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PERSPECTIVE

Don't know whether to write "affect" or "effect"? Use "impact" instead.

BJP, Congress Stage Rival Protests in Manipur Over NEET Row

IMPHAL The controversy surrounding the alleged NEET paper leak sparked rival political protests in Manipur on Wednesday, with the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the opposition Congress holding separate demonstrations and exchanging sharp criticism over the issue.

Chief Minister N. Biren Singh, accompanied by BJP legislators and senior party leaders, participated in a sit-in protest at Thangshang in Nityapat Chuthek, accusing the Congress of politicising student concerns instead of engaging in constructive debate. Addressing party workers and supporters, Singh said students deserved "solutions, certainty and responsible leadership, not political theatrics," while alleging that the Congress was attempting to create disruption rather than participate in discussions on the examination controversy. He maintained that the Centre had expressed its readiness for a comprehensive debate on the issue and criticised the Opposition for choosing protests over parliamentary engagement. The Chief Minister further asserted that democracy should not be weakened through "manufactured chaos, deliberate disruption or misinformation," adding that the BJP remained committed to safeguarding constitutional values and democratic institutions. In a social media post, Singh reiterated the party's commitment to the rule of law and pledged continued efforts toward the welfare, peace and progress of citizens.

Meanwhile, the Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) organised a separate protest in Imphal condemning the detention of senior Congress leaders, including Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi and Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, during demonstrations in New Delhi over the NEET controversy.

WHO SAID WHAT



After the floods recede, we will thoroughly study satellite maps to figure out what went wrong on the fateful day of the cloudburst in Nagaland and devise our strategies accordingly. ~ Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM, Assam

Manipur Orders Special Audit of Delayed ADB-Funded IKTR Road Project

IMPHAL The Manipur Government has constituted a three-member high-level committee to conduct a special audit of the Asian Development Bank (ADB)-funded Imphal-Kangchup-Tamenglong Road (IKTR) project amid concerns over delays, cost overruns and the suspension of external funding.

The move comes as the state faces mounting financial liabilities following reports that the ADB has withheld further assistance after only 20 kilometres of the proposed 103-kilometre road project were completed.

The IKTR project, envisioned as a key connectivity corridor, aims to reduce the distance between Imphal and Guwahati by nearly 90 kilometres and improve access to the remote hill districts of Manipur. However, despite substantial financial investment over the past decade, progress on the project has remained slow, with only a 20-kilometre stretch reportedly blacktopped so far.

According to an official order issued on July 20, the special audit committee



STAY ENRICHED

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Assam Floods: Around 100 People Still Missing, Says CM Himanta After Visiting Worst-Hit Districts

OVER 30,000 DISPLACED SHELTERED IN 148 RELIEF CAMPS AS RESCUE OPERATIONS INTENSIFY

GUWAHATI Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said that around 100 people remain missing in the devastating floods that have inundated large parts of Upper Assam, following his visit to some of the worst-affected districts, including Sivasagar, Charaideo and Jorhat.

The Chief Minister toured flood-hit areas, inspected relief camps, interacted with displaced residents and reviewed rescue and relief operations being carried out by various agencies.

Addressing the media in Sivasagar, Sarma described the flood situation as "extremely serious," noting that several villages remain submerged and many affected areas are still difficult to access.

"Around 100 people are still missing. Many villages continue to remain under water, and there are places where rescue teams have not yet been able to reach. We are making every effort to assist those affected, but the situation remains challenging," he said.



The Chief Minister observed that the current floods have impacted not only rural areas but also urban centres, making the disaster particularly severe. According to him, Sivasagar, Charaideo, Jorhat and Golaghat are among the districts worst affected by the deluge.

He attributed part of the worsening situation to the inflow of water from neighbouring Nagaland, which has contributed to rising water levels in several areas of Upper Assam.

During his visit to Charaideo district, Sarma reviewed the functioning of relief camps and met families displaced by the floods. He described the scale of devastation as unprecedented, with

large numbers of residents taking shelter in relief camps while many others remain stranded in inundated villages.

The Chief Minister also acknowledged the loss of lives caused by the floods, adding that recovery efforts were continuing and more bodies were being recovered from affected areas. Sarma said rescue and relief operations were being conducted round the clock by personnel of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), the Indian Army and district administrations. The teams are engaged in evacuating stranded residents, supplying essential commodities and providing medical assistance in affected regions.

He further stated that the Union Government was extending full support to Assam's flood relief efforts and assured that the state government would seek additional assistance from the Centre if required.

Later in the day, the Chief Minister visited Solmora and Borigaon villages in Jorhat district to assess the damage

caused by the floods and interact with affected families.

Reviewing the situation in Jorhat, Sarma said the Bhogdoi River had breached embankments at five locations, aggravating flooding in surrounding areas. He announced that restoration and reconstruction work on the damaged embankments would begin immediately.

"The flood situation is very serious. The Bhogdoi River has breached embankments at five places. We will start reconstruction work without delay. Relief and rescue operations are continuing, and the government will provide every possible assistance to the affected people," he said. Responding to reports of a possible cloudburst in Nagaland's Mon district that may have contributed to the sudden rise in water levels, the Chief Minister said the Assam Government was in close coordination with the Nagaland Government. He added that a detailed assessment of the causes behind the surge would be undertaken once the immediate flood crisis subsides.

Sarma is scheduled to visit Golaghat district on Thursday to review the flood situation as rescue, relief and rehabilitation efforts continue across flood-affected areas of Upper Assam.

Assam continues to battle one of its worst flood disasters in recent years, with more than nine lakh people affected across 25 districts and over 1,800 villages inundated, while the death toll has risen to 41, according to official figures. The devastating floods have also resulted in the loss of thousands of livestock, adding to the humanitarian and economic burden faced by affected communities across the state.

State government officials attributed the unprecedented flooding to a combination of upstream cloudbursts and exceptionally heavy localised rainfall. Authorities said rainfall levels during the current spell have been recorded at nearly 436 per cent above normal, leading to widespread inundation, including in several areas that have not experienced flooding of such magnitude in recent memory.

Pawan Khera Appears Before Assam Crime Branch in Defamation Case

GUWAHATI Senior Congress leader Pawan Khera appeared before the Assam Police Crime Branch in Guwahati on Wednesday in connection with a defamation case filed by Riniki Bhuyan Sharma, wife of Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

Khera arrived in Guwahati from New Delhi and proceeded to the Crime Branch office after responding to a summons issued by the investigating agency. His appearance comes after he had missed several earlier dates, citing health issues and prior party commitments.

Speaking to reporters before joining the investigation, Khera said he had complied with the latest summons and maintained that he had informed the Crime Branch about the reasons for his earlier absence. "I had requested the Crime Branch as I was unwell and had party programmes. They accepted my request," Khera said. The Crime Branch had most recently directed the Congress leader to appear on July 17 after he failed to attend previous scheduled hearings.

According to the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC), Khera was engaged in the Congress party's 'Chhatron Ki Goonj' programme in Bengaluru at the time, an event that was also attended by Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi.

Despite missing the latest scheduled appearance, Khera has previously cooperated with the investigation and appeared before the Crime Branch on two occasions, during which he was questioned in connection with the case.

The defamation complaint was filed by Riniki Bhuyan Sharma over remarks allegedly made by the Congress leader. The matter has since been under investigation by the Assam Police Crime Branch.

Amit Shah Orders Central Team to Assess Assam Flood Damage as Death Toll Reaches 41

GUWAHATI Union Home Minister Amit Shah has directed an inter-ministerial central team to visit Assam to assess the damage caused by the ongoing floods and facilitate relief and rehabilitation measures, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

The move comes amid one of the worst flood crises in recent years, which has claimed at least 41 lives and affected more than 6.5 lakh people across the state.

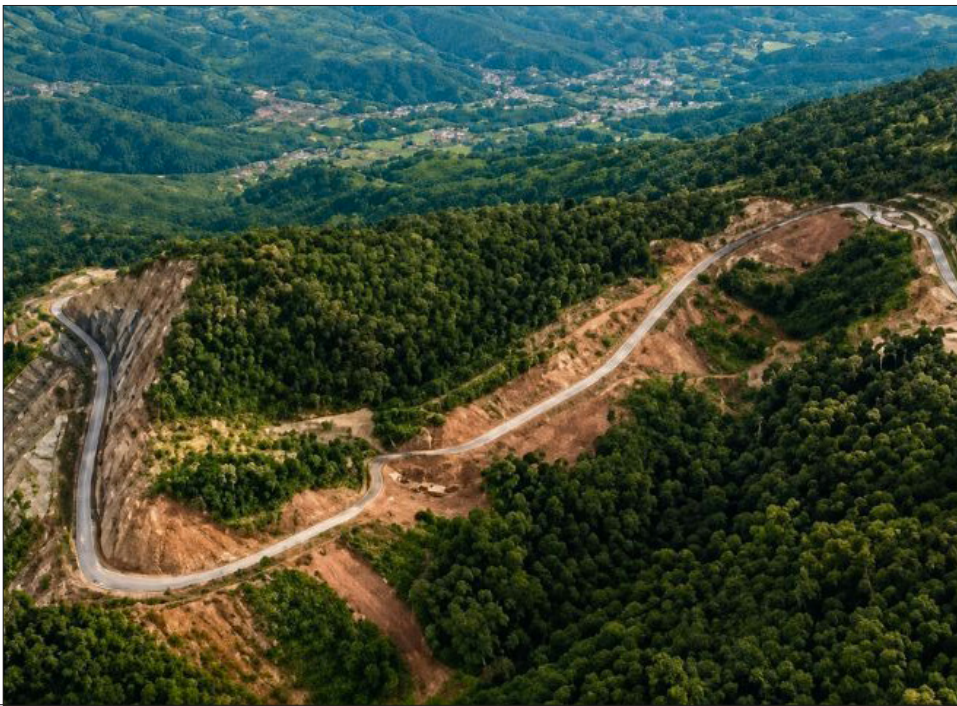
Sharing the development on social media, Sarma said Shah personally spoke to him regarding the "unprecedented flood situation" in Assam and assured the Centre's support in addressing the disaster. According to the Chief Minister, the Union Home Minister informed him that an inter-ministerial team would soon visit the state to assess the extent of the damage and evaluate the assistance required for relief, rehabilitation and restoration of livelihoods.

Expressing gratitude for the Centre's support, Sarma said the floods, triggered by a cloudburst in upstream areas and intensified by heavy rainfall, have caused widespread devastation across several districts. "The flash floods, triggered by a cloudburst upstream, have wreaked havoc on the lives of our people," Sarma said, thanking Shah for standing with Assam during the crisis. Highlighting the scale of the disaster, the Chief Minister said more than nine lakh people across over 1,800 villages in 25 districts have been affected by the floods. He added that thousands of livestock have also been lost, further aggravating the economic

hardship faced by rural communities. Sarma noted that upstream cloudbursts coupled with localised rainfall measuring nearly 436 per cent above normal levels led to extensive flooding, including in areas that had not witnessed such severe inundation in recent decades. Rescue and relief operations are continuing on a war footing, with personnel from the Indian Air Force, National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) and various state agencies engaged in evacuating stranded residents and delivering emergency supplies.

The state government has established more than 148 relief camps, currently sheltering nearly 30,000 displaced people. Relief teams are distributing food, drinking water, medicines and other essential items across the affected districts. Officials said more than 3 lakh kilograms of rice and other relief materials have already been dispatched to the worst-hit areas, while additional supplies are being mobilised to meet growing requirements. The Chief Minister also said the state government is working closely with the Centre and relevant departments to formulate a comprehensive long-term rehabilitation package for flood-affected families.

In addition, Assam plans to initiate structured discussions with neighbouring states once the immediate crisis subsides to strengthen inter-state coordination on disaster management, early warning systems and mitigation measures aimed at reducing the impact of upstream cloudbursts and flash floods in the future.



has been tasked with examining the tendering process, utilisation of funds, project execution and the factors responsible for the prolonged delay. The panel has been directed to submit its findings and recommendations within three months.

The committee comprises three retired senior Public Works Department (PWD) officials:

“ Kh. Temba Singh, former Chief Engineer, PWD - Chairman

“ T. Rabindrakumar Singh, retired Chief Engineer (NH&NEC) - Member

“ N. Subhas Singh, former Chief Engineer, PWD - Member

Officials said the audit is intended to provide a comprehensive assessment of the project's implementation and identify lapses that may have contributed to the failure to meet construction targets. The IKTR project was launched in March 2016 with an initial estimated cost of ₹1,380 crore, which was subsequently revised to ₹1,766 crore. The ADB reportedly released ₹1,447.48 crore for the project, while the Manipur Government contributed its mandatory 10

per cent share amounting to ₹115.20 crore. Despite the significant financial outlay, the project has failed to achieve its intended milestones. Official sources indicated that the project deadline has already expired and available funds were not fully utilised, leading the ADB to suspend further financial assistance.

The funding freeze has reportedly left the state government grappling with substantial outstanding payments owed to contractors engaged in the project.

Sources further indicated that the findings of the special audit could form the basis for a more detailed investigation. Once the committee submits its report, authorities may consider referring the matter for a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) if evidence of financial irregularities or procedural violations emerges.

The audit is expected to play a crucial role in determining accountability and charting the future course of the long-delayed infrastructure project, which was envisaged as a major boost to road connectivity and economic development in Manipur.



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THE GLOBAL INDIAN ADVANTAGE

The extraordinary success of Indians across the world is often celebrated as a matter of national pride. From Silicon Valley boardrooms to the highest offices of government in countries thousands of miles away, people of Indian origin have become some of the most influential leaders of the 21st century. Google CEO Sundar Pichai, former British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, former Irish Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, former Portuguese Prime Minister António Costa, and countless business leaders, scientists, doctors and entrepreneurs stand as examples of a diaspora that has consistently excelled wherever it has settled.

Yet the real question is not why Indians succeed abroad. The more important question is why the same level of success remains elusive for millions within India itself.

The answer carries profound implications for India's future.

The Indian diaspora, estimated at nearly 35 million people, represents only a small fraction of India's population. Yet its influence on global politics, business, technology, medicine and academia is disproportionately large. Indian-origin professionals head some of the world's most valuable corporations. Indian communities in countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Singapore, South Africa, Mauritius, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago have achieved remarkable economic and social mobility, often becoming among the most prosperous groups in their adopted societies.

This phenomenon cannot be dismissed as a coincidence.

A common explanation is that many Indians who migrated to developed countries were already highly educated and skilled. There is certainly some truth in that argument. The United States, for example, attracted engineers, doctors and scientists from India's best institutions. Their success is therefore hardly surprising.

However, that explanation alone does not account for the broader global pattern.

The story of the Indian diaspora extends far beyond highly qualified professionals. In many countries, Indians arrived under far less favourable circumstances. Thousands were transported as indentured labourers to work on plantations across the British Empire. They faced discrimination, economic hardship and limited opportunities. Yet over generations they not only survived but thrived.

In Mauritius, descendants of indentured labourers today form the majority population and have played a central role in transforming the country into one of Africa's most successful economies. In Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana, Indian-origin communities have become major political and economic forces. In South Africa, despite enduring decades of racial discrimination under apartheid, Indians built prosperous businesses and produced leaders who helped shape the nation's democratic transition.

The same pattern is visible in Britain, where early Indian migrants often arrived with limited resources and faced social prejudice. Today British Indians rank among the country's most successful communities in terms of education, professional achievement and household income.

These examples suggest that the success of overseas Indians cannot be explained merely by educational qualifications or selective immigration policies. Something more fundamental is at work.

Singaporean diplomat and scholar Kishore Mahbubani has argued that Indians succeed abroad because they are allowed to compete fairly in systems that reward merit. Whether one fully agrees with his assessment or not, it highlights an uncomfortable truth that India must confront.

Most advanced economies operate within relatively transparent and rules-based systems. Success depends more on performance, innovation and competence than on navigating layers of bureaucracy, patronage networks or administrative hurdles. Individuals are generally able to rise based on their abilities rather than their connections.

In such environments, Indians often flourish. This should not surprise anyone. India has never lacked talent. It has never lacked ambition. Nor has it lacked hardworking people willing to take risks and seize opportunities.

What India has often lacked is a system that consistently allows talent to translate into success.

Despite significant economic reforms over the past three decades, many Indians still face obstacles that limit their potential. Excessive bureaucracy, regulatory complexity, uneven access to quality education, inadequate healthcare, difficulties in obtaining credit, and persistent barriers to entrepreneurship continue to constrain millions of capable citizens.

For every Indian who becomes a global CEO, there are countless others whose aspirations are stifled by systemic limitations.

The lesson from the diaspora is therefore not that Indians are exceptional abroad. It is that Indians perform exceptionally when institutions create conditions that reward merit, encourage innovation and provide fair opportunities.

India's challenge is not to create talent but to unlock it.

This requires reforms that go beyond headline-grabbing announcements. It means improving public education so that children in rural districts have opportunities comparable to those in major cities. It means making access to finance easier for small entrepreneurs. It means simplifying regulations that discourage business formation and investment. It means strengthening institutions that ensure fairness, transparency and accountability.

Most importantly, it means creating a culture where achievement is determined by capability rather than influence.

The success of the diaspora also raises another important question: India's relationship with overseas Indians. India has rightly recognised the achievements of its diaspora through initiatives such as the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award and the Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) programme. Overseas Indians also contribute enormously through remittances, which consistently rank among the highest in the world.

However, there is growing debate over whether India should reconsider its long-standing opposition to dual citizenship.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Happiness is not something ready made. It comes from your own actions. - Dalai Lama

Jammu & Kashmir's Statehood Question Will the Demand for Statehood Remain in Limbo Forever?



POONAM I. KAUSHISH

As Parliament's Monsoon Session began on Monday, protests and political confrontations quickly intensified, drawing national attention to New Delhi. More than 20,000 students marched toward Parliament in protest against the alleged NEET examination paper leak, demanding the resignation of the Education Minister.

Amid this political noise, another significant issue received comparatively less attention. Jammu & Kashmir's ruling National Conference (NC) once again pressed for the restoration of statehood and urged the Modi government to honor the commitments it had made in Parliament and before the Supreme Court.

Notably, the peaceful Assembly elections held in 2024, following the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, helped break a prolonged political deadlock. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has repeatedly cited the decline in terrorist incidents and the sharp rise in tourism as evidence that normalcy has returned to the "new Kashmir."

Against this backdrop, the National Conference has grown increasingly frustrated by the delay in restoring statehood. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah sarcastically remarked, "Should we approach US President Donald Trump and stage a protest outside the White House to secure statehood from the BJP?"

If Kashmir has indeed become stable enough for full democratic self-governance, then what is preventing the restoration of statehood? What benchmark remains unmet?

In simple terms, the biggest obstacle is not constitutional but political and strategic. The Union government has consistently maintained that Jammu & Kashmir will regain statehood at an "appropriate time." The real dispute centers on when that time will arrive and under what conditions the decision will be taken.

The Centre's hesitation stems primarily from security concerns. While it acknowledges significant improvements in the security situation, it is not yet convinced that these gains are permanent. Statehood, according to this view, should be restored only after peace and security are firmly entrenched. After all, Jammu & Kashmir has endured decades of terrorism, cross-border infiltration, and Pakistan-sponsored militancy. The scars of the Pahalgam terror attack have not yet fully healed.

There is also a political dimension. As a Union Territory, Jammu & Kashmir remains under greater administrative influence of the Centre. Restoring full statehood could result in an elected government that frequently disagrees with New Delhi's policies and emerges as a strong political challenger to the Centre.

Moreover, direct administrative oversight through the Lieutenant Governor (LG) allows faster security-related decision-making and facilitates closer coordination among the Army, paramilitary forces, intelligence agencies, and the police.

According to a senior political leader, "The political priorities of a state government may not always align with New Delhi's security strategy. That does not mean such a government would support terrorism, but it could have a different political approach. At the same time, after the abrogation of Article 370, the Centre does not want regional parties such as Omar Abdullah's National Conference or Mehbooba Mufti's PDP to create a constant atmosphere of political confrontation."

The question, therefore, is why the Centre would relinquish powers when the current arrangement helps

maintain stability and keeps separatist politics under control. For the BJP, retaining administrative authority currently appears more important than the symbolic value of restoring statehood.

Union Territory status gives the Centre broad control over governance through the LG. Restoring statehood would require sharing power with an elected government that may hold different views on governance, law and order, and the political discourse surrounding Kashmir. From a practical standpoint, maintaining administrative control is seen as more advantageous for the Centre.

In addition, neither the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) nor the BJP appears to face significant political pressure to restore statehood immediately. Delaying the issue carries little apparent electoral cost. For most BJP supporters outside Jammu & Kashmir, the abrogation of Article 370 was the defining political objective; the timing of statehood restoration is a secondary concern.

Conversely, if statehood is restored and an elected government becomes a vocal critic of New Delhi, or if security conditions deteriorate again, the political consequences could fall squarely on the BJP and the Union government.

Policymakers also argue that while security has improved, a few more years of sustained stability may be needed before making major governance changes. They want to test whether recent gains are durable and long-lasting. For Jammu & Kashmir's elected government, however, statehood is not merely a symbolic issue. It is fundamentally about who exercises political authority, controls financial resources, and directs administration. Under the current arrangement, substantial powers remain concentrated in New Delhi. Critical subjects such as law and order, policing, and public administration continue to fall largely within the LG's domain.

Kashmiri leaders argue that while they remain accountable to the electorate, they lack the powers that normally accompany elected state governments. During the Assembly elections, Omar Abdullah's National Conference made the restoration of statehood a central campaign promise. Failure to achieve that goal could allow the People's Democratic Party

(PDP) to portray the NC as a powerless government functioning under the Centre's influence.

Many Kashmiris believe that the abrogation of Article 370 diminished their political status. For them, restoring statehood is not merely an administrative adjustment but a minimum restoration of dignity and political rights.

One of the Omar Abdullah government's major grievances is that the bureaucracy feels more accountable to the LG and the Union Home Ministry than to elected ministers. Statehood would strengthen the authority of the Council of Ministers over the administrative machinery.

At the same time, with an elected government now in place and democratic representation restored, continuing to postpone statehood is becoming increasingly difficult to justify from a democratic perspective.

Clearly, both sides have legitimate arguments and perceived risks. The Centre prioritizes security and centralized control, while Jammu & Kashmir's elected leadership emphasizes federalism and democratic rights. The dispute is not about whether statehood can constitutionally be restored; it is about how much risk the Centre is willing to accept and when it will conclude that those risks have fallen to an acceptable level.

Underlying the entire debate is a deep trust deficit. Whether under Congress or BJP governments, successive administrations in New Delhi have often viewed Kashmir's political leadership with suspicion, accusing it of exploiting democratic institutions while encouraging separatist sentiments. Kashmiri parties, in turn, have accused the Centre of repeatedly weakening democratic institutions through dismissals of elected governments, prolonged Governor's Rule, and political interference.

The BJP's caution is rooted in its belief that Jammu & Kashmir remains an exceptionally sensitive region. If, after statehood is restored, an elected government repeatedly challenges the Centre politically, or if another major terror attack similar to Pahalgam occurs, the opposition would likely blame New Delhi for acting prematurely. Likewise, if unrest resurfaces, the responsibility for restoring statehood would ultimately be placed on the Centre.

Critics argue that if the government continues to claim that elections have been successfully conducted, terrorism has declined, investment is increasing, infrastructure is expanding rapidly, and integration with the national mainstream is progressing, then the continued delay in restoring statehood appears inconsistent with its own narrative. Such delays inevitably raise questions about whether the Centre itself is fully confident in the durability of the post-2019 order.

Consequently, the government appears determined to avoid political risks while retaining administrative control for as long as possible.

The phrase "appropriate time" has thus evolved into a political com-

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Govt has already appealed to all the political parties for a comprehensive discussion on NEET paper leaks and all the matters related to examinations in the country. Parliament must deliberate on the such important issues for the future of the students of our country.

~ Kiren Rijju, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Minister of Minority Affairs, Gol



mitment without a clear timeline or measurable criteria. The eventual restoration of statehood will depend on how policymakers balance residual security concerns against the growing demands for full democratic rights.

Ultimately, beyond political rhetoric and constitutional debates, the core issue remains simple: who will exercise real power in Jammu & Kashmir—the Union government or the elected government of Jammu & Kashmir?

The Centre argues that it has delivered stability. The state government contends that stability without full democratic authority remains incomplete. In any democracy, credibility depends not only on conducting elections but also on entrusting elected governments with genuine executive powers.

It is increasingly evident that this prolonged state of uncertainty can neither satisfy democratic aspirations nor guarantee long-term political stability.

What is needed now is a clear, transparent, and time-bound roadmap based on objective benchmarks such as security, governance, and institutional stability rather than political convenience. Only then can a sustainable balance be struck between national security and democratic aspirations.

The question remains: what comes next?



Assam Floods: CM Announces Rs 4 Lakh Ex Gratia for Victims’ Families; Around 70 Missing



GUWAHATI

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced an ex gratia of Rs 4 lakh for the next of kin of each person who lost their lives in the ongoing floods, as authorities continued search and relief operations across Upper Assam, where around 70 people remain missing in Sivasagar district alone.

The announcement came during the Chief Minister’s visit to flood-affected areas of Sivasagar after reviewing the situation in neighbouring Charaideo district.

“We will immediately provide Rs 4 lakh as relief to the family of every deceased victim. I will also try to assist them further in the future,” Sarma said while interacting with affected families.

Acknowledging the extensive damage caused by the floods, the Chief Minister

assured residents that the government would support rehabilitation and livelihood restoration efforts.

“There has been widespread destruction. The affected families are not alone in this crisis. The government will stand by them throughout the rehabilitation and rebuilding process,” he said.

Sivasagar has emerged as the worst-affected district in the current flood wave, with nearly 3.6 lakh people impacted. Official figures show that around 88,000 people have been affected in Jorhat, while more than 72,500 residents have been impacted in Charaideo district.

Sarma said it was too early to determine the final death toll, citing the large number of missing persons.

“It is difficult to estimate the number of casualties at this stage because

around 70 people are still missing in Sivasagar alone. The actual picture will become clear only after three or four days,” he said.

Describing the situation as unprecedented, the Chief Minister said floodwaters had submerged entire localities, reaching the rooftops of houses in some areas. “Many people have lost their lives. Houses, agricultural land and livestock have suffered extensive damage,” he said after reviewing conditions in Charaideo, Sivasagar and Jorhat.

Earlier in the day, several flood-hit residents raised concerns over delays in rescue operations and shortages of relief materials in certain localities. Some residents from inundated areas on the outskirts of Sivasagar town alleged that rescue teams were unable to reach them in time, forcing families to evacuate on their own.

District authorities, however, said large-scale relief operations were underway. According to official data, relief agencies have distributed over 1,335 quintals of rice, 259 quintals of dal, more than 1.74 lakh litres of drinking water, 4,715 tarpaulins and 2,320 litres of infant food across the Nazira, Sivasagar and Dimow revenue circles. Other essential supplies, including salt, mustard oil, biscuits and flattened rice, have also been distributed.

Responding to demands for additional rescue resources, including appeals by Sivasagar MLA Akhil Gogoi for more boats, Sarma said the government would arrange the necessary equipment.

“There is no issue in carrying out airlift operations, but there is no suitable place for helicopters to land as vast stretches remain submerged. There are

practical challenges, but we are doing everything possible,” he said.

Amid the widespread devastation, authorities reported a gradual improvement in some areas as floodwaters began receding. According to the district Water Resources Control Room, water levels in the Brahmaputra, Dihing and Dikhou rivers have started falling, although they continue to flow above danger levels at several locations.

However, water levels in the Disang and Darika rivers have risen again, while the Mitong River remains stable, officials said.

With rescue, relief and rehabilitation efforts continuing, the state government remains focused on locating missing persons and assessing the full extent of the damage caused by one of the most severe flood episodes to hit Upper Assam in recent years.

Suspected IED Blast Destroys Bailey Bridge in Kamjong, Isolates Over 10 Villages

IMPHAL

A suspected improvised explosive device (IED) blast destroyed a Bailey bridge in Manipur’s Kamjong district, severing a key road link and cutting off more than 10 villages from the district headquarters, police said on Wednesday.

The explosion reportedly occurred around 9.30 pm on Tuesday on the bridge over the Namban Lok River between Phange and Chattric villages. The blast caused extensive damage to the structure, while a Telecom Department pick-up vehicle parked on the riverbank below was also set on fire by unidentified miscreants.

Built under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), the bridge served as the primary connection between Sahamphung Block and Kamjong district headquarters. It was also the sole road link for Chattric village and several surrounding settlements. The destruction of the bridge has disrupted transport and access to essential services for thousands of residents.

Police have registered a suo motu case and launched an investigation. Preliminary findings suggest that the attack was intended to damage critical public infrastructure, disrupt transportation and communication networks, obstruct civilian movement and create fear among local communities.

Investigators recovered materials believed to be remnants of the explosive device from the site, including debris found on a blue plastic tarpaulin. However, authorities have not yet officially confirmed the nature of the recovered materials.

While some local residents alleged the involvement of Kuki militant groups, no organisation had claimed responsibility for the blast as of Wednesday evening. The allegations remain unverified.

BABINA Group Releases Two Books on Life and Journey of Dr Thangjam Dhabali Singh



IMPHAL

The BABINA Group of Companies on Wednesday released two books chronicling the life and inspiring journey of its Chairman and Managing Director, Dr Thangjam Dhabali Singh, at a function held at The Classic Grande in Imphal on Wednesday. The books, titled *Microscope to Milestones: A Pathologist’s Journey Beyond the Lab*, an autobiography by Dr Dhabali Singh, and *Korongi Mangal*, a biography authored by Lourembam Orenkumar, were unveiled in the presence of former MLA Professor Ng Bijoy Singh as the chief

guest. Former DMU Vice Chancellor Professor N Rajmuhon and Indian Institute of Information Technology (IIIT) Manipur Director Professor Krishnan Baskar attended the event as guests of honour. Speaking on the occasion, Dr Dhabali reflected on his personal and professional journey and the values that guided him throughout his life and career. He said the autobiography was written to document his life’s journey, beginning with his childhood and formative years, followed by his academic pursuits, professional career, entrepreneurial ventures, and the establishment of healthcare and hospitality institutions. The event was attended by eminent personalities, academicians, professionals, and well-wishers, who appreciated Dr Dhabali’s contributions to healthcare, education, and entrepreneurship in the region.

GUWAHATI

Women and children accounted for nine of the 21 flood-related deaths reported in Assam over the past 24 hours, underscoring the human cost of the devastating floods that continue to ravage Upper Assam.

According to the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), four children and five women were among those who lost their lives during the period. Four deaths were reported from Sivasagar district and one from Jorhat.

With the latest casualties, the flood-related death toll in Assam this year has risen to 31. Sivasagar remains the worst-affected district in terms of fatalities, accounting for 13 deaths so far.

The deaths of children come amid growing concerns over safety in flood-affected areas. On July 20, two teenage girls were swept away by floodwaters in Jorhat district, while another boy was reported missing in Karbi Anglong.

The victims, identified as 14-year-old Susmita Mardha and Chuniya Pahariya of Panbari village, were reportedly caught in a strong current while near the swollen Doi Jaan stream. Following the tragedy, Titabor MLA Dhiraj Gowala visited the bereaved families and appealed to parents to keep children away from rivers, streams and other water bodies during the monsoon season.

The floods have also severely affected women, particularly in remote tea garden areas of Sivasagar, where damaged roads and submerged settlements have disrupted access to healthcare services.

In one incident earlier this week, a pregnant tea garden worker was forced to deliver her baby inside a factory after floodwaters made it impossible to reach a hospital. The Tea Association of India (TAI) also highlighted the plight of another expectant mother in a flood-hit tea estate who required urgent medical care, drawing at-

tention to the vulnerabilities faced by pregnant women during the crisis.

The overall flood situation remained critical on Wednesday, with more than 5.65 lakh people affected across the state following days of incessant rainfall and heavy inflows from rivers originating in the Naga Hills.

ASDMA reported that 872 villages remained inundated, while floodwaters have damaged over 24,210 hectares of agricultural land.

Several major rivers continue to flow above danger levels. The Brahmaputra remains above the danger mark at Neamatighat, while tributaries including the Buridihing at Khowang and the Dhansiri at Golaghat and Numaligarh are also flowing above danger levels. The Dikhou River at Sivasagar and the Disang River at Nanglamuraghat have crossed their highest recorded flood levels.

Relief and rescue operations are continuing across affected

districts. Authorities have established 273 relief camps and relief distribution centres in 10 districts, providing shelter to more than 12,000 displaced people.

Rescue teams comprising the Army, National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), Fire and Emergency Services, police and district administrations have rescued over 6,000 people from flood-hit areas of Charaideo, Golaghat, Jorhat and Sivasagar.

Meanwhile, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued a yellow alert for Assam, forecasting thunderstorms and heavy rainfall at isolated places over the next four days. The forecast has raised concerns that the flood situation could deteriorate further in several vulnerable districts.

As rescue and relief efforts continue, authorities have urged residents in low-lying and riverine areas to remain alert and follow official advisories amid the ongoing threat of fresh flooding.

Assam Congress Marches to BJP Headquarters Over Exam Row, Demands Pradhan’s Resignation

GUWAHATI

The Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) on Wednesday intensified its agitation over alleged examination irregularities by staging a march towards the BJP’s state headquarters in Guwahati, demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharma Pradhan and a discussion on the issue in Parliament.

The protest march, organised from Rajiv Bhawan to Vajpayee Bhawan, was led by Leader of the Opposition in the Assam Assembly Wajed Ali Choudhury and Congress MLA Jakir Hussain Sikdar. Hundreds of party workers participated in the demonstration, which was held in solidarity with ongoing protests at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi and similar demonstrations being organised by the Congress across the country.

Protesters raised slogans against the BJP-led government and condemned the police action against students during the “Sansad Chalo” march in New Delhi on July 20. They demanded the withdrawal of all FIRs and cases registered against protesting students and sought action against those allegedly responsible for the use of force.

Addressing the gathering, Sikdar accused the authorities of acting harshly against student protesters and questioned the gov-

ernment’s response to the examination controversy.

“We want answers from the BJP-led government and accountability over the treatment meted out to students,” he said. Choudhury reiterated the party’s demand for a parliamentary debate on the alleged examination irregularities and called for Pradhan’s resignation. “The issue deserves a full discussion in Parliament. The Union Education Minister should take responsibility, and all cases registered against students must be withdrawn,” he said.

Earlier in the day, Congress workers also staged a protest outside the Assam Legislative Assembly, expressing solidarity with students and Opposition leaders participating in an indefinite hunger strike at Jantar Mantar.

The demonstrations followed the detention of Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and several Opposition leaders by Delhi Police after a sit-in protest outside the Prime Minister’s official residence in New Delhi on Tuesday night.

Assam Congress leaders and workers also attempted to submit a memorandum to Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya at Raj Bhawan. However, the delegation was stopped by police outside the Governor’s residence and was not allowed to enter the premises.

Manipur CM Disburses Rs 91.66 Crore Welfare Assistance, Launches Integrated Pension System

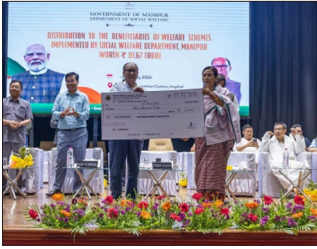
IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Wednesday distributed welfare assistance worth Rs 91.66 crore to more than 2.4 lakh beneficiaries under various schemes of the Social Welfare Department and launched a new digital pension platform aimed at improving service delivery.

The welfare distribution programme was held at the City Convention Centre in Imphal and benefited a total of 2,40,758 individuals across the state.

During the event, the Chief Minister formally launched the Integrated Monthly Pension Processing System (IMPPS), a technology-driven platform designed to ensure faster, more transparent and efficient disbursement of pension benefits.

Addressing the gathering,



Khemchand Singh said Manipur had endured significant challenges over the past three years, with the prolonged crisis placing considerable social, emotional and financial burdens on the people.

He stated that the welfare measures were being implemented under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and with the support of the Union government to provide financial assistance to vulnerable and disadvantaged sections of society.

“The state has gone through difficult times, and many families have faced hardships. These welfare initiatives are intended to provide support and relief to those who need it most,” the Chief Minister said.

Expressing confidence that the assistance would benefit recipients, he said the government remained focused on strengthening social security and ensuring that welfare schemes reach eligible beneficiaries in a timely manner. Highlighting the importance of the newly launched pension system, Khemchand Singh said the Integrated Monthly Pension Processing System would streamline the pension disbursement process by reducing delays, enhancing transparency and improving administrative efficiency. “The system will help ensure timely pension payments and make the entire process more transparent and accountable,” he said.

Reaffirming his government’s

commitment to inclusive development, the Chief Minister said Manipur would continue to prioritise welfare-oriented governance and strengthen mechanisms for the effective delivery of public services.

He emphasised that empowering vulnerable citizens through social protection measures and transparent administration remains a key objective of the state government.

The programme was attended by Deputy Chief Ministers Losli Dikho and Nemcha Kipgen, the latter joining virtually, along with Cabinet ministers, legislators, senior government officials and other dignitaries.

The launch of the Integrated Monthly Pension Processing System is expected to modernise pension administration in the state and improve access to welfare benefits for thousands of eligible beneficiaries.

Nagaland-Japan Connect 2.0 Begins, Expands Employment Opportunities for Youth

DIMAPUR

The second edition of Nagaland-Japan Connect commenced at the ARMS Incorporation Centre in Chümoukedima marking a significant step in strengthening workforce collaboration and employment opportunities between Nagaland and Japan.

The programme, titled Nagaland-Japan Connect 2.0, brought together representatives of the Government of Nagaland, Japan’s Kochi Prefecture, Japanese organisations and aspiring youth from the state. The event also coincided with the inauguration of the new ARMS Incorporation office and training centre.

Among those present were Advisor to the Chief Minister and Chairman of the Investment and Development Authority of Nagaland (IDAN) Abu Metha, Advisor for Industries and Commerce Hekani Jakhlu, and a 21-member delegation from Kochi Prefecture representing 14 Japanese organisations. The delegation was led by Kiyo Maeda, Planning Supervisor of the Commerce and Industry Policy Division of Kochi Prefecture.

Welcoming participants, Nagatoshi Shibata, Vice-President of H&A India Pvt. Ltd. (ARMS Incorporation), highlighted the organisation’s growth since its establishment in 2022. He said the



newly inaugurated centre would serve as a hub for Japanese language training, skill development and career counselling, helping create wider employment opportunities for young people from Nagaland and the Northeast.

Addressing the gathering, Abu Metha said the partnership between Nagaland and Kochi Prefecture has evolved steadily through sustained engagement and is already generating meaningful employment opportunities for Naga youth.

Recalling a previous visit to Japan

led by Chief Minister Dr. Neiphiu Rio, Metha noted that cooperation between the two sides now extends beyond employment to include education, tourism, culture and people-to-people exchanges.

He urged young people seeking opportunities abroad to act as ambassadors of Nagaland and uphold the state’s values, discipline and reputation wherever they work.

Hekani Jakhlu described the continued engagement of Kochi Prefecture as a reflection of the strong relationship built

over the years and the positive performance of Naga youth employed in Japan.

She encouraged stakeholders to broaden employment opportunities beyond the service sector and explore high-demand fields such as skilled trades, while also expanding long-term skill development initiatives.

Speaking on behalf of Kochi Prefecture, Kiyo Maeda said more than 40 Naga youths are currently employed in the prefecture. Highlighting Japan’s growing labour requirements, particularly in agriculture, she encouraged more young people from Nagaland to take advantage of available opportunities.

Maeda noted that the partnership has emerged as one of Kochi Prefecture’s most successful international collaborations, with employment avenues available in sectors such as construction, hospitality, caregiving and agriculture.

In the closing session, IDAN officials thanked the Kochi Prefecture delegation and ARMS Incorporation for facilitating interactions between Japanese employers and local youth. They reaffirmed the Nagaland government’s commitment to strengthening international partnerships that can generate sustainable employment and skill-development opportunities. Following the programme, a high-level review meeting chaired by Abu Metha assessed the progress of ongoing collaborations between the Government of Nagaland and Kochi Prefecture. Discussions focused on expanding cooperation in workforce development, skill training, education and investment, with both sides expressing optimism about deepening the partnership in the years ahead.

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CJP alleges internet shutdown at Jantar Mantar, fears fresh police crackdown

NEW DELHI

The Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) on Thursday alleged that internet services had been shut down around Delhi's Jantar Mantar, where its supporters have been staging a sit-in, and claimed the move signalled the possibility of another police crackdown on the ongoing protest. In a post on X, CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke said, "Internet service shutdown at Jantar Mantar. Govt planning another brutal crackdown?"

In a separate post, Dipke appealed to police and paramilitary personnel deployed at the protest site not to use force against demonstrators. "Appeal to police and paramilitary forces deployed to crush the protest. Do not obey illegal orders that ask you to

beat up innocent protesters. This is your test as well. Will you stand with the people, or with authoritarians," he wrote.

The allegations come as the sit-in at Jantar Mantar entered its third day following the July 20 'Sansad Chalo' march, during which Delhi Police used baton charges and tear gas to prevent protesters from marching towards Parliament. The CJP has accused the police of using excessive force during the operation, while Delhi Police has maintained that it acted after protesters attempted to breach security arrangements.

The agitation, which began on June 20, seeks accountability over alleged irregularities in competitive examinations, reforms to the

education system, the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, and compensation for the families of students who allegedly died by suicide following the paper leak.

Meanwhile, activist Sonam Wangchuk, who joined the protest on June 28 and has been on an indefinite hunger strike since then, said on Wednesday that he would end his fast if the Centre assured that no punitive action or FIRs would be initiated against students and youth who participated in the protest.

Wangchuk is currently admitted to Medanta Hospital in Gurugram after being shifted from Safdarjung Hospital following a Delhi High Court order.

‘Nothing is more important than youth’s future’: PM Modi

‘PM is shaken, rattled’: Congress accuses Modi of doing most harm to youth’s future



NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said that safeguarding the future of the country's youth remains the government's highest priority, saying those responsible for paper leaks would face strict action.

His remarks come amid continuing protests by students over the alleged NEET paper leak and demands resignation of Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

The prime minister said the government has decided to establish fast-track courts to ensure speedy trials and stringent punishment in paper leak cases.

"Nothing is more important than the welfare and future of our youth! Those who try to harm the future of our youth

“Nothing is more important than the welfare and future of our youth! Those who try to harm the future of our youth will not be spared”

will not be spared," Modi said in a post on X.

He added that he had directed the concerned authorities and officials to take all necessary steps to tackle the issue.

"This continues our series of steps for safeguarding the interests of students," the PM said.

Amid Prime Minister

Narendra Modi's outreach for youth welfare, the Congress on Thursday said that the PM was "rattled" and had alleged that he had done the greatest harm to the future of young people.

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi also alleged that Modi had allowed and encouraged the total cap-

ture and destruction of India's education system, and protected every person responsible for it. "You are the one who has harmed the future of our youth the most. You allowed and encouraged the total capture and destruction of our education system - and protected every person responsible for it," Gandhi said on X.

"The students' demands are clear: 1. Sack Dharmendra Pradhan. 2. Apologise to the students. 3. Take action against those who assaulted them," the former Congress chief said.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the PM does not have the courage to stand up in Parliament, speak and engage in serious debate like all his predecessors did when the occasion demanded.

This morning he has put out a social media post to show that he is concerned with the issues being raised by students across the country, the Congress leader said.

"Actually, the post, such as it is, demonstrates that he is shaken and rattled," Ramesh said.

"Vote Chori, Seat Chori, Chanda Chori, Exam Paper Chori" - the list goes on and on," he said on X.

His remarks came after Modi said on X that nothing is more important than the welfare and future of our youth.

"We have decided to set up fast-track courts to ensure swift and stringent punishment for those involved in paper leaks. Have directed the concerned authorities and officials to take all necessary steps in this regard," Modi said.

This continues our series of steps for safeguarding the interests of students, the prime minister said.

"Those who try to harm the future of our youth will not be spared," Modi asserted.



INTERNATIONAL

Rubio to revive prospect of US helping end war in Ukraine in meeting with Russian counterpart



MANILA

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio is set to meet Thursday with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in the Philippines, where he's expected to renew the prospect of the U.S. trying to broker an end to the war in Ukraine.

The meeting between Rubio and Lavrov is slated to occur on the sidelines of a gathering by Southeast Asian foreign ministers, among the most high-profile side meetings the region's top diplomats were having at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations event in Manila.

U.S. efforts to broker an end to the Russia-Ukraine war have dropped off as indirect talks stalled and the Iran war took center stage. Renewed strikes by Washington and Tehran have been intensifying after an interim ceasefire deal collapsed.

Rubio told reporters in Manila on

Wednesday that he plans to raise the conflict in Ukraine with Lavrov, saying that the U.S. remained open to playing a role in ending the conflict "if that opportunity presents itself."

He acknowledged that those efforts have