are still grappling with the impact of the floods.

Among the worst-hit districts, Charaideo recorded the highest number of affected residents at 188,404, followed by Sivasagar with 154,064 and



Jorhat with 137,775. Floodwaters have also submerged 48,742.09 hectares of agricultural land, causing significant losses to farmers.

Hydrological conditions improved further, with the Dhansiri (South) River at Numaligarh remaining the only river flowing above the danger level. No river was reported to have crossed its highest flood level.

To assist flood-hit residents, the state government has established 354 relief facilities, including 109 relief camps and 245 relief distribu-

ting the season’s death toll to 68. No missing persons were reported.

The floods have also caused widespread damage to livestock and infrastructure. According to officials, 88,240 animals have been affected, while 26,512 cattle and poultry were washed away.

The disaster has completely destroyed 579 houses and partially damaged 1,611 homes, besides damaging 1,042 cattle sheds and other structures.Relief and rescue operations continue across the affected districts, with 152 medical teams, 36 boats, and two helicopters deployed. Personnel from the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), the Indian Army, the Indian Air Force, and other agencies remain engaged in evacuation, rescue and relief operations.

Authorities have distrib-

uted substantial quantities of relief materials, including 3,302.55 quintals of rice, 590.99 quintals of pulses, 177.38 quintals of salt, and nearly 17,736 litres of mustard oil. Other essential supplies such as drinking water, tarpaulins, mosquito nets, halogen tablets, baby food, sanitary napkins and bleaching powder have also been provided to affected families.

Floodwaters have damaged 105 roads, particularly in Sivasagar, Charaideo and Jorhat districts, disrupting transportation and connectivity. Several roads remain submerged, while others have suffered erosion and surface damage. However, the latest assessment reported no bridge collapses or embankment breaches, indicating an overall improvement in the flood situation despite continued challenges in the affected areas.

Mirabai Chanu Wins Historic Third Straight Gold, Rishikanta Singh Bags Silver



IMPHAL

Manipur once again underlined its dominance in Indian weightlifting at the Commonwealth Games 2026 in Glasgow, with Olympic silver medallist Saikhom Mirabai Chanu securing a historic third consecutive Commonwealth Games gold medal and Chanambam Rishikanta Singh claiming silver in a record-breaking performance.The twin podium finishes delivered a major boost to India’s weightlifting campaign and sparked celebrations across Manipur, long regarded as one of the country’s premier centres for the sport.

Mirabai, 31, produced another commanding performance in the women’s 48kg category, lifting a Commonwealth Games record 85kg in the snatch and 105kg in the clean and jerk for a combined total of 190kg, setting Games records in all three categories.

The victory made her the first Indian weightlifter to win three successive Commonwealth Games gold medals, following her triumphs at Gold Coast 2018 and Birmingham 2022. She had earlier won a silver medal at the Glasgow 2014 Games, taking her overall Commonwealth Games medal tally to four.

Despite missing her opening snatch attempt at 82kg, Mirabai quickly regained composure and dominated the competition. She finished 22kg ahead of Nigeria’s Ruth Asuquo Nyong, who settled for silver with a total lift of 168kg.

Congratulating the champion, Prime Minister Narendra Modi praised her achievement in a social media post.

“The talented Mirabai Chanu once again showcased her skills at the Commonwealth Games with a stunning performance in the 48kg category and winning Gold. With back-to-back Commonwealth Games Golds and an overall fourth CWG medal to her name, she remains an inspiration for every Indian. Congratulations to her. Best wishes for the endeavours ahead,” the Prime Minister said.India’s medal haul received another boost when Chanambam Rishikanta Singh finished second in the men’s 60kg category.The 25-year-old lifter from Ngairangbam Makha Maning Leikai in Imphal West district set a new Commonwealth Games record in the snatch with a lift of 121kg before finishing with a combined total of 264kg to secure the silver medal-India’s first silver in weightlifting at the Glasgow Games.A former trainee of the National Sports Academy at Khuman Lampak, Rishikanta is currently part of the Indian Army’s sports programme. The Glasgow Games marked his second Commonwealth Games appearance after making his debut at Birmingham 2022.He earned qualification for the 2026 Games after winning gold at the 2025 Commonwealth Weightlifting Championships, continuing his steady rise on the international stage.

The double success was widely celebrated in Manipur, with political leaders, sports administrators and fans congratulating the two lifters for bringing further glory to both the state and the country.With Mirabai extending her remarkable legacy and Rishikanta announcing himself among the Commonwealth’s elite lifters, Manipur once again reinforced its reputation as India’s weightlifting powerhouse on the international stage.

IIT Guwahati Student Found Dead on Campus; Police Launch Investigation

GUWAHATI
A third-year BTech student of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Guwahati was found dead on the campus on Sunday, prompting a police investigation into the circumstances surrounding the incident.

The deceased has been identified as Ritesh Raj Singh, a third-year Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) student and a resident of Brahmaputra Hostel.

According to police, Singh reportedly fell from the fifth floor of an academic building at around 2:30 pm. He was immediately taken for medical assistance but was declared dead. Authorities are investigating the case, and the cause of the incident has not yet been established.

Police said an inquiry is underway to determine the circumstances leading to the student’s death. No official conclusion has been announced.Singh had recently secured an internship with Goldman Sachs and was regarded by classmates and faculty as a bright student with a strong academic record.Expressing grief over the loss, IIT Guwahati Director Prof. Devendra Jalihal said the institute was extending full support to the bereaved family. “It is with deep sorrow that I inform you of the untimely demise of Ritesh Raj Singh, a third-year BTech student from the Computer Science and Engineering department and a resident of Brahmaputra Hostel. This is a profound loss to our IITG family. The Institute is in close contact with his family and is providing all necessary support during this difficult time,” Jalihal said in a statement.

The incident has once again drawn attention to student well-being and mental health on higher education campuses. IIT Guwahati had reported multiple student deaths in recent years, prompting renewed discussions on the need for stronger counselling services, early intervention mechanisms and enhanced mental health support for students.

Rahul Gandhi Calls for Permanent Flood Management System



NEW DELHI

Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi has called for a long-term and scientific solution to Assam’s recurring flood crisis, urging the Centre and the state government to strengthen flood prevention and disaster management measures while ensuring comprehensive relief and rehabilitation for affected families.

