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## PERSPECTIVE

The best thing in life is finding someone who knows all your flaws, mistakes, and weaknesses, and still thinks you're completely amazing.

### Assam Cabinet Restricts Govt Land Eligibility to Families With Three Generations of Residency

GUWAHATI

The Assam Cabinet has approved a significant amendment to the state's land settlement policy, restricting eligibility for government land allotment to families that have been residing in Assam for at least three generations.

Announcing the decision after a Cabinet meeting on Friday, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the revised definition of a "landless person" would apply specifically to the settlement of government land across the state.

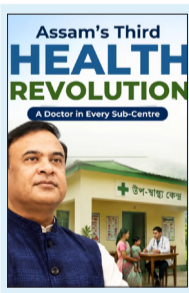
Under the amended policy, only those families able to establish residency in Assam for three generations will qualify for government land settlement benefits. However, the Cabinet has made an exception for refugees who entered Assam before March 24, 1971.

The Chief Minister said such refugees would continue to remain eligible for government land allotment even if they do not meet the three-generation residency criterion, provided they can produce valid documentary evidence establishing their status and period of migration.

The move is expected to have a significant bearing on future land settlement policies and beneficiary identification processes, particularly in a state where issues relating to land rights, migration and indigenous interests have remained politically sensitive for decades.

Apart from the land policy amendment, the Cabinet approved the revalidation of administrative sanction amounting to Rs 474.25 crore for the construction of a four-lane flyover at Mission Chariali in Tezpur.

#### WHO SAID WHAT



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#AssamBudget2026

~ Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM, Assam

# Assam Budget 2026-27 Bets on Semiconductors, Gaming and Green Energy to Create Future Jobs

GUWAHATI

The Assam Budget 2026-27 has unveiled an ambitious employment strategy that goes beyond conventional government recruitment, seeking to prepare the state's youth for opportunities in emerging sectors such as semiconductors, advanced manufacturing, animation and gaming, green energy, and global healthcare services.

While the government has reaffirmed its commitment to creating two lakh jobs in the broader public sector ecosystem over the next five years, the Budget signals a significant shift in focus towards building a workforce equipped for a rapidly evolving economy.

Presenting the Budget in the Assembly, Finance Minister Jayanta Mallabrah highlighted the government's record in public sector recruitment, noting that more than 1.64 lakh appointments had already been made through the State Level Recruitment Commissions (SLRC) over the past five years, surpassing the earlier target of one lakh jobs.

Building on that achievement, the government has now set a new target of generating two lakh employment oppor-



tunities across government departments, universities, medical colleges, statutory bodies, state-owned enterprises, societies and Sixth Schedule institutions.

"The Government had promised one lakh jobs, and we have exceeded that commitment by providing over 1.64 lakh appointments in the last five years. Building on this achievement, we are now entering the next phase of employment generation," Mallabrah said.

A task force headed by the Chief Secretary has been constituted to prepare a roadmap for achieving the target. The government plans not only to fill existing vacancies but also to create new positions in sectors such as healthcare, education, policing, forestry and revenue

administration. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said employment generation would not be confined to traditional government recruitment.

"We will create jobs in different sectors and empower the youth," Sarma said during a post-budget press conference at the Assam Legislative Assembly.

**Focus on New-Economy Industries**

A key feature of the Budget is its emphasis on industries that were largely absent from Assam's economic landscape a decade ago. Among the most notable initiatives is the state's push to develop a semiconductor ecosystem. Backed by support from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Assam plans to invest in skill development and infrastructure needed for semiconductor manufacturing and allied industries.

The sector is expected to create opportunities for engineers, technicians, quality-control specialists, logistics professionals and supply-chain managers, marking a move towards high-value manufacturing and technology-driven employment.

The government has also proposed the development of industrial parks in

every district, a measure aimed at attracting manufacturing units, logistics operators and export-oriented businesses. These industrial hubs, together with the proposed Aeropolis project under the Asom Nagar Unnayan Abhiyan, are expected to generate employment across a wide spectrum of skill categories.

The Budget also reflects a growing recognition that future employment opportunities may increasingly lie beyond Assam and even outside India.

To improve overseas employability, the government has proposed foreign language training and specialised spoken English programmes for nurses and healthcare professionals. The initiative is intended to help Assamese youth access opportunities in countries facing healthcare workforce shortages, including Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom and several Gulf nations.

The state's employment roadmap further includes support for emerging sectors such as AVGC-XR - Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, Comics and Extended Reality - which are among the fastest-growing creative industries globally.

of violence and to reassure local residents. The attack has triggered concern among security agencies operating in Manipur, where forces have remained on high alert amid continuing efforts to restore peace and normalcy following months of ethnic unrest and sporadic militant activity. Meanwhile, the National Socialist Council of Nagalim-Isak Muivah (NSCN (IM)) has denied any role in the ambush.

In a statement issued after the attack, the Naga insurgent group said it had no connection with the incident and reiterated its commitment to the ceasefire agreement signed with the Centre and the ongoing peace process. The organisation also condemned actions that could undermine dialogue efforts and urged all stakeholders to act responsibly in the interest of maintaining peace and stability in the region.

Security agencies have not officially attributed responsibility for the ambush to any particular militant group and investigations into the incident are continuing.

The latest operation comes amid intensified security measures across Manipur, where forces have been conducting regular search operations, area domination exercises and intelligence-based missions in vulnerable and fringe areas.

Since ethnic violence erupted between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities in May 2023, security forces have maintained an extensive presence across several districts of the state. The conflict has claimed more than 260 lives and displaced thousands of people, leading to one of the most prolonged periods of unrest in Manipur in recent years.

Authorities have repeatedly stated that counter-insurgency operations and coordinated security actions will continue to curb militant activities, recover illegal weapons and create conditions for the safe return of normalcy.

Officials said the ongoing search operation in Ukhrul district will continue until those responsible for the deadly ambush are identified and apprehended.

IMPHAL

Security forces have launched a large-scale search operation in Manipur's Ukhrul district to track down those responsible for the ambush that killed two Assam Rifles personnel earlier this week, officials said on Saturday.

The coordinated operation, involving the Assam Rifles, Border Security Force (BSF) and Manipur Police, began on Friday in the Nungshang area following the July 6 attack in which two Assam Rifles personnel lost their lives after suspected militants opened fire on a convoy in the Nungshong Khong area under Ukhrul Police Station.

The deceased personnel were identified as Warrant Officer Balwant Singh and Havildar C.M. Singh.

According to security officials, joint teams are carrying out intensive combing operations across residential localities, vulnerable stretches of roads and forested areas surrounding the attack site. The operation aims to trace the attackers,



recover hidden arms and ammunition caches, and prevent any further militant activity in the region.

Assam Rifles said the operation reflects the security forces' commitment to maintaining law and order and ensuring the safety of civilians in the district.

In a statement posted on social

media platform X, the force said security personnel are conducting coordinated searches and area domination exercises to identify those involved in the ambush and bring them to justice.

Officials said additional security measures have also been put in place in sensitive locations across Ukhrul district to prevent any escalation

## IMD Issues Red Alert for Assam, Meghalaya as Heavy Rainfall Likely Through July 17

GUWAHATI

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast a prolonged spell of rainfall across Assam over the next seven days, issuing a Red Alert for July 11 and warning of extremely heavy rain, thunderstorms, lightning and squally winds in several parts of the state.

According to the weather department, Assam and neighbouring Meghalaya are likely to experience intense rainfall activity on Saturday, prompting authorities to urge residents to remain cautious and avoid travel through vulnerable areas. The Red Alert is expected to be downgraded to an Orange Alert on Sunday, although very heavy rainfall accompanied by thunderstorms and gusty winds is likely to continue.

From July 13 to July 17, the IMD has placed the region under a Yellow Alert, forecasting heavy rainfall at isolated places. Thunderstorms, lightning and squally winds are expected to persist until July 15, while heavy rain is likely to continue on July 16 and 17.

Meteorologists attributed the extended wet spell to a combination of active monsoon systems, including the monsoon trough, upper-air cyclonic circulations over Assam and adjoining regions, and a strong influx of moisture from the Bay of Bengal.

"These weather systems are likely to bring light to moderate rainfall over many parts of Assam, with isolated spells of heavy to very heavy rainfall during the coming week," officials said.

For Saturday, the IMD has specifically warned of heavy to very heavy rainfall ranging between 7 cm and 20 cm at isolated locations in West Karbi Anglong and Morigaon districts.

The weather office has also issued an impact-based forecast for Guwahati and surrounding areas, warning of thunderstorms and lightning accompanied by

multiple spells of moderate rain and isolated heavy rainfall until 8.30 am on July 12.

According to the forecast, isolated locations in and around Guwahati may receive between 7 cm and 12 cm of rainfall within a 24-hour period.

Authorities have cautioned that the persistent rainfall could lead to waterlogging in low-lying areas, underpasses and urban pockets, particularly in Guwahati and other flood-prone regions. Traffic disruptions, reduced visibility, temporary power outages and interruptions in municipal services are also likely during periods of intense rainfall.

The IMD further warned that ferry and boat services could be affected by adverse weather conditions, while landslides, mudslides and landslips remain a concern in vulnerable hill districts and steep terrain.

Residents have been advised to closely monitor weather bulletins, follow traffic advisories and avoid unnecessary travel through areas prone to flooding, waterlogging and landslides. Daily commuters and long-distance travellers have been urged to plan their journeys carefully and remain prepared for weather-related disruptions.

The Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) has also appealed to residents, particularly those living in low-lying and hillside areas, to remain vigilant and take all necessary precautions. "In view of the prevailing weather conditions, people should stay alert and follow official advisories issued by the authorities," an ASDMA statement said.

The latest forecast comes amid the ongoing monsoon season, during which several districts of Assam have already witnessed flooding, erosion and landslides. Authorities across the state are closely monitoring the situation as heavy rainfall is expected to continue through the coming week.

## World Meetei Council Claims Broad Support for ST Status Demand, Counters RK Meghen's Remarks

IMPHAL

The World Meetei Council (WMC) has asserted that the demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status for the Meetei community enjoys overwhelming public support across Manipur, rejecting recent remarks by former United National Liberation Front (UNLF) chairman RK Meghen, also known as Sanayaima, who reportedly claimed that the issue was backed only by a section of the community. In a statement issued on Saturday, the council said the movement for inclusion of the Meetei community in the Scheduled Tribe list has witnessed sustained public support over the years through awareness campaigns, rallies and mass mobilisation efforts across the state. "The organisation maintained that activists associated with the Meetei ST movement had conducted extensive outreach programmes in Meetei-inhabited villages and localities throughout Manipur, where, it claimed, the demand received widespread acceptance and support. Citing a statewide campaign conducted in 2024, the WMC said nearly 10 lakh signatures were collected through a "Mass Missed Call Campaign" in support of the ST demand. According to the council, the response reflected support from a substantial section of the adult Meetei population, estimated at around 15 lakh, excluding children who were not eligible to participate.

The council also pointed to a major rally organised by the Scheduled Tribe Demand Committee of Manipur (STDCM) in 2015, claiming that around 1.5 lakh people had gathered in Imphal to press for Scheduled Tribe status. It described the mobilisation as one of the strongest demonstrations of public support for the demand.

Responding directly to RK Meghen's recent video statement, the WMC alleged that his observations did not accurately reflect the extent of public backing enjoyed by the movement. The organisation said the demand had remained a significant socio-political issue for years and was supported by extensive public mobilisation and advocacy.

## Centre-State Team Assesses Flood, Erosion Damage in Cachar During Field Inspection

SILCHAR

A joint team comprising officials from the Inter-Ministerial Central Team (IMCT) and the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) has conducted a two-day field inspection in Cachar district to assess damage caused by floods and erosion, focusing on vulnerable settlements, damaged roads and critical infrastructure affected by recurring monsoon disasters. The five-member delegation visited several flood and erosion-prone areas across the district to evaluate the extent of damage and examine restoration requirements. The inspection forms part of a broader assessment exercise aimed at documenting losses and identifying long-term mitigation measures in flood-affected regions of Assam.

According to officials, the team was led by Sanjeev Kumar Suman, Director, Central Water Commission under the Ministry of Jal Shakti. Other members included Prabhat Kumar, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, and Dheeraj, Regional Officer, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.

The central delegation was accompanied by Kishore Dutta and Nitu Moni Borah, project officers of the Assam State Disaster Management Authority, along with officials from the Cachar District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA).

During the visit on July 8, the team inspected several flood-hit locations in the Katigorah region, in-

cluding Ganirgram, Shantipur and Kalinagar, where repeated flooding and erosion have caused significant damage to roads, residential areas and public infrastructure.

The delegation also visited the Kinokhal international border area to assess erosion-related threats and road connectivity issues. Officials examined vulnerable stretches where recurring floods have weakened embankments and increased the risk of further damage during the monsoon season.

At Amaranager, the team inspected a damaged bridge approach that has affected transportation and local connectivity. Following the assessment, the visiting officials provided technical suggestions and assured support for restoration and strengthening of the affected infrastructure.

Sources said the team held detailed discussions with officials from the Water Resources Department and the Public Works Department to better understand the causes of recurring erosion, infrastructure damage and flood vulnerability in different parts of the district.

State officials briefed the delegation on the scale of flood-induced destruction, disruptions to public movement and transportation, and the challenges faced in maintaining connectivity during periods of heavy rainfall. They also highlighted the need for durable and scientifically designed restoration measures to reduce the impact of future floods.

for a large section of Assam's youth. The Budget retains a strong commitment to public sector recruitment, but it also signals a broader shift in employment policy. The government's vision suggests that the next generation of Assamese workers may increasingly find opportunities not only in government offices but also in semiconductor facilities, industrial parks, renewable energy projects, gaming studios, logistics networks, manufacturing clusters and international healthcare institutions.

The success of this strategy will depend on effective implementation, sustained private investment and the pace of industrial growth. However, the Budget makes clear that Assam is attempting to align its workforce with emerging economic trends and prepare young people for opportunities in industries that are expected to shape the future economy. In that sense, Budget 2026-27 represents more than an employment plan-it outlines a long-term effort to redefine the state's job market and broaden the horizons of its workforce beyond traditional government service.



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## TILTING ELECTORAL EQUATIONS

The adage that what one continually takes for granted will eventually be taken away, is a time tested fact. It is only the question of ephemeral quantum of period factor coupled with other reasons, depending upon where it gets into operation sooner, to upset apple carts otherwise complacently thought indomitable. Such equations have been thriving on the political laissez faire in our electoral system and have been surviving on factors of the manufactured fear of "communal forces", a term coined by such political parties that thrive on vote bank appeasement electoral equations. Such equations or in popular parlance known as vote banks, therefore, used to be justified to "keep communal and fascist forces out" of power. Who are these so called communal and fascist forces, is not difficult to be understood. The RSS phobia frantically played on back to back basis, used to be thought (and still is) as oxygen and a strength to keep identified vote banks and electoral equations surviving, however, is undergoing a process of revisionism. In other words, the RSS, which has been the choicest whipping boy of the so called secular and socialist political club has, to a larger extent, overstuffed its efficacy and utility. Unfortunately, on the other hand, it still continues to be derided, even in fiercer rhetoric, strangely enough though, in this partitioned country. Recall how fortification of this manufactured "communal and divisive forces" was further attempted to be strengthened by coining another term "Saffron terror". It was all done to this extent only to appease the vote bank for which former Union Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde, later expressed regrets for the terminology. In his book, "Five decades in Politics", Shinde distances himself from the term's origin and said that "I said what was on the record, the Congress party had said that saffron terrorism was active".

Recall how Atal Bihari Vajpayee Government had to face no confidence motions three times in 1996, 1999 and 2003, the last one he survived. It is not argued that no confidence motion is not a constitutional democratic parliamentary procedure but the veteran leader came under the ambit of so called "communal and fascist forces" which even resulted, in the year 2003, an attempt by Congress to dislodge him even though his Government enjoyed the required majority. The electoral equations led to the formation of political Fronts and Morchas and coalitions comprising such parties under the same pretext and the "dire need" to save the country and its secular character, stability and a single majority political party rule became a distant dream resulting in economic backwardness and slow growth. That was, perhaps, hardly anyone's concern. In a country as diverse as Bharat, political stability and a strong central government are concomitants of a strong united country where critical, urgent and innovative decisions are needed to be made in order to be on a path of development and growth to achieve the status of a strong economic and military power. However, champions of electoral equations and vote bank appeasement politics have, besides other alibi, been over using the term secularism to an extent using the word Hindu and its way - the Hindutva or Hindu-ness - embodying civilization(al) and religio-cultural pride, have been treated as being anti secular, divisive and reactionary.

In this connection, recall how former Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao, in a private conversation with Mani Shanker Aiyer in November 1992 had said, which Aiyer later publicly revealed that, "you do not seem to realise that this is a Hindu country." Congress veteran Rao only wanted to express his sincere and factual reality based on pragmatic and nuanced views on the country's demographic reality within the traditional secular framework. That was blown out of proportion by Aiyer (because the word Hindu was used) who quoted Rao having said that he did not agree with his definition of secularism which made Aiyer feel astonished and muttering, "But I thought ours was a secular country". Aiyer said, "But, Sir, that is exactly what the BJP says". Rao chose not to answer, is what Aiyer revealed. Secularism, in pseudo secular framework, perhaps, means talk and voice for everybody in the country sans Hindus, their historic, cultural, religious, traditions, glory and ages old spirit of tolerance and accommodation.

However, time and tide wait for none and what is in store and in scheme of things of these two factors, very often, get enveloped by the element of suspense and uncertainty too. The adage referred to herein started showing its operation right from the year 2014 in this country when appeasement was attempted to be replaced by "Sab ka saath, sab ka vikas aur sab ka vishwas" meaning the fruits of development reaching every one and no one caused to be left out or denied the vast opportunities. This is not only catchy phrase but statistics and records consistently are proving it right. Such a fair play and equal treatment coupled with sincerity of purpose have been exposing the inherent contradictions and weaknesses in decades' old electoral equations, pursued by so called secular parties, now getting manifest in clear and vivid form.

This very dilemma, if it is so, is going to take a heavy toll of the electoral fortunes of this conventional vote bank electoral equations oriented political parties in the coming years. The trend has set in. Distortions and misinterpretations are, as a periodic corollary, getting reviewed and corrected on their own, though steadily.

We saw it in Maharashtra as to how All India Ulama Board and Jamait Ulema-e-Hind were among the prominent Islamic organisations that strongly appealed to Muslims to vote for the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) led by Udhav Thackeray citing the "need" to defeat the BJP in Assembly elections. In other words, if Muslim organisations and leaders appeal for a particular voting pattern, it is considered as all right and within the realms of freedom of expression but if the case is obverse, it is considered as divisive, polarised and unconstitutional which seems highly irrational, illogical, one sided and again, a mode to appease the vote banks. However, for quite some time the groups comprising such vote banks have started emerging cleverer and realising that it was a losing bargain to be treated as mere vote banks and an antidote to the so called strong Hindu Nationalist forces. "Why should we be used to be seen as antagonists to the parties like the BJP and why, if not for what?" The equations failed the Maha Aghadi.

In Bihar, in 2025 where all the might behind so called secular parties led by the RJD, even with slogan raised by Tejaswi Yadav renting the air, "Shabudin Ji Amar Rahen" was seen as a desperate attempt to pandering to a specific vote base by even glorifying a convicted criminal but of no avail. The time tested equations failed the combined opposition, even the new party floated by Prashant Kishore - The Jan Swaraj Party - using and relying upon the same equations, winning a naught out of 238 seats.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

It is literally true that you can succeed best and quickest by helping others to succeed. - Napoleon Hill

# INDONESIA VISIT SENDS A MESSAGE TO CHINA



DR. D.K. GIRI

India is now learning to speak not only the language of diplomacy but also that of deterrence. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Indonesia clearly reflects this shift. From July 6 to 11, Modi embarked on a three-nation tour covering Indonesia, Australia, and New Zealand. By the time this article was written, he had completed the Indonesia leg and departed for Australia. The major outcomes of the Jakarta visit are significant.

This was Modi's third visit to Indonesia as Prime Minister and the first bilateral summit since the two countries elevated their relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2018. Modi also became the first Indian Prime Minister to address the Indonesian Parliament.

In his speech, he highlighted the deep historical ties between India and Indonesia. He recalled India's support for Indonesia's independence at the United Nations. He also referred to the daring mission carried out by Biju Patnaik in 1947, under the direction of then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, to safely evacuate Indonesian Prime Minister Sutan Sjahrir and Vice President Mohammad Hatta. Modi praised Nehru's support for Indonesia's freedom struggle and reminded lawmakers that Indonesian President Sukarno was the chief guest at India's first Republic Day celebrations in 1950.

Emphasising the concept of unity in diversity, Modi linked India's philosophy of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (the world is one family) with Indonesia's national motto "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" (Unity in Diversity). His reference to Nehru on foreign soil sparked debate on social media, with many viewing it as a sign that India's foreign policy transcends ideological boundaries and acknowledges a shared national legacy.

Modi proposed a "Ganga-Mahakam Vision" aimed at strengthening cooperation in trade, technology, maritime security, and amplifying the voice of the Global South. The initiative is being seen as an important step toward elevating India-Indonesia relations to a new strategic level, one that could raise concerns in Beijing.

India and Indonesia also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the supply of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile. Valued at around \$630 million, the agreement makes Indonesia the third country in the region, after the Philippines and Vietnam, to acquire the BrahMos system. The agreement has two major dimensions. First, it provides a major boost to India's defence exports under the "Make in India" initiative and strengthens Indo-Pacific security cooperation with ASEAN's largest economy. Second, it is not merely a missile deal but a geopolitical statement. Indonesia sits astride the Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok Straits, through which

nearly 40 percent of global trade and around 80 percent of China's oil imports pass.

By deploying BrahMos missiles in Indonesia's coastal regions, India is helping Jakarta secure critical sea lanes over which Beijing seeks to maintain influence. This also means India is no longer focused solely on defending its own maritime boundaries but is increasingly playing the role of a security partner in safeguarding Asia's maritime gateways.

The supply of BrahMos missiles to Indonesia is not preparation for war but an effort to establish a balance of power in the region. As one Southeast Asian official reportedly remarked, "We are not trying to stop China; we are helping our neighbours become more capable." When Jakarta can demonstrate that it has strategic alternatives, Beijing may be compelled to reassess its approach.

Three ASEAN countries concerned about developments in the South China Sea-the Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia-are now showing interest in India's BrahMos missile system. For China, this signals that India's "Act East" policy is no longer merely a diplomatic slogan but is increasingly taking shape through concrete security partnerships. Technically, the BrahMos missile, with a strike range of 290-400 kilometres, travels at several times the speed of sound and is extremely difficult to intercept. Its deployment could significantly alter the coastal defence equation in the region.

China has invested heavily in ports such as Gwadar (Pakistan), Hambantota (Sri Lanka), and Kyaukphyu (Myanmar), and is now seeking to expand its presence in Indonesia's Natuna region. In response, India is advancing its own strategy through the development of Sabang Port, BrahMos exports, and broader maritime cooperation agreements.

India's position is clear: "We are not building military blocs; we are strengthening the capabilities of our partners." This is precisely why India's approach is relatively less provocative while still making it difficult for China to counter effectively. Indonesia could emerge as an important bridge between the Quad and ASEAN. Although it is not a member of the Quad, it holds a leadership position within ASEAN. By helping Indonesia strengthen its defence capabilities, India is also signalling to Quad partners-the United States, Japan, and Australia-that it can reinforce the security capacities of ASEAN countries without drawing them into formal alliances.

China's real concern may be that India is helping build a network of capable, independent, and non-aligned nations that can confidently say "no" to coercion or aggression. Beyond defence cooperation, India and Indonesia signed around 20 agreements covering economic and

strategic sectors. Cooperation in nickel, steel, and critical minerals is particularly important. Indonesia possesses the world's largest nickel reserves, a resource crucial for India's electric vehicle battery industry.

In this context, India's public sector company SAIL and Indonesia's Krakatau Steel agreed to establish a stainless-steel manufacturing venture in Indonesia. In education, the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Bangalore is expected to establish a campus there. In healthcare, India will supply affordable medicines and provide training to Indonesian medical professionals.

Under digital cooperation initiatives, discussions were held on developing electronic voting machines tailored to Indonesia's needs and creating digital commerce platforms modelled on India's UPI and ONDC frameworks.

In the maritime domain, both sides agreed to develop Sabang Port near the Malacca Strait and create an institutional framework for maritime security cooperation. An MoU was also signed to expand collaboration in agriculture.

Bilateral trade between India and Indonesia stood at roughly \$25 billion last year. The two leaders agreed to accelerate negotiations on a preferential trade agreement to further boost economic ties.

Prime Minister Modi was also conferred Indonesia's highest civilian honour. On the occasion, President Prabowo Subianto remarked that he had learned much from Modi's leadership. He also acknowledged the profound influence of Sanskrit on Indonesian languages and culture. The two leaders visited the UNESCO World Heritage site of Prambanan Temple. The Ramayana and Hindu-Buddhist cultural traditions remain vibrant in Indonesia. Many tourist destinations still stage Ramayana performances through traditional puppet theatre. The author notes having personally seen Muslim puppeteers narrate stories from Indian epics. The visit demonstrated a powerful combination of India's civilisational heritage and strategic diplomacy. A morning visit to Prambanan Temple and an evening BrahMos agreement symbolised the emerging character of Modi's foreign policy.

A second important aspect was defence diplomacy. BrahMos exports should not be viewed merely as commercial transactions. They help establish India as a credible security partner in ASEAN at a time when China is seeking to expand its regional influence.

A third dimension was the use of history as a bridge. Modi invoked both Jawaharlal Nehru and Biju Patnaik, leaders associated with different political traditions. Their inclusion conveyed the message that

India's foreign policy is shaped not only by partisan politics but also by national continuity. For countries of the Global South, this offers reassurance, especially at a time when uncertainties in U.S. foreign policy have affected many traditional partnerships.

The next stop on Modi's tour is Australia, where the key agenda items include the Quad, defence cooperation, critical minerals, ed-

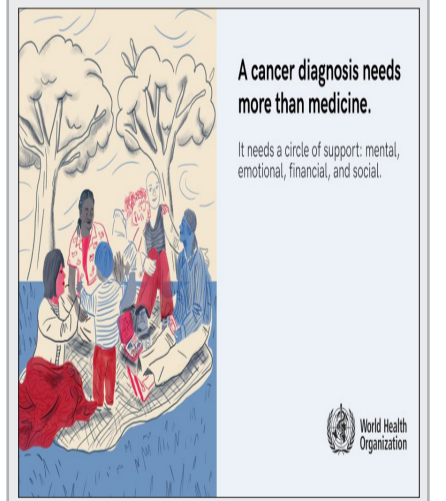
### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Across 116 countries thousands were asked what #cancer actually does to one's life. Most didn't just talk about their diagnosis and treatment. They also spoke about- lost incomes, strained relationships, careers put on hold, anxiety and loneliness, chronic pain and uncertainty about their futures.

When cancer strikes, what people need are:

- ☐ Pain relief
  - ☐ Mental health support
  - ☐ Financial protection
  - ☐ Rehabilitation
  - ☐ Social connection
  - ☐ Dignified, and compassionate care
- Cancer care isn't just about treating the disease. It's about supporting the person living with it <https://bit.ly/4wxY9VT>

~ World Health Organisation (WHO)



A cancer diagnosis needs more than medicine.

It needs a circle of support: mental, emotional, financial, and social.



education, and engagement with the Indian diaspora. Discussions are expected on partnerships involving lithium, cobalt, and rare earth minerals, reviews of Quad maritime security initiatives, and mobility agreements for Indian students and skilled professionals. Modi is also expected to address the Indian community in Australia, which now numbers over one million people.

The final leg of the tour is New Zealand. It will be the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to the country in many years. The primary objectives are to revive negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), strengthen cooperation in dairy and agriculture, and deepen collaboration on Indo-Pacific security, climate change, and people-to-people ties. Engagement with the Indian diaspora will also be a key component of the visit.

The broader message of Modi's three-nation tour is clear: India is moving beyond "Act East" toward "Act Indo-Pacific." Defence cooperation with Indonesia, strengthened critical-mineral and Quad partnerships with Australia, and expanded trade and strategic engagement with New Zealand together underline the evolving direction of India's Indo-Pacific strategy.

# 300 Supply Vehicles Stranded on NH-37; Transporters Threaten PIL Over Highway Conditions



**IMPHAL**  
Nearly 300 loaded vehicles carrying fuel and essential commodities to Manipur remained stranded on the severely damaged National Highway-37 in Noney district on Friday, prompting transporters to threaten legal action against the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHID-CL).

The affected vehicles, travelling under security escort from Jiribam to

Imphal, were unable to proceed due to worsening road conditions, deep mud and damaged stretches along the crucial highway linking Manipur with Assam's Silchar.

According to officials, the stranded convoy comprises 109 fuel tankers and 191 goods-laden trucks. The vehicles are currently stuck at various locations in Noney district where recent rains and poor road conditions have rendered several sections of the highway nearly impassable.

NH-37 has emerged as one of Manipur's most important supply routes since the outbreak of ethnic violence in May 2023, with the highway serving as a key corridor for transporting fuel, food and other essential commodities into the state.

While the latest convoy remains stranded, authorities said 150 loaded

vehicles from Jiribam and another 225 trucks that had been delayed earlier successfully reached Imphal on July 9.

Officials also confirmed that, owing to a shortage of security personnel, no empty trucks or fuel tankers will be allowed to travel from Imphal to Jiribam for the time being. However, two additional security convoys carrying loaded vehicles are scheduled to depart from Jiribam on Saturday.

The worsening condition of NH-37 has drawn sharp criticism from the Transporters' and Drivers' Council (TDC), which has accused NHIDCL of failing to deliver a road project for which substantial funds have already been released.

In 2022, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways sanctioned Rs 1,900 crore for the widening and upgradation of a 203-km stretch of NH-37 into an all-weather highway.

TDC president Hijam Ranjit claimed that nearly Rs 1,040 crore-around 80 per cent of the sanctioned amount-has already been spent, yet large portions of the road remain in poor condition.

According to transporters, several stretches, particularly around Kaiphundai, Shantikhouon, Barak, Nungba, Rengpang and Irang, continue to be plagued by knee-deep mud and damaged road surfaces, making transportation extremely difficult.

The TDC has warned that it is preparing to file a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) against NHIDCL, alleging negligence and poor execution of the project.

The organisation has also challenged NHIDCL's assertion that increased traffic following the Manipur conflict is primarily responsible for the road's deterioration.

Transporters argue that daily traffic

volumes on the highway rarely exceed 700 vehicles, a figure they say is routinely handled by highways in neighbouring states such as Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura without similar levels of deterioration.

The deteriorating condition of the highway has significantly increased travel times. A journey that previously took four to five hours now often requires several days, particularly during the monsoon season. Transporters have also expressed doubts over NHIDCL's target of completing the project by December 2026, saying visible progress on the ground remains inadequate.

The TDC has demanded immediate repairs in accordance with standard engineering specifications and warned that legal proceedings would be initiated if corrective measures are not undertaken urgently. Meanwhile, security agencies

continue to maintain strict surveillance along the highway and other vulnerable areas across the state.

Police said search operations and area domination exercises are being conducted regularly in sensitive hill and valley districts. Security personnel have also ensured the movement of 675 vehicles carrying essential commodities along NH-37 in recent days.

To safeguard transportation, security convoys are being provided along vulnerable stretches, while 114 checkpoints and nakas have been established across Manipur to monitor movement and maintain law and order.

As the monsoon intensifies and the state continues to rely heavily on NH-37 for supplies, concerns are growing over the condition of the highway and its impact on the movement of essential goods into Manipur.

## Assam to Phase Out Free Scooter Scheme, Shift Focus to Wider Student Welfare Programmes

### GUWAHATI

The Assam government has announced that the Dr Bankanta Kakati Meritorious Award, popularly known as the free scooter scheme for meritorious students, will be discontinued after the current year, with funds earmarked for the programme set to be redirected towards broader educational welfare initiatives.

Finance Minister Jayanta Malla Baruah made the announcement while presenting the Assam Budget 2026-27 in the State Assembly, stating that nearly 18,000 meritorious students will receive scooters this year under the scheme before it is formally phased out.

The government said the decision was taken to enable a larger number of students to benefit from welfare programmes by reallocating resources from the scooter distribution initiative. According to the Finance Minister, the state plans to strengthen and expand student assistance schemes that provide direct financial support to beneficiaries across different educational levels. As part of the new approach, the government will resume the Nijut Moina and Nijut Babu schemes from August this year. These programmes are aimed at supporting students through financial assistance and encouraging continued participation in education.

Budget documents indicate that more than 5.44 lakh girl students have already benefited under these initiatives, with the government disbursing approximately Rs 374 crore so far. During the current financial year, around 5.30 lakh students are expected to receive assistance under the schemes.

## Assam Medical Colleges Face 4,232 Vacancies as Patient Load Continues to Rise

### GUWAHATI

More than 4,200 posts remain vacant across Assam's government medical colleges and hospitals, leaving over 28 per cent of sanctioned positions unfilled even as the state's public healthcare institutions handle more than 15,000 patients every day.

Health and Family Welfare Minister Ashok Singhal disclosed the figures in the Assam Legislative Assembly on Friday while responding to questions raised by members during the ongoing Budget Session.

Replying to a question from Congress MLA Baby Begum, the minister said Assam's 14 government medical colleges and hospitals have a total of 14,754 sanctioned posts, of which 4,232 are currently vacant.

The vacancies span various categories, including teaching, medical and non-medical positions, raising concerns about staffing levels in institutions that form

the backbone of the state's healthcare system.

Responding to another query from Congress MLA Asif Mohammad Nazir, Singhal said the vacancies include 297 teaching posts comprising professors, associate professors and assistant professors. The shortage of faculty members comes at a time when the government is expanding medical education infrastructure and increasing student intake across the state. Despite the staffing gaps, Assam's medical colleges and hospitals continue to cater to a substantial patient load. Answering a question from BJP MLA Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha, the minister informed the House that government medical colleges and hospitals collectively treat around 15,205 patients daily. Among them, Gauhati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH) records the highest daily patient footfall, with approximately 3,246 patients seeking treatment every day.

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He argued that several major infrastructure projects highlighted in the Budget-including

## Opposition Slams Assam Budget as 'Copy-Paste Exercise'; BJP Calls It Development-Oriented

### GUWAHATI

The Assam Budget 2026-27 triggered sharp exchanges in the State Assembly on Friday, with opposition parties dismissing it as a repetition of previous budgets and lacking innovative measures, while the ruling BJP defended it as a forward-looking financial plan focused on employment, infrastructure and welfare.

Leading the criticism, Rajior Dal MLA Akhil Gogoi described the Budget presented by Finance Minister Jayanta Malla Baruah as "old wine in a new bottle," alleging that it relied heavily on borrowings and offered little in terms of fresh policy initiatives.

"This budget is not going to bring anything new. It is a safe budget dependent on borrowings from the open market," Gogoi said, claiming that a significant portion of the state's revenue would come through loans.

He argued that several major infrastructure projects highlighted in the Budget-including

the Kaziranga elevated corridor, the Guwahati Ring Road and the Gohpur-Numaligarh four-lane highway-were primarily Central Government projects rather than initiatives undertaken by the Assam Government.

Gogoi, however, welcomed the proposed allocation of Rs 4,000 crore for irrigation, stating that Assam urgently required expanded irrigation infrastructure to support agriculture and improve farm productivity.

"Assam desperately needs irrigation facilities. If implemented properly, this investment can help farmers. Apart from that, this budget has nothing substantial to offer Assam," he said.

Congress MLA and Deputy Leader of the Opposition J.P. Das also criticised the Budget, describing it as anti-farmer and anti-people.

According to Das, the financial proposals failed to adequately address the concerns of farmers, youth, economically weaker sec-

tions and several other social groups.

"This budget is against farmers, the poor, youth and the common people," he said, alleging that promises made to women, Adivasis and other communities had not been translated into meaningful budgetary provisions.

The criticism was echoed by AIUDF MLA Mujibur Rahman, who accused the government of recycling earlier budgets without introducing substantive reforms.

"There is nothing new in this budget. It is merely a copy of previous budgets," Rahman said. He further alleged that the government was increasing the state's debt burden through extensive borrowing while failing to deliver significant benefits to ordinary citizens.

The ruling BJP strongly rejected the opposition's assessment and maintained that the Budget reflected the government's development agenda and commitment to inclusive growth.

BJP MLA Pabitra Rabha defended the Budget, calling it a roadmap for Assam's future and a reflection of the government's long-term vision.

"I believe this is the budget of our dreams," Rabha said, highlighting the government's commitment to create two lakh jobs over the next five years and provide self-employment opportunities to 50,000 educated youth through the Chief Minister's Atmanirbhar Assam Abhiyan.

He also pointed to the proposal to provide an additional annual assistance of Rs 11,000 to PM-KISAN beneficiaries in the state, along with measures aimed at expanding medical education, strengthening healthcare infrastructure and increasing investments in multiple development sectors.

Rabha argued that the opposition's criticism was politically motivated and overlooked the Budget's focus on employment generation, welfare expansion and infrastructure development.

## Historic mega-development package for Karbi Anglong

### SUSHANTA ROY

**DIPHU**-In what is being hailed as a historic transformation for the hill region, Karbi Anglong is undergoing a massive infrastructural overhaul driven by a massive 2,109 crore mega-development package.

Spearheaded by Chief Executive Member Tulliram Ronghang and backed by significant central assistance, this aggressive developmental push is rapidly modernizing the district's connectivity, health, education, and energy sectors; effectively reshaping its socio-economic fabric.

The structural foundation of this initiative lies in a meticulous financial blueprint designed to balance immediate public utility with future asset creation.

Of the core 2,109 crore packages, 816 crore was utilized upfront for the immediate inauguration of 54 completed community assets, ensuring that citizens felt the immediate benefits of the administration's policy.

Concurrently, 1,293 crore was

sanctioned for 53 pipeline projects that span essential sectors like healthcare, energy, and education.

To supercharge these state-level projects, the Union Budget added an exclusive, additional 200 crore allocation, injecting vital capital that has allowed multiple large-scale projects to run simultaneously without budgetary bottlenecks.

The momentum of this developmental wave follows a strict and fast-tracked chronological framework. The preliminary groundwork was laid in February 2026 when the Union Budget's special 200 crore allocation was officially introduced.

This was closely followed by the grand launch of the master 2,109 crore packages in March 2026, setting the wheels of bureaucracy and construction into motion.

By July 2026, the region entered an intense, full-scale construction phase. Up and down the hills, workers and heavy machinery have been deployed across healthcare, energy, and transit corridors to capitalize on

the dry working months, setting a hard target for major infrastructure handovers by December 2026.

[Feb 2026] Union Budget adds special 200 Cr allocation [Mar 2026] Launch of the 2,109 Cr mega-development package [Jul 2026] Intense construction phase across healthcare & transit [Dec 2026] Target completion for Diphu Flyover & Hamren-Tumpreng road

At the heart of this transformation are several mega-projects aimed at elevating public services to premium standards.

In the education and defense sector, a new Sainik School at Langvoku is being constructed with an allocated budget of 365 crore, establishing a premier defense-educational institute right in the hill district.

Healthcare is receiving a massive upgrade through the Diphu Cancer Centre, a 270 crore advanced oncology facility slated to boost tertiary health infrastructure by late 2026. To solve the perennial traffic bottlenecks in urban Diphu, the

administration has funded the 4-Lane Khorsing Terang-Ingjarkap Flyover at 228 crore. Spanning a 1.4 km elevated arterial corridor, it is on track for completion by December 31, 2026.

Furthermore, green energy is taking center stage, with the 202 crore Bonglong Terang Solar Plant, a 42 MW clean energy station that promises to significantly advance regional grid self-reliance.

Parallel to these landmark buildings, major road widening and modernization schemes are actively running to bridge the physical divide between East and West Karbi Anglong. Hamren-Tumpreng-Howraghat Road; Civil work on this critical 29.70 km highway stretch is currently fast-tracked for a December finish.

Birla Road; Four-lane efforts from the East Division Forest Office to the St. Mary's stretch are underway, effectively expanding urban outer limits and facilitating smoother suburban transit.

## Man Held for Alleged Attempt to Abduct Minor Girl in Assam's Sribhumi District



### STRIBHUMI

A man has been arrested for allegedly attempting to abduct a minor girl and outrage her modesty in Assam's Sribhumi district, police said on Friday.

The incident took place in the Mokamsara Tea Estate area under Ratabari Police Station limits, where the victim, a Class 10 student, was reportedly on her way to a private tuition class along with a friend.

According to local residents, the accused, identified as Sanjiv Chauhan, allegedly intercepted the two girls on a relatively isolated stretch of road and attempted to forcibly take the minor away. He is also accused of attempting to outrage the girl's modesty during the incident.

The situation took a dramatic turn when the girls raised an alarm, attracting the attention of nearby residents. Hearing their cries for help, locals rushed to the spot, forcing the accused to flee.

Residents subsequently chased the suspect and managed to apprehend him near the Dullavchhara

Station Road area before handing him over to the Ratabari Police.

Following a written complaint lodged by the victim's family, police registered a case and arrested the accused. He was later produced before a court, while investigations into the incident are continuing. Meanwhile, local residents have submitted a memorandum to the Ratabari Police, alleging that anti-social activities had been taking place at the accused's residence for a considerable period. The memorandum urged authorities to take stringent legal action against the accused and strengthen measures to ensure the safety and security of women and children in the area.

The incident has added to growing concerns over crimes against women and minors in Sribhumi district. In recent weeks, several cases involving violence and abuse against women and children have sparked public outrage and prompted calls for stronger law enforcement measures.

Residents and community leaders have stressed the need for enhanced policing, greater vigilance in vulnerable areas and swift action against offenders to restore public confidence and improve safety, particularly for women and school-going children.

Police said the investigation is underway and further legal action will be taken based on the findings of the probe.

## Tripura Secures Over Rs 1 Lakh Crore Investment Intent Through 250 MoUs at Business Conclave



### AGARTALA

Tripura has attracted proposed investments worth more than Rs 1 lakh crore through over 250 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) signed at the Destination Tripura Business Conclave 2026, Chief Minister Manik Saha announced on Thursday.

The two-day investment summit, being held at the International Fair Ground in Agartala, has drawn more than 700 delegates, including policymakers, industrialists, investors, diplomats and business leaders from India and abroad.

Addressing the inaugural session, Saha expressed confidence that a significant number of the investment proposals would translate into concrete projects in the coming years.

"More than 700 delegates are participating, and more than 250 MoUs are being inked with an investment intent of more than Rs 1 lakh crore. With the proactive support of Team Tripura, we are highly confident that most of these MoUs will be converted into projects on the ground in the near future," the Chief Minister said.

The conclave was attended virtually by Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, while Union Minister for Development of North Eastern Re-

gion (DoNER) Jyotiraditya Scindia participated in the inaugural session.

Highlighting the state's economic progress, Saha said Tripura had emerged as one of India's fastest-growing states, with its Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) doubling over the past six years.

He attributed the state's improving investment climate to sustained investments by both the Centre and the state government in critical infrastructure sectors, including highways, railways, airports, internet connectivity, waterways and banking services.

The Chief Minister said Tripura's rich natural resource base offered immense opportunities for industrial growth and value addition. He identified natural gas reserves, extensive rubber plantations, GI-tagged Queen Pineapple, agarwood, bamboo resources and horticultural products as key sectors capable of attracting domestic and international investors.

Saha also highlighted a series of governance and policy reforms undertaken by the state government to improve the ease of doing business. These include reforms in land administration, urban planning, industrial policy, healthcare, education and tourism, along with the introduction of a single-window clearance mechanism and risk-based inspection systems.

According to the Chief Minister, Tripura secured the top position among states and Union Territories in the De-regulation and Compliance Reduction Phases I and II, reflecting its efforts to create a more business-friendly environment.

He noted that the state had received investment proposals worth more than Rs 30,000 crore during the previous year, of which projects valued at over Rs 8,000

crore had already moved into the implementation stage.

The government is now seeking to build on that momentum by attracting investments across a range of sectors, including rubber-based manufacturing, bamboo value chains, agarwood processing, food processing, fisheries, logistics, healthcare, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology and information technology.

A major focus of the conclave has been Tripura's strategic location as India's gateway to Southeast Asia. The Chief Minister underscored the significance of the state's 856-kilometre international border with Bangladesh and pointed to key connectivity projects such as the Agartala-Akhaura rail link, Maitri Setu, inland water transport networks and the expansion of airport infrastructure.

These projects, he said, are expected to strengthen Tripura's logistics capabilities, reduce transportation costs and improve access to regional and international markets.

The conclave was attended by cabinet ministers, senior government officials, industrial leaders, investors, and ambassadors and high commissioners from nine countries, reflecting growing international interest in Tripura's economic potential.

The large volume of investment commitments secured during the event is being viewed as a significant milestone in Tripura's efforts to position itself as an emerging investment destination in Northeast India. While the success of the initiative will ultimately depend on the conversion of MoUs into operational projects, the state government believes the conclave has laid the foundation for a new phase of industrial growth, job creation and economic expansion.

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## SC to hear pleas seeking CBI probe into alleged Ram temple donations embezzlement on July 13



NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court will hear on July 13 a batch of petitions seeking a court-monitored probe into the alleged embezzlement of donations at the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

According to the Supreme Court website, a Bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V. Mohana will take up three petitions when the apex court reopens on Monday.

The pleas seek a fair and time-bound investigation into the alleged financial irregularities involving the Shri Ram Jambhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, which manages the affairs of the Ram temple.

One of the petitions, filed by Narendra Kumar Goswami, seeks a CBI probe into the alleged embezzlement and a Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) audit of the Trust's finances.

A second petition, filed by advocates Ajay Kumar Rai and Dinesh Kumar Yadav, seeks the constitution of a CBI-led multi-disciplinary Special Investigation Team

(SIT) to investigate the alleged financial irregularities and other purported illegalities concerning the Trust's affairs and administration. The third plea, filed by RJD MP Sudhakar Singh, seeks a Supreme Court-monitored CBI investigation and a forensic audit of the Trust's entire finances. Earlier, a partial working day Bench headed by Justice B.V. Nagarathna had asked one of the petitioners to mention the matter later for an urgent hearing.

Rai's petition also seeks directions to the Centre, the Uttar Pradesh government and the Trust to establish appropriate regulatory, supervisory and audit mechanisms to safeguard public interest and maintain the confidence of devotees and donors. "Whether or not the reports regarding missing funds and other alleged irregularities concerning the Shri Ram Jambhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust are ultimately found to be true, such reports have caused deep concern among the generations that struggled for the restoration of the glory of Ayodhya," the plea said. The petition also questioned the Uttar Pradesh

government's SIT inquiry, saying it was initiated without the registration of an FIR or any regular criminal case.

It said the veracity of reports concerning alleged missing funds and other purported irregularities involving the Trust ought to be independently verified through a professional investigation conducted by a unified agency possessing the requisite expertise, resources and institutional mechanisms for handling complex financial and criminal investigations.

"Such an inquiry would inspire greater public confidence than a preliminary probe conducted by a special investigation team comprising administrative officers who may not possess specialised credentials in criminal investigation," the plea said. It said the issues involved not only concern the possible commission of cognisable offences but also directly affect the faith, sentiments and confidence of countless devotees and the public. The Uttar Pradesh government had constituted a three-member SIT on June 13 at the request of the temple trust following allegations of misappropriation of donations received at the Ram temple. The panel comprises Lucknow Divisional Commissioner Vijay Vishwas Pant, Inspector General of Police Kiran S. and Special Secretary (Finance) Neel Ratan. Meanwhile, the criminal investigation into the alleged donations theft is also progressing. On July 7, an Ayodhya court granted one-day police remand of three of the eight accused, Anukalp Mishra, Lavkush Mishra and Karunesh Pandey. The eight accused had earlier been remanded to 14-day judicial custody by a local court on June 29.

# PM Modi arrives in New Zealand on historic first PM visit in 40 years; to hold talks with Luxon



AUCKLAND

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday arrived in New Zealand on the final leg of his three-nation visit, where he is scheduled to hold talks with Prime Minister Christopher Luxon and address the Indian diaspora.

This marks the first visit by an Indian prime minister to New Zealand in 40 years.

Modi was received by Luxon at the airport, where the two leaders

exchanged a warm hug.

"Reached Auckland a short while ago. Thankful to Prime Minister Luxon for the welcome at the airport," Modi said in a post on X.

"This visit is historic, being the first Prime Ministerial visit to New Zealand in four decades. I look forward to holding talks with Prime Minister Luxon and discussing the complete range of the India-NZ friendship. I will also be addressing a community programme tomorrow

in Auckland," he said.

In a post on X, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said, "This historic visit is set to strengthen bilateral ties and unlock new avenues of cooperation across several areas especially trade, defence, sports, culture, education, and people-to-people exchanges."

Calling it as a "special welcome in Auckland!", the MEA in another post on X said the iconic Sky Tower was illuminated to mark Modi's visit to New Zealand, "symbolis-

ing the friendship between our two countries."

In his departure statement in New Delhi, the prime minister had said that his visit would "meaningfully build" upon the strong momentum in India-New Zealand ties pursuant to Luxon's visit to India in March 2025.

Modi said his visit to Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand will further strengthen India's Act East Policy, MAHASAGAR Vision, as well as its outlook towards a free and open Indo-Pacific.

During his two-day visit to New Zealand, he will hold talks with Luxon on ways to further enhance economic, trade and commercial engagements.

He will also address the Indian diaspora at a community programme.

Modi arrived in New Zealand after concluding a three-day visit to Australia, where he held summit talks with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, and both leaders reinforced the vital role of the bilateral partnership in ensuring a peaceful Indo-Pacific.

A major highlight of the summit talks between the two leaders was their focus on significantly ramping up defence ties, especially in the maritime domain.

An agreement on civil nuclear energy to facilitate the commercial supply of uranium from Australia to India to fuel New Delhi's nuclear power projects was sealed after over two years of negotiations.

Modi was in Indonesia before that, where 14 agreements were inked to boost cooperation in critical minerals, maritime security and other key sectors.

# INTERNATIONAL

## Despite Trump's wishes, Iran is dragging the US into a long war



WASHINGTON

The United States has launched a series of strikes on Iran in response to the Iranian targeting of vessels in the Strait of Hormuz.

These are the most severe violations yet of the Memorandum of Understanding that came into effect on June 17, and may signal an end to the truce.

For the first time since the initial ceasefire on April 8, US President Donald Trump has definitively stated the ceasefire is over.

These escalating tensions suggest the ceasefire will not turn into a permanent peace. The US is being drawn into a long war with Iran, against its will.

The key sticking point that has driven the latest round of strikes is Iran's determination to impose control over the Strait of Hormuz.

The Memorandum of Understanding stated Iran would use its "best efforts" to ensure safe passage of commercial vessels through the strait with no charge for 60 days.

However, tensions immediately spiked over ships using the "Omani route" through the strait. This is a US-endorsed maritime corridor that

hugs the coast of Oman and involves international coordination.

Iran wants vessels to use a second route that passes along the Iranian coast and is closely monitored and controlled by Iran.

The strait is too wide for Iran to maintain control over both routes without the use, or threatened use, of force.

Iran has shown it is willing to use live fire to deter vessels from sailing the Omani route.

One reason it has been so hard for the ceasefire to hold is that US and Iran have different strengths. Neither sees themselves as having surrendered.

The US is militarily strong, with overwhelming military capability. But it has weak political resolve. It does not want to stay in this war or put boots on the ground in Iran. The US does not want to expend its military arsenal in a long war, or focus its global military efforts on the Iranian regime.

So, while the US has the military capability, it is highly unlikely to force regime change in Iran or forcibly open the Strait of Hormuz.

The Iranian regime's greatest strength is its political resolve. It is determined to survive.

Since key political leaders were killed at the start of this war, the regime has become even more hardline and militaristic. The current regime is ideological, savvy and ruthless.

Iran is determined to show the US and the region that it is in control and will not back down. It is willing to bear staggering economic and security costs to achieve this aim.

Iran's resolve is shown in its willingness to threaten civilian vessels in the strait with light, cost-effective drones and attack boats.

The Iranian regime's main weakness is economic. Iran has suffered massive economic and military damage as a result of this war. It could not weather another long US blockade of the Strait of Hormuz and sustained US air strikes on infrastructure and military targets.

The very different domestic landscapes in the US and Iran are driving both parties closer to a breakdown of the ceasefire.

In Iran, as noted, the war has led to a hardened regime with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) more firmly in control of political power. Iranian leaders who even talk to US counterparts,

let alone make concessions, may risk being branded political traitors by some IRGC elements.

As history has shown with the assassinations of President Anwar Sadat in Egypt in 1981 and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in Israel in 1995, leaders can put their own life on the line if they make agreements with counterparts considered sworn enemies by hardliners in their own country.

This drives Iran to focus on controlling the Strait of Hormuz and appearing uncompromising, rather than capitulating to enjoy the economic benefits of sanctions relief and the promised US\$300 billion reconstruction fund.

Trump, on the other hand, does not want to return to full-scale war due to a lack of domestic support.

However, Trump is also influenced by those in the US who do not want to see the US walk away from the war with Iran without agreement on the nuclear issues, and Iran in full control of the Strait of Hormuz.

Trump expects Iran to cooperate with the Memorandum of Understanding due to its promised economic benefits. But he has vastly underestimated Iran's determination to assert dominance over the strait and control in the region.

Iran's determination to show control means we are also not likely to see the ceasefire hold or a substantial peace agreement forthcoming. The most likely scenario is we will return to the status quo from the first ceasefire of April 8 until June 17. This was a precarious truce, below the threshold of all-out war, but also not a substantive peace.

Tit-for-tat strikes will continue over coming months. The Strait of Hormuz will remain partially closed with security uncertain.

As I have previously noted, this is more akin to a frozen conflict than a full ceasefire or a return to full-scale war.

## 'They may arrest or kill me': Sheikh Hasina vows to return to Bangladesh in December



DHAKA

Bangladesh's former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has announced that she, alongside other exiled leaders of the Awami League, intends to return to Bangladesh voluntarily around December, despite facing the stark prospect of arrest or death upon her arrival.

In an interview with Reuters, the 78-year-old leader, who moved to India following a student-led uprising that unseated her administration in August 2024, stated that she plans to surrender before the judicial courts upon her return.

She further clarified that there has been no communication with the current authorities in Dhaka concerning the scheduled homecoming.

"They may arrest me on my return, they may even kill me," Sheikh Hasina told the news agency. "Still, I have to go."

Expressing deep concern over the ongoing situation of her political supporters back home, the former Prime Minister emphasised her resolve to face the consequences on her home soil.

"My party leaders and workers are being subjected to tremendous repression. If death comes, I want it to come on my own soil, where my parents are buried and where their blood was shed," she added.

The high-stakes announcement follows a ruling by Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal, which sentenced her to death after convict-

ing her of crimes against humanity.

The charges were tied to the state crackdown on the 2024 student-led demonstrations that ultimately led to the fall of the Awami League government, with the tribunal holding her accountable for ordering or failing to stop the fatalities of demonstrators during the political unrest.

In the same verdict, the tribunal handed a death sentence to former Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal and a five-year prison sentence to former Inspector General of Police Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun.

The judicial body additionally directed the state to confiscate the properties of both Sheikh Hasina and Kamal.

# BIG DREAMS, THIN WALLET: ASSAM BUDGET BETS ON GROWTH

**A**ssam's Budget for 2026-27 is not merely a statement of government spending. It is a roadmap built on a critical assumption: that today's investments will generate tomorrow's prosperity quickly enough to ease mounting fiscal pressures. Presented by Finance Minister Jayanta Malla Baruah, the Rs 1.57 lakh crore budget marks the first financial blueprint of the Himanta Biswa Sarma government's second term. It reflects confidence in Assam's economic rise, but it also exposes the challenges of sustaining that momentum in the face of growing obligations and limited financial flexibility.

The central theme of the budget is clear. The government wants to accelerate growth through infrastructure, industrialisation, welfare expansion and employment generation. The question is whether the state's finances can keep pace with these ambitions.

**An Economy on the Rise**  
Assam enters the new fiscal year with several encouraging indicators. The state's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) is projected to reach Rs 8.71 lakh crore in 2026-27. Over the past decade, Assam has steadily improved its economic standing, increasing its share in India's GDP from 1.65 per cent to over 2 per cent.

Per capita income has also registered significant growth, crossing Rs 1.85 lakh compared to around Rs 60,000 ten years ago. Tax collections have improved substantially, infrastructure spending has expanded, and budget utilisation rates have risen.

These figures suggest that Assam is no longer merely keeping pace with national growth but is attempting to emerge as a more significant contributor to India's economy. The government has used these achievements to project confidence in its ability to attract large-scale investment and create jobs.

Yet beneath these encouraging numbers lies a more complex reality.

**The Revenue Challenge**  
Despite rapid economic expansion, Assam remains heavily dependent on New Delhi for its finances.

The state still relies on Central transfers for nearly two-thirds of its revenue. Put differently, around 64 paise of every rupee spent by the government originates from the Centre rather than from Assam's own earnings.

This dependence highlights a structural weakness in the state's economy. Growth may be accelerating, but the government's ability to generate independent revenue remains limited.

The budget acknowledges this challenge and sets a target of increasing the share of the state's own revenue from about 36 per cent to 50 per cent by 2031. Achieving such a transformation would significantly strengthen Assam's financial autonomy.

However, the budget offers few concrete details about how this goal will be achieved.

While revenues from GST, petroleum taxes, excise duties and vehicle taxes continue to grow, the state's non-tax income remains heavily tied to royalties from crude oil and natural gas. Such revenue sources are vulnerable to market fluctuations and cannot alone provide a stable long-term foundation.

The challenge therefore is not simply to collect more taxes but to broaden the economic base itself.

**Infrastructure as the Engine of Growth**  
Recognising this reality, the government has placed extraordinary emphasis on capital expenditure.

The budget allocates Rs 29,451 crore for capital spending—money intended to create assets such as roads, bridges, industrial infrastructure and public facilities. Compared to a decade ago, when capital expenditure stood below Rs 3,000 crore, the increase is remarkable.

The government's strategy is straightforward. Infrastructure creates economic activity. Better connectivity attracts industries. Industries create jobs. Jobs generate income and tax revenue.

If this cycle functions as intended, Assam could gradually reduce its dependence on Central support.

Several major projects reinforce this vision.

The government has announced the next phase of Asom Mala, targeting 800 kilometres of roads. It has also highlighted major projects being undertaken with Central assistance, including the Guwahati Ring Road, the Silchar high-speed corridor and the Brahmaputra tunnel connecting Gohpur and Numaligarh.

These projects have the potential to reshape regional connectivity and improve the state's investment attractiveness.

However, there is a caveat. While absolute capital



expenditure continues to rise, projections indicate that capital spending as a share of the state's economy may decline over the coming years. This suggests that infrastructure investment is not keeping pace with the overall growth of the economy.

For a state banking heavily on infrastructure-led transformation, maintaining investment intensity will be critical.

**The Employment Question**  
No issue dominates public expectations more than employment.

The government has highlighted its record of providing over 1.64 lakh government appointments during the previous term and now promises another two lakh jobs.

This commitment carries undeniable political appeal. Government employment remains highly sought after across Assam, offering security and social prestige.

But government jobs come with a fiscal cost.

Every new appointment adds to future salary and pension liabilities. These obligations continue for decades and cannot easily be reduced during difficult financial periods.

The state's finances are already under pressure from committed expenditure. Salaries, pensions and interest payments account for nearly 63 per cent of revenue expenditure.

This means that before the government spends on welfare, infrastructure or development programmes, a majority of its revenue is already spoken for.

The long-term solution therefore lies not in government recruitment but in private-sector employment.

The budget recognises this reality.

Much of the government's optimism rests on the outcomes of the Advantage Assam investment summit held earlier this year. Officials claim investment commitments worth over Rs 5 lakh crore, with projects worth more than Rs 3 lakh crore already under implementation.

Among the flagship initiatives is the Tata semiconductor facility at Jagiroad, which is expected to begin production later this year. The revival of the Namrup fertiliser plant and the development of industrial parks are also expected to generate employment opportunities.

If these projects materialise as planned, they could help transform Assam's economic structure.

If they fail to deliver, the pressure on government finances will intensify.

**Welfare Remains Politically Central**

While investment and infrastructure dominate the growth narrative, welfare remains central to the budget's political strategy.

The government has allocated more than Rs 6,000 crore for welfare programmes.

Flagship schemes such as Orunodoi, Nijut Moina, Nijut Babu and Mahila Udyamita continue to receive support. Millions of beneficiaries are expected to benefit from cash transfers, educational assistance and entrepreneurship support.

These schemes have become important instruments of social support as well as political outreach.

The government has also introduced new eligibility conditions, excluding individuals practising polygamy or those convicted of crimes from receiving benefits.

Such measures reflect the administration's effort to combine welfare expansion with broader social and governance objectives.

However, welfare spending also adds to recurring expenditure obligations. Sustaining these programmes over the long term will depend on the state's ability to expand its revenue base.

**Education: Large Allocation, Lingering Questions**

Education receives one of the largest allocations in the budget.

School and higher education together account for more than Rs 22,600 crore, making

education one of the state's highest spending priorities.

At first glance, this appears impressive. Yet the composition of spending tells a more nuanced story.

Most of the allocation goes towards salaries and routine expenditure. Capital investment in schools remains relatively modest compared to overall spending.

This raises important questions about outcomes.

Are learning levels improving?  
Are dropout rates falling?  
Are students acquiring the skills needed for a changing economy?

The budget provides substantial financial support but offers limited insight into educational outcomes.

For a state with a young population, improving the quality of education may ultimately matter more than increasing expenditure alone.

**Debt and Fiscal Pressures**

The most significant challenge confronting Assam's finances lies in debt management.

The fiscal deficit for 2026-27 is projected at Rs 26,186 crore, exactly 3 per cent of GSDP—the maximum permitted under fiscal responsibility rules.

Staying within this limit demonstrates fiscal discipline. Yet it also leaves little room for unexpected shocks.

Assam remains highly vulnerable to nat-

ural disasters, particularly floods. Fluctuations in Central transfers, commodity prices or economic growth could quickly upset fiscal calculations.

The state's debt burden has increased significantly over recent years. Outstanding debt has risen from around Rs 55,000 crore in 2019 to more than Rs 1.6 lakh crore by 2025.

Interest payments have risen even faster. The government itself acknowledges that debt growth has reached a stage where caution is necessary. Current projections indicate that debt ratios could breach prescribed limits within the next decade if trends continue.

This does not suggest an immediate crisis. But it does mean that future budgets will have less room to manoeuvre unless economic growth generates substantially higher revenues.

**The Defining Decade**  
Assam's Budget 2026-27 represents a transition point rather than a destination.

The state has moved beyond discussions centred solely on welfare and basic development. It is now attempting a more ambitious transformation based on industrialisation, infrastructure and large-scale investment.

The government is betting that roads, factories, industrial parks and semiconductor plants will create a stronger economic foundation capable of sustaining welfare programmes, public employment and social development.

That strategy is logical. But it also carries risks.

Investment announcements must translate into functioning industries. Capital expenditure must create productive assets rather than merely inflate budget figures. Economic growth must generate jobs at a scale sufficient to absorb Assam's young workforce.

Above all, the state must strengthen its own revenue generation so that prosperity is not permanently dependent on Central transfers and borrowing.

The budget reveals a government that is confident about Assam's future but aware of the constraints it faces. The coming years will determine whether Assam can convert its current growth momentum into lasting economic self-reliance.

If the investment pipeline delivers, the state could emerge as one of India's fastest-growing regional economies. If it does not, rising debt and expanding commitments may limit future choices.

The success of this budget, therefore, will not be measured by the size of its allocations but by whether Assam can turn promises of investment into jobs, productivity and sustainable growth.

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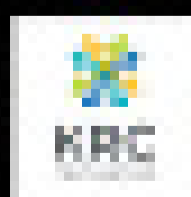


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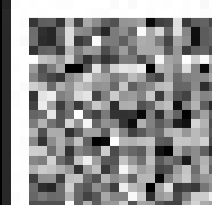


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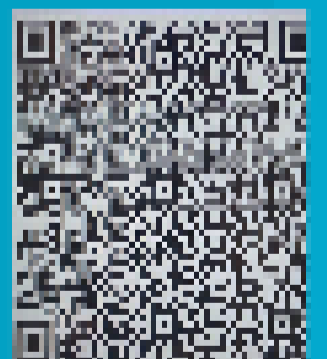
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