Expressing grief over the loss of lives in this year’s floods, Gandhi extended condolences to the bereaved families and expressed solidarity with the lakhs of people affected across the state.

“The news of the loss of lives in the devastating floods in Assam is deeply saddening. I extend my heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families. My deepest sympathies are with the lakhs of people affected by this disaster,” Gandhi said in a social media post in Hindi.

Noting that Assam faces devastating floods almost every year, the Congress leader stressed the need to move beyond temporary relief measures and adopt a sustainable flood management strategy.

“The time has come for us to establish a robust and permanent system to tackle the flood menace-a system that prioritises scientific prevention, early warning mechanisms, strong infrastructure and rehabilitation so that people do not have to face such tragedies year after year,” he said.

Gandhi also urged both the Union and Assam governments to spare no effort in carrying out relief, rescue and rehabilitation operations for flood-affected residents.

His remarks came as the Assam government shifted its focus from emergency response to restoration and rehabilitation following an improvement in the flood situation.

On Sunday, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced that ministers would visit flood-affected districts immediately after the ongoing Assembly session to oversee sector-wise restoration work.

“Once the Assembly session concludes, ministers of every department will visit the affected districts to undertake sector-wise restoration work, including repairing schools, restoring health-care services, rebuilding rural infrastructure and accelerating rehabilitation,” Sarma had said.

Four Killed, Several Injured in Explosion at Rod Manufacturing Unit in Assam’s Cachar

Assam Announces Rs.5 Lakh Ex Gratia for Families of Cachar Factory Blast Victims

SILCHAR
At least four workers were killed and several others injured after a powerful explosion ripped through a rod manufacturing unit in Assam’s Cachar district on Sunday, triggering panic and prompting a large-scale rescue operation.

The blast occurred at around 11:30 a.m. at Kade Global Infrastructure LLP in Pangram under the Udharband Police Station area.

According to preliminary reports, the explosion is suspected to have been caused by the blast of an LPG cylinder inside the factory. However, officials said the exact cause will be determined after a detailed investigation.

Police, rescue teams and district officials rushed to the site soon after the

incident and launched rescue and relief operations. The bodies of the deceased workers were recovered from the debris and sent for post-mortem examination.

The injured were shifted to Silchar Medical College and Hospital (SMCH) for treatment, where several were reported to be in critical condition. Officials said the death toll could rise as some of the injured remain in a serious condition.

Following the explosion, police sealed the factory premises to facilitate the investigation and maintain law and order.

Senior officials, including the Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Cachar, the Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) and other security personnel, visited the site to oversee rescue operations and assess the situation.

The incident sparked protests outside the factory, with angry workers and local residents alleging inadequate safety measures at the industrial unit. Protesters blocked the factory gate and demanded adequate compensation for the families of those killed in the explosion.

Security personnel later brought the situation under control.

Several local residents also claimed that the factory is located in a residential



area and alleged that similar accidents had occurred in the past. Family members of some workers further alleged that they were initially prevented from entering the premises to identify their relatives or search for those who might have been trapped inside.

Authorities have launched an investigation to ascertain the cause of the explosion and examine whether safety protocols at the factory were adequately followed.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday announced an

ex gratia of ₹5 lakh each for the families of the four workers who lost their lives in the explosion at Kade Global Infrastructure LLP in Pangram under Udharbond in Cachar district.

The deceased have been identified as Appu Baraik, Kiran Munda, Shyamal Gou and Sagar Nath.

In a post on X, the Chief Minister’s Office expressed grief over the tragedy, stating that the Chief Minister had announced financial assistance of ₹5 lakh for the next of kin of each deceased worker and wished a speedy recovery to those

injured in the incident.

Police said all four workers died on the spot. Their bodies were later shifted to Silchar Medical College and Hospital (SMCH) for post-mortem examination after being identified by their family members.

Udharbond MLA Rajdeep Goala said three of the deceased were residents of the local area, while Sagar Nath, who was employed as a driver, hailed from Tripura.

He said the factory owners, who were reportedly out of station when the explosion occurred, have been directed to appear before investigating authorities on Monday.

Goala further said the Assistant Labour Commissioner would conduct a separate inquiry into workplace conditions, statutory compliance and the safety measures available to workers at the industrial unit.

Meanwhile, Assam Cabinet Minister Kaushik Rai, who visited the accident site, announced that the state government had ordered a magisterial inquiry, a police investigation and a probe by the District Labour Commissioner to determine the cause of the explosion and

examine whether mandatory industrial safety norms had been followed.

Addressing reporters, Rai said the investigations would also verify allegations by local residents that minor explosions had occurred at the factory in the past.

“If such incidents had taken place and were not reported to the administration, that aspect will also be investigated. The inquiries will examine the functioning of the factory, labour safety measures and all circumstances surrounding the tragedy,” he said.

Cachar Police have detained four persons, including the factory manager, for questioning as part of the ongoing investigation.

The district administration has also initiated discussions with the factory management regarding additional compensation for the families of the deceased workers.

The explosion, which occurred on Sunday morning, claimed four lives and left several others injured, with some of the victims undergoing treatment at SMCH. Authorities are continuing investigations to establish the exact cause of the blast and identify any lapses in safety protocols.



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FROM
PROTEST
TO POLICY

The resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has brought to an end one of the most prolonged and politically consequential public agitations in recent memory. For thirty-six days, the national capital became the stage for an escalating confrontation that moved far beyond student demonstrations. It drew in civil society activists, opposition voices, the Prime Minister's direct intervention, sweeping administrative action, and eventually a Cabinet-backed legislative response. What began as outrage over a leaked examination paper evolved into a wider referendum on the credibility of India's examination system and the accountability of institutions entrusted with the aspirations of millions of young people.

The conclusion of the standoff is undoubtedly significant. Yet its importance lies not merely in the resignation of a minister, but in the recognition-however delayed-that governance cannot remain insulated from persistent public concern. After weeks of confrontation, both the government and protest leaders chose negotiation over further escalation. That willingness to engage, even after relations had become deeply adversarial, prevented a crisis of confidence from hardening into a permanent institutional breakdown.

This episode was never solely about the cancellation of a single examination. The NEET-UG controversy became the catalyst because it reflected years of accumulated frustration. Repeated allegations of question paper leaks, irregularities in examination conduct, inconsistent administrative responses, and a growing perception of institutional complacency had steadily eroded public trust. Students preparing for highly competitive examinations invest years of effort, emotional energy and financial resources. When examination integrity comes under question, it is not simply a procedural lapse-it undermines faith in meritocracy itself.

The cancellation of the May 3 examination following the paper leak only intensified these concerns. The subsequent problems surrounding digital evaluation further reinforced the perception that the failures were systemic rather than isolated. Whether or not every administrative error was directly connected became almost irrelevant in the public imagination. Students increasingly viewed the succession of mistakes as evidence of deeper institutional weaknesses.

The judiciary's reluctance to intervene in a manner that satisfied aggrieved students closed off another avenue for immediate relief. As legal remedies appeared limited, frustration naturally shifted to public protest. In democratic societies, such transitions are not unusual. When citizens believe institutional channels have failed to address legitimate concerns, public demonstrations become an instrument of political communication rather than merely dissent.

The turning point came when the agitation expanded beyond students. The sit-in at Jantar Mantar might have remained a focused campaign centred on examination reform. However, the participation of activist Sonam Wangchuk and his decision to undertake an indefinite hunger strike transformed the nature of the movement. Hunger strikes possess a unique moral symbolism in India's political tradition. They shift public attention from policy disagreements to questions of conscience, compelling governments to respond not only politically but ethically.

The decision to hospitalise Wangchuk against the backdrop of his deteriorating health further intensified public emotions. Soon afterward, confrontations during the Parliament march, including police action involving lathi charges and tear gas, generated powerful visual narratives that strengthened rather than weakened the resolve of protesters. History repeatedly demonstrates that excessive force rarely concludes democratic movements; more often, it broadens their appeal by attracting wider public sympathy.

Ironically, it was only after the confrontation reached its peak that meaningful dialogue finally began. That sequence should offer an important lesson for governments. Engagement delayed often becomes engagement under pressure. Had negotiations commenced earlier, considerable political damage and public anxiety might have been avoided.

To the government's credit, the negotiations that followed appear to have produced substantive outcomes rather than symbolic compromises. The discussions reportedly narrowed numerous demands into a manageable set of core issues-ministerial accountability, withdrawal of legal cases against protesters, and support for families affected by the tragedy surrounding the examination crisis. The willingness to withdraw cases and provide compensation represented acknowledgment that reconciliation sometimes requires governments to temper administrative authority with political sensitivity.

Equally significant was the Prime Minister's announcement of tougher anti-paper leak legislation. Provisions prescribing imprisonment of up to ten years and financial penalties reaching Rs 10 crore for organised examination fraud indicate a recognition that examination malpractice is no longer a minor administrative offence but a serious assault on public institutions. The Cabinet's prompt approval of legislative amendments reinforced the message that examination integrity deserves urgent national attention.

Yet stronger laws, while necessary, are only one part of the solution. India has rarely suffered from a shortage of legislation. More often, implementation has proven the greater challenge. Criminal penalties may deter organised cheating networks, but they cannot by themselves eliminate institutional vulnerabilities or administrative complacency.

Encouragingly, the proposed restructuring of the National Testing Agency appears more ambitious than previous reform efforts. Reports suggest that the agency may narrow its responsibilities to higher education entrance examinations, allowing greater operational focus. Recommendations to strengthen technical leadership through specialised recruitment, expand biometric verification, deploy artificial intelligence for monitoring, and improve secure digital transmission on all represent practical responses to vulnerabilities exposed over recent years.

These measures deserve careful implementation rather than hurried announcement. Technological solutions can certainly reduce opportunities for malpractice, but technology itself is not infallible. Artificial intelligence, biometric authentication and encrypted systems are effective only when supported by competent personnel, transparent oversight and regular independent audits. Otherwise, new technologies merely replace old vulnerabilities with more sophisticated ones. Institutional culture also requires attention. Accountability cannot stop with the dismissal of officials after crises emerge. Preventive accountability is equally important. Regular security assessments, transparent reporting mechanisms, whistleblower protections and clearly defined chains of responsibility should become permanent features of examination administration rather than emergency responses after scandals occur.

QUOTE OF THE DAY
Being positive in a negative situation is not naive. It's leadership
- Ralph Marston

The Jantar
Mantar agitation
and the Hubbris



ANAND NEELAKANTAN

There is something profoundly moving, and deeply damning, about the sight unfolding at Jantar Mantar. To see the 16-or 17-year-old kids standing eye-to-eye with heavily armed riot police fills me with shame at what we have become as a country. As expected, there are no children of the politicians of any political party out there, braving the lathis and tear gas. The politicians know how broken our system is and have sent their kids abroad to countries that are not viswagurus to get a decent education. It is the children of the middle class and lower middle class who are out there in the open, with their frail shoulders bearing the weight of a broken promise. Meanwhile, the generation that came before them, their parents and grand-parents, the comfortable middle-aged demographic that has crossed 40—indulges in blind, cringeworthy support of authority. No one is accountable for anything in this La La Land of WhatsApp uncles and aunts except the long-dead Nehru, Aurangazeb, Akbar, and Alauddin Khalji.

These much-derided Gen Z kids, the very same reel-obsessed, non-reading children, possess far more moral courage than the older generations who routinely lecture them. Their numbers on the street may appear modest for now, but the fire in their eyes should alarm anyone who understands history.

Instead of opening doors for honest engagement, the state has chosen its default response of police barricades, tear gas canisters, and lathi charges. When educator Sonam Wangchuk is forced into a fast unto death alongside student movements like the Cockroach Janta Party to protest back-to-back examination paper leaks, the response of a mature republic should be open dialogue. Peaceful protest is the essential safety valve of a constitutional democracy. When a government clamps down on that safety valve, it creates a volatile pressure cooker. Suppressing legitimate dissent does not eliminate anger; it drives it underground, creating a vacuum that fissiparous agencies and hostile foreign adversaries are always eager to exploit.

It remains utterly baffling why a government that has effectively decimated the formal political opposition feels the need to adopt such strong-man tactics against teenagers. Why are rulers who command absolute power so terrified of a few students on the street? The answer lies in the classic, intoxicating disease of political hubris. Rulers forget that the seeds of a regime's collapse are almost always sown at the precise moment it feels completely invincible.

History is ruthless toward such arrogance. The Mughal Empire reached its absolute geographical zenith under Aurangzeb, only to fracture into irrelevance almost immediately after his death. The Congress party won the largest parliamentary mandate in Indian history under Rajiv Gandhi in 1984, yet that colossal majority marked the beginning of its long, irreversible structural decline. World history tells the exact same tale. The Romanov dy-

nasty in Russia celebrated three centuries of unchecked autocratic rule with breathtaking splendour in 1913, oblivious to the starved, angry populace that would tear down the empire just four years later. The Soviet Union appeared monolithic and unshakable at the peak of its Cold War power, yet it dissolved overnight because its internal rot was ignored.

Perhaps the ruling elite believes this current storm will simply pass. The men running the state are well past their 60s and 70s and have smartly secured the future of their many generations. These geriatrics look at these protesting kids and see only the much-derided Gen Z. They view them as soft, privileged, screen-obsessed brats who cannot sustain a real fight and will run home at the first whiff of tear gas. They think that at the first sight of police, Gen Z would write abject apology letters and run home as many did during our freedom struggle.

They forget that even when an imperial Britain ruled, for every one who wrote apology letters or colluded with the British, there were hundreds who braved the lathis and jails of a superpower that ruled half the world, and that is how we won our Independence. The DNA of these great-grandparents who fought the British could have skipped a generation or two, as it did for this writer's generation, but it has to suffice somewhere.

Most of these kids who are protesting are not hardened political operatives or funded provocateurs. They are middle-class and lower-mid-

dle-class kids whose families pooled their life savings to pay for competitive exam coaching, only to watch question papers leak back-to-back while the state looks the other way. They are not asking much, other than to give them a fair system and show some accountability. When the police personnel, who also belong to the same social class as most of these kids, go home after beating the teenagers to pulp, how are they going to face their own kids? We can only hope that their training has made them sufficiently inhumane to be immune to the accusatory glances of their children. Let's hope the police and RPF don't lose sleep over such trivial things. They were just doing their duty, though the duty turned out to be beating up kids.

Mass movements are inherently unpredictable. Most likely, the establishment calculated correctly: the police force will wear the children down, the street protests will fizzle out, and our parliamentarians can comfortably return to their vital work.

They can spend endless legislative hours debating whether to make the singing of Vande Mataram compulsory in every hall instead of debating education or the lack of the promised two crore jobs per year. That is, after all, the fastest route to becoming a viswaguru.

Yet, in the remote chance that this spark catches fire, and the old men in power have severely underestimated the resilience of Gen Z, events could rapidly spiral out of control. We may either be witnessing the dawn of a new, uncompromising Indian politi-

cal consciousness, or entering a deeply chaotic period of unrest. A smart government does not roll the dice on its own stability. A smart government would hold the paper-leak syndicates

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

AND FINALLY....
I'm being discharged from the hospital. Will be going to Rajghat to pay tribute to Mahatma Gandhi and then back to the mountains. Thank you all and BIG THANK YOU to the wonderful team of doctors and staff at Medanta Hospital Gurgaon.

~ Sonam Wangchuk,
Education reformer



accountable, invite student representatives to the table, listen to Sonam Wangchuk, and dismantle the grievances driving the street protests.

An oversmart government, however, believes that a few lathi charges, a well-timed media blitz, and the old reliable playbook of religious polarisation and hyper-nationalism will suffice. Supported by a pliant media ecosystem, largely owned by the crony capitalists who bankroll political parties, this path seems effortless on paper. You simply label the protesting kids as foreign agents or anti-nationals, parade a few distractions on prime-time television, and carry on as usual. If these students are genuinely funded by foreign powers, the government commands the entire apparatus of the state—the CBI, the ED, and national intelligence—to arrest and prosecute them. Running whisper campaigns without judicial proof only proves that the administration has no answers for the exam paper leakages that ruined young lives. Since most of these kids or their parents don't have the means or might to take on the powerful establishment or hold them accountable, this will likely fizzle out this time, as it often does.



NFR Intensifies Restoration Work as Floods Disrupt Rail Services Across Assam

GUWAHATI

The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has stepped up restoration efforts across flood-affected rail sections in Assam after heavy rainfall, flooding and landslides disrupted train services in Upper Assam and the Lumding-Badarpur hill section. According to NFR Chief Public Relations Officer Kapinjal Kishore Sharma, restoration work is being carried out on a war footing in the Tinsukia Division, where railway embankments and track formations have suffered extensive damage due to incessant rain.

More than 700 labourers, supported by heavy machinery including Poclains and JCB excavators, have been deployed across affected locations. Railway teams are continuously transporting ballast, boulders, sandbags, stone dust and rails to



reinforce damaged formations and restore normal operations at the earliest.

Between Simalguri and Lakwa, engineers are undertaking cess protection and strengthening works, with ballast

rakes positioned at the site and boulders being unloaded to stabilise the damaged embankments. Restoration is also in progress on the Simalguri-Namtiali stretch, where railway personnel are reinforcing

the track formation with stone dust and boulders to facilitate the reopening of the route.

In the Amguri-Selenghat section, teams are using sandbags, bamboo piling and rail piling to strengthen vulnerable portions of the track, while similar protection measures are underway between Simalguri and Sibsagar Town, supported by continuous ballast mobilisation. Senior officials of the Tinsukia Division are closely monitoring the restoration work to ensure coordinated deployment of resources and strict adherence to safety standards.

Meanwhile, train operations on the strategically important Lumding-Badarpur Hill Section under the Lumding Division remain restricted after railway tracks on Lines 1 and 2 near New Haranga-jao station in Dima Hasao district settled due to heavy rainfall. At present, all train

movements are being routed through Line 3 under enhanced safety monitoring. As a precaution, train services through the affected stretch have been suspended during night hours from 7 p.m. to 5 a.m., while daytime operations continue under regulated conditions with continuous monitoring.

The restrictions have led to the cancellation, rescheduling and regulation of several trains operating on the Lumding-Badarpur route. Railway engineers and maintenance teams continue to work round the clock to restore the affected tracks, with NFR expressing confidence that normal services will resume once safety and operational standards are fully met. Officials noted that the Lumding-Badarpur hill section, located in Assam's Dima Hasao district, is particularly vulnerable during the monsoon months from

June to September, when landslides, soil erosion and waterlogging frequently damage railway infrastructure.

Disruptions on this corridor often affect rail connectivity to several northeastern states, including Tripura, Mizoram and Manipur, besides parts of southern Assam, impacting passenger travel and the movement of essential commodities.

The restoration drive comes as Assam continues to battle a severe flood situation. According to the latest official figures, floods have affected 10 districts and around 810 villages, with nearly 1.15 lakh people taking shelter in relief camps. The flood-related death toll has crossed 62, while Sivasagar, Charaideo and Jorhat remain among the worst-hit districts. The Dikhou, Disang and Dhansiri rivers continue to flow above the danger level, further worsening the flood situation.

Arunachal Home Minister Dismisses Chinese Encroachment Claims, Calls Reports 'Baseless Rumours'

ITANAGAR

Arunachal Pradesh Home Minister Mama Natung has categorically denied reports of alleged Chinese encroachment in the Taksing sector of Upper Subansiri district, describing the claims as "lies and social media rumours" and asserting that there has been no intrusion by the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) into the state.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the Kargil Vijay Diwas commemorations in Itanagar on Sunday, Natung said India's borders in Arunachal Pradesh remain secure and are being vigilantly guarded by the armed forces. "There has been no encroachment in Arunachal Pradesh by the Chinese. All these are just lies and social media rumours. Our jawans are protecting our border continuously. No Chinese would dare encroach into Indian territory, and I can assure you that these are all rumours and nothing else," the minister said. Natung also highlighted the close co-operation between residents of border villages and the Indian Army, stating that the people of Arunachal Pradesh remain committed to safeguarding the country's territorial integrity. "The people of Arunachal Pradesh are always with the Indian Army and are ready to shed blood to protect the country," he added. The minister's remarks came in response to allegations made by the Nah Welfare Society (NWS), which claimed that Chinese military activities near the Taksing sector had intensified over the past 15 years.

The organisation alleged that the PLA had gradually expanded its military infrastructure and established outposts closer to the border. It also claimed to have submitted representations on the issue to constitutional authorities and elected representatives in the past.

Manipur CM Inaugurates School Library, Reviews Ongoing Education Infrastructure Projects

IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Sunday inaugurated a newly constructed library at Heirangoi-thong High School and reviewed the progress of infrastructure development at Singjamei Chingamakha High School, reaffirming the state government's commitment to strengthening educational facilities.

The Chief Minister inaugurated the library building at Heirangoi-thong High School in the presence of Manipur Public Service Commission (MPSC) Secretary Neeta Arambam, Director of Education (Schools) Ng. Bhogendra Meetei, the school's Head Mistress and other officials.

Addressing the gathering, Singh highlighted the importance of libraries in fostering a culture of reading and lifelong learning among students. He said the new facility would help students develop reading habits, broaden their knowledge and

build a strong academic foundation.

Describing the library as a step towards creating a knowledge-driven society, the Chief Minister said investments in educational infrastructure are essential for preparing the younger generation to contribute to Manipur's future development.

Later, Singh visited Singjamei Chingamakha High School to inspect the construction of new school buildings being undertaken by the Education Department.

Reviewing the progress of the project, the Chief Minister expressed satisfaction with the pace of work and said the construction was progressing according to schedule. He added that the project is expected to be completed within the stipulated timeframe. The visits reflect the Manipur government's continued focus on upgrading school infrastructure, improving learning environments and enhancing the quality of education across the state.

CM Himanta Biswa Sarma confirms 66 deaths; BJP to raise Rs 12 crore for relief material



KAMRUP

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma provided a grim update on the flood situation in the state, confirming that the death toll has risen to 66. Speaking to the media, the Chief Minister also announced a massive relief drive

spearheaded by the State BJP to provide essential clothing to those affected in the worst-hit districts.

Speaking on the casualties, CM Sarma stated, "So far, 66 persons, including one person in Guwahati Urban, have died in floods in the state."

Detailing the relief operations,

the Chief Minister appealed for a collective effort from party workers to assist those in distress.

"I appeal to all BJP workers of Assam to get involved in flood relief operations. From the Assam State BJP, we have decided to provide 2 lakh Mekhela-Chador to 2 lakh women and clothes to 2 lakh children who have been affected by the flood. We need Rs 12 crore for it," he said.

To meet the financial target for this initiative, the CM outlined a structured donation process for party members. "I appeal to the BJP Karyakartas, who want to donate below Rs 2000, to give the amount to their local MLAs, and those who want to donate above Rs 2000 can deposit their cheques to the party's account number, and we will give the account number on social media," Sarma added.

He expressed confidence that the funds would be raised quickly through the support of party members both within and outside the state. "We have targeted to collect

Rs 12 crore for it. BJP Karyakartas will help to collect this amount.

BJP Karyakartas from various parts of Assam and outside Assam have assured us to help us. We are very much hopeful that within the next 4-5 days we will be able to collect this amount and to help the flood-affected people of Sivasagar, Charaideo, Golaghat, and Jorhat districts," he said.

Earlier in the day, the Chief Minister attended a screening of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Mann Ki Baat' in the Azara Taluk area.

Noting the significance of the day, which coincides with Kargil Vijay Diwas, the CM paid a heartfelt tribute to the fallen soldiers.

"Today we listened to PM Mann Ki Baat at the Azara Taluk area along with local people. Today is Kargil Vijay Diwas, and I pay my tributes to the martyrs of the Kargil war. I also pay my tributes to Assam's son Captain Jintu Gogoi, who was also martyred in the Kargil war," the CM said.

PM Modi Hails Manipur Astrophysicist, Citizen-Led Initiatives in 136th 'Mann Ki Baat'

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday highlighted achievements in science, environmental conservation and community-led development from across the country during the 136th episode of his monthly radio programme, Mann Ki Baat, praising Manipur-born astrophysicist Dr Ronaldo Laishram and several grassroots initiatives.

Among the highlights, the Prime Minister commended Dr Ronaldo Laishram, who is currently based in Japan, for being part of an international team of researchers that discovered a large cluster of young galaxies.

Referring to the achievement, Modi said the newly identified galaxy cluster has been named the Loktak Proto-Cluster, after Manipur's iconic Loktak Lake.

"I would like to tell you all



about Dr Ronaldo Laishram from Manipur. His name is Ronaldo, but he is an astrophysicist. He works in Japan and was part of the team that discovered a large cluster of young galaxies. They named this entire cluster the Loktak Proto-Cluster, after a beautiful lake in Manipur," the Prime Minister said during the

broadcast.

Modi also highlighted a "Waste to Wealth" initiative in Bihar's Sitamarhi district, where discarded plastic waste is being recycled into benches for installation in public spaces. He described the project as an example of sustainable resource management and community-driven

innovation.

Turning to wildlife conservation, the Prime Minister noted the return of the Indian Grey Hornbill to the Gir forests in Gujarat after nearly six decades, calling it a significant milestone for biodiversity conservation.

He further praised a mass plantation drive in Ahmedabad, where more than 3.5 lakh saplings were planted in the Bhaif area within a single hour. Modi said the campaign reflected the growing spirit of public participation in environmental protection.

Through the latest edition of Mann Ki Baat, the Prime Minister showcased examples of scientific excellence, ecological conservation and grassroots innovation, underscoring the role of individual achievements and community initiatives in advancing the country's development.

Papon Appeals for Aid as Assam Flood Death Toll Reaches 68

GUWAHATI

Renowned Assamese singer Papon has appealed to people across India and abroad to support relief efforts for flood-affected communities in Assam, describing this year's deluge as one of the worst the state has witnessed in recent times.

In a video message shared on social media platform X, the singer highlighted the scale of devastation caused by the floods, saying thousands of families have lost their homes and livelihoods.

"It rains a lot here, there are floods, but you can't imagine the situation this time," Papon said, adding that entire villages remain submerged and many people have been left with nothing.

Describing the humanitarian crisis, he said several lives had been lost, many people were still unaccounted for and large numbers of animals had perished in the disaster.

"So many animals have died. It's a bad situation," he said, urging people to spread awareness and extend support to those affected.

Calling for collective action, Papon appealed for immediate assistance to strengthen ongoing relief efforts.



"It's humanity... we all must come together. If you want to help, please come forward," he said, noting that volunteers and relief workers on the ground require wider public support.

According to the latest bulletin issued by the Disaster Reporting and Information Management System (DRIMS), the flood-related death toll in Assam has risen to 68, while more than 5.24 lakh people continue to remain affected across several districts despite a gradual improvement in the overall flood situation.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sar-

ma said the state government is shifting its focus from emergency response to restoration and rehabilitation, with ministers set to visit flood-hit districts after the ongoing Assembly session to supervise sector-wise recovery work.

The government is also working to restore electricity in affected areas where power supply had been suspended as a precautionary measure during the floods.

Officials of the Assam Power Distribution Company Limited (APDCL) are conducting safety inspections before

reconnecting electricity in districts including Sivasagar, Jorhat, Charaideo, Dhubri and Bongaigaon.

"As Assam steadily recovers from the floods, power restoration efforts continue across affected districts," Sarma said, adding that the government remained committed to restoring essential services and assisting affected communities in returning to normal life.

Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal described the flood situation in Assam as "very serious" and said the Centre and the state government were jointly carrying out rescue, relief and rehabilitation operations.

He said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been closely monitoring the situation since the floods began and has remained in regular contact with the Chief Minister.

"The flood situation in Assam is very serious," Sonowal said, adding that the Centre has been extending full support to the state in relief distribution and rescue operations.

According to the Union Minister, the Prime Minister also spoke to him on Sunday morning to review the ground situation and assured all possible assistance for the flood-hit state.

Sonowal further said a high-level inter-ministerial team has already reached Assam to assess the extent of the damage, interact with affected residents and recommend additional support measures as restoration efforts continue.



IMPHAL

Manipur observed Kargil Vijay Diwas with a state-level ceremony in Imphal, where Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla and Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh paid tribute to the soldiers who laid down their lives during the 1999 Kargil War. The commemorative programme, held at the Manipur State Film Development Society, brought together government officials, military personnel, ex-servicemen and families of martyrs to honour the courage and sacrifice of the Indian Armed Forces.

Addressing the gathering, Governor Bhalla remembered the valour of the Kargil heroes and praised the armed forces for their unwavering commitment to safeguarding the country's sovereignty. He also acknowledged their role in national security, including during Operation Sindoor.

The Governor paid special tribute to Veer Naris and Veer Matas, recognising their resilience and the sacrifices made by the families of fallen soldiers. Describing Kargil Vijay Diwas as a symbol of patriotism, sacrifice and

national pride, Bhalla urged citizens to honour the memory of the martyrs and extend support to their families. Highlighting Manipur's longstanding contribution to the Indian Armed Forces, he encouraged the state's youth to uphold the values of discipline, dedication and patriotism by serving the nation. Emphasising that national security is a collective responsibility, the Governor called upon citizens to work towards strengthening peace, harmony and national integration as the country advances towards the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047. Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh also attended the ceremony and joined the Governor in paying homage to the brave soldiers who made the supreme sacrifice during the Kargil conflict.

The programme featured patriotic performances by artistes from Shri Shri Bal Mukunda Dev Government Music College, Imphal. It was attended by members of the Manipur Legislative Assembly, senior civil, military and police officials, ex-servicemen, Veer Naris, Veer Matas and families of martyrs.

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Congress MPs protest alleged ‘police brutality’ against NEET protesters, seek Shah’s apology

NEW DELHI

Congress MPs, led by party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, staged a protest in the Parliament House complex on Monday, alleging “police brutality” against students during demonstrations over the NEET paper leak issue and demanding an apology from Home Minister Amit Shah.

Carrying placards and a large banner, the MPs gathered near the steps of Makar Dwar in Parliament and raised slogans seeking answers from the home minister over the alleged police action against protesting

students. Congress MPs Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Imran Pratapgarhi, Sanjana Jatav, and others, stage a protest during the Monsoon session of Parliament, in New Delhi, Monday, July 27, 2026.

The Congress-led Opposition is expected to continue pressing the government in Parliament on the issue, seeking action against those responsible for the alleged assault on students and demanding apologies from Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Shah. Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi has written to Shah, seeking accountability for what he described as a “barbaric

assault” on peaceful protesters. He also questioned whether the home minister had approved the use of “lethal force”, including pellet guns.

In his letter, Gandhi said peaceful protest was a key part of democracy and that the government’s responsibility was to protect demonstrators and address their concerns through dialogue.

“Such brutal violence destroys every norm, and has outraged the country. Youth and students, the future of our country, are demanding answers and accountability. Their voice will be heard,” the former Congress president said.

NEET protests: SC says right to peaceful protest is guaranteed, to hear police excesses pleas Tuesday



NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday said the right to peaceful protest is “absolutely guaranteed” as it agreed to hear on Tuesday a batch of petitions alleging police excesses against students protesting the NEET paper leak and other examination irregularities across the country.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana also agreed to hear a separate plea filed by family members of police personnel who were allegedly attacked during the protests along with the other pending petitions.

“The Right to peaceful protest is absolutely guaranteed. That cannot be denied. Merely because there is agitation cannot justify police excesses,” the CJI said.

CJI Kant also clarified that the life of every individual, including police personnel, is equally important.

The Court further directed that all the connected petitions be listed together on July 28 for hearing.

Justice Bagchi stressed that injuries to individuals, whether students or policemen, are of equal concern and questioned why police personnel were not adequately equipped, such as with helmets, to manage such situations.

The petitions, including one filed by advocate Shailendra Mani Tripathi, sought comprehensive guidelines to regulate police conduct during public protests. The plea sought a ban on the deployment of plainclothes personnel for crowd control, stricter norms for imposing prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), which replaced Section 144 of the CrPC, and an independent investigation into the police action in Delhi on July 20.

Tripathi also sought establishing strict constitutional thresholds for the invocation of Section 152 of the BNS (Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita) 2023, clarifying that no person shall be prosecuted under this section for political dissent, academic critique, peaceful protest, or criticism of the government unless there is a direct, proximate,

and imminent incitement to armed rebellion or secessionist violence.

The petitioners have sought appropriate directions and orders from the top court for independent probe into the police action.

Out of the two pleas, one sought a high-powered Judicial Commission or a Special Investigation Team (SIT) headed by a retired Judge of this Court in the case.

“The SC should direct for an independent, high-powered Judicial Commission or a SIT headed by a retired Judge of this court to investigate the physical excesses, gender-based violence, kinetic brutalities, and arbitrary detentions committed by the Delhi Police and other security personnel during the CJP Parliament March on July 20, 2026, and to direct the prosecution and suspension of all delinquent officers identified,” the plea said.

The NEET paper leak controversy has led to widespread and severe protests in Jantar Mantar and many other places – including major cities

like, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Patna and Guwahati – across the country demanding the immediate resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, over the alleged NEET exam paper leak case. The protesters also demand scrapping the exam and fixing accountability on NTA.

During the protest march held on Monday July 20 at Jantar Mantar, the police had lathi charged CJP (Cockroach Janata Party) protesters and students and fired tear gas shells.

It is also to be noted that the Supreme Court is already hearing several petitions on alleged irregularities in NEET-UG and the functioning of NTA.

“There should be a direction for immediate, time-bound, and literal implementation of the police reform directives laid down in Prakash Singh versus Union of India (2006), specifically the establishment of fully functional, independent, and structurally empowered State and District Police Complaints Authorities (PCAs) whose recommendations for disciplinary and criminal action against delinquent officers shall be binding,” the plea added. Tripathi also sought that the Cente should introduce mandatory, structured, and periodical training programs for all police all personnel on human rights, gender-sensitive crowd policing, conflict de-escalation, and non-lethal crowd control methods, in line with the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force.

The plea also sought direction to the respondent No. 3, Delhi police (Commissioner of Police, Delhi) to immediately register a First Information Report (FIR) under the relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023— including sections corresponding to sexual harassment, assault, and use of criminal force with intent to outrage the modesty of a woman -- against the delinquent police personnel, and to identify, suspend, and initiate criminal prosecution against the officers who subjected female protesters to physical and sexual abuse during the protest on July 20, 2026.

INTERNATIONAL

In Israel vote, ex-army chief emerges as main rival to Netanyahu



JERUSALEM

As Israel heads into a fiercely contested general election on October 27, former military chief Gadi Eisenkot has emerged as the principal challenger to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Eisenkot’s rise comes at a pivotal moment in Israeli politics, with the election widely viewed as a referendum on the long-serving premier’s leadership in the violent aftermath of Hamas’s October 7, 2023, attack on Israel.

A recent Channel 12 poll put Eisenkot’s new party, Yashar (Hebrew for “Straight” or “Upright”), ahead of Netanyahu’s Likud, projecting 23 seats to Likud’s 22 in the 120-member Knesset.

The same survey found that 43 per cent of respondents considered Eisenkot, 66, the most suitable candidate for prime minister, compared with 34 per cent for Netanyahu.

Eisenkot -- who has dismissed calls for a future Palestinian state as irrelevant after the October 7 attacks and pioneered Israel’s strategy of disproportionate military responses in Lebanon -- has built his campaign around a 10-point platform that he says will restore Israel’s security, unity and democratic institutions.

Chief of staff of the Israeli military

between 2015 and 2019, Eisenkot was among those credited with developing the “Dahiya Doctrine”, named after a Beirut suburb that is a Hezbollah stronghold.

Advanced on the premise that Hezbollah conceals fighters and weapons among civilian homes and infrastructure, the doctrine calls for a devastating Israeli response against enemy population centres when Israeli communities come under long-range attack.

At the top of his civilian manifesto is a pledge to establish a state commission of inquiry into Hamas’s bloody 2023 cross-border attack, which triggered the Gaza war and quickly expanded into a broader regional conflict, and which led to Netanyahu’s government being accused of overseeing an intelligence failure.

Former military chief Gadi Eisenkot has emerged as the principal challenger to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Tens of thousands of Israelis have repeatedly demonstrated in support of such an inquiry, but Netanyahu’s coalition has instead proposed a commission whose members would be chosen by politicians.

Eisenkot also promises a “new long-term national security doctrine” aimed at strengthening the military and rein-

forcing Israel’s borders.

A central plank of this is a “universal national service law” that would extend compulsory service to ultra-Orthodox Jews and Arab citizens.

He has also pledged to “protect judicial independence, the rule of law, minority rights and a free press.”

“Through these steps, we will ensure that Israel is a Jewish, democratic, powerful, advanced and secure state,” Eisenkot’s campaign says.

His overall position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, however, remains less clearly defined.

“The only signal that he sent was that Israel should be a state of law,” said Tal Elovits, a researcher at Israeli think tank Molad. “Therefore, illegal settlements and settlers’ violence will be dealt with.”

Relatively new to politics, Eisenkot has attracted widespread public sympathy after his son, Gal, and two nephews were killed fighting in Gaza.

Eisenkot’s call for universal military service has become a defining issue of his campaign, putting him at the forefront of opposition to Netanyahu’s alliance with ultra-Orthodox parties.

Eisenkot has repeatedly attacked Netanyahu’s agreement with his coalition partners to advance legislation

exempting many Haredi men from military service.

“This is a government that chooses to weaken the army in the midst of a brutal war, while the finest sons and daughters of this nation are deployed across all fronts,” he wrote, in a social media post.

Former military chief Gadi Eisenkot has emerged as the principal challenger to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Unlike Netanyahu, who comes from one of Israel’s elite families, Eisenkot is the son of Moroccan immigrants and grew up on the country’s geographic periphery.

“In a political universe full of Netanyahu wannabes... Eisenkot reads as a man of a different generation, far more connected to the traditional security narratives of Zionism,” columnist Nadav Eyal wrote in a recent blog.

Eisenkot’s understated style could prove to be one of his strongest political assets, said Elovits.

“The middle class and upper middle class... look for someone that will look responsible, boring, and I think that Eisenkot has that appeal,” he said.

Although opposition leaders Yair Lapid and Naftali Bennett remain in contention, current polling suggests neither is as well positioned as Eisenkot to defeat Netanyahu.

Lapid and Bennett governed together between 2021 and 2022 in a coalition that included an Arab party.

According to Elovits, many disillusioned right-wing voters still see that alliance as a “betrayal”, making them unlikely to return to Bennett.

“Many voters of the right wing who do not like what Netanyahu is doing... are looking for a home. And a reasonable house for them today is Gadi Eisenkot,” said Gayil Talshir, a political science professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

For liberal centrist voters, Eisenkot increasingly represents the opposition candidate with the strongest chance of unseating Netanyahu.

“Once Eisenkot began to rise above Bennett in the polls, the strategic voters of the liberal camp went with Eisenkot,” Talshir said.

French authorities say 220,000 now evacuated from biggest forest fire



BORDEAUX

French authorities said Sunday that more than 220,000 people have now been evacuated from the main forest fire raging in the southwest of the country that has also forced the closure of highways and rail lines.

More than 50,000 additional people have been ordered to leave villages around Bordeaux, which is now under threat from the flames, bringing the total evacuated from this single fire above 220,000. Tens of thousands more have been evacuated from other wildfires in France and central

Spain.

Because of the spread of the flames in high winds, 60 kilometers (37 miles) of the main A63 highway from Bordeaux to the Spanish border has been closed because of the fires, regional authorities said. The SNCF rail company said it had also halted train traffic south of Bordeaux.

The fire “will take a long time to bring under control” and until it is contained “there will be no return” for evacuated residents and tourists, Interior Minister Laurent Nunez said in an interview published Sunday by La Tribune.

The regional prefecture said that the fire has now burned some 42,000 hectares (103,000 acres) of land, making it one of the biggest in France since World War II. A 1949 fire devastated some 50,000 hectares.

The French army has sent 1,500 soldiers to help hundreds of exhausted firefighters who have been battling the flames for nearly a week.

Heat from the flames was causing whirlwinds that had made the wildfire “erratic and unmanageable”, said firefighter captain Nicolas Braz, one of the leaders of the operation.

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mir, a soldier begins his day with physical training and games. These are not merely routines, they are investments in strength, endurance, flexibility, discipline, and mental resilience.

Rain or shine, blistering heat or freezing snow, the soldier trains because he knows that fitness is not an event it is a way of life.

Retirement from the Armed Forces does not mean retirement from life. The uniform may come off, but the discipline should never fade. As veterans, we must continue to keep ourselves physically active through regular walks, exercise, yoga, or sports. Equally important, however, is keeping the mind active, and one of the simplest and most effective ways to do so is by writing with a pen every day.

Recently, I read an article in a medical journal recommending that veterans should write by hand every day, even if it is only five lines. This simple habit helps preserve fine motor skills, maintains steady handwriting, improves coordination between the brain and the hand, and may reduce the chances of hand tremors as we age. More importantly, when the moment comes to sign an important document, fill out a bank cheque, or write a heartfelt letter, our hands respond with confidence rather than hesitation.

Writing is not merely putting ink on paper. It is an exercise for the brain. Every written word activates memory, concentration, creativity, and emotional expression. It keeps the mind engaged and alert.

This message is equally important for the younger generation.

Today's youth have become almost entirely dependent on laptops, tablets, and mobile phones. While technology has transformed our lives, it should never replace the timeless skill of handwriting. Studies have

consistently shown that writing by hand improves learning, strengthens memory, sharpens concentration, and stimulates creativity in ways that typing often cannot.

I would encourage every young person to spend just ten minutes each day with a notebook and pen. Write your thoughts, your dreams, your daily experiences, or simply your gratitude. These few minutes will strengthen not only your handwriting but also your ability to think clearly and express yourself effectively.

For veterans, writing is another way of serving the nation. Our experiences, lessons from service, leadership, courage, sacrifices, and values are a priceless legacy. If we do not write them down, an important part of our nation's history may be lost forever.

As soldiers, we trained our bodies every day. As veterans, we must now train both our body and our mind every day. A brisk walk keeps the legs moving, a pen keeps the mind alive.

Remember:
“A soldier never truly retires, he simply changes his battlefield.”

Today, our battlefield is against inactivity, loneliness, forgetfulness, and ageing. Our weapons are discipline, exercise, reading, writing, and a positive attitude.

Let us inspire the next generation not only through our stories but also through our example.

Pick up a pen.
Write five lines every day.
Walk a few kilometres.
Read a few pages.
Learn something new.

Because an active body gives strength, an active mind gives purpose, and an active pen leaves behind a legacy.

“The hand that once defended the nation should never stop writing its story.”

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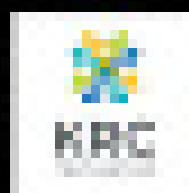


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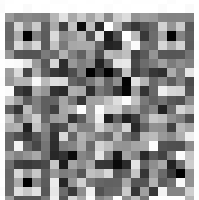


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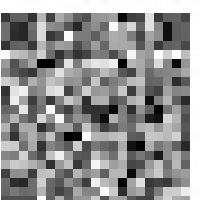


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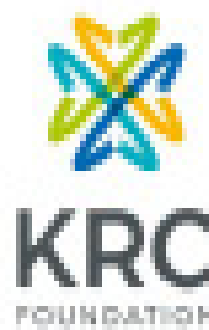
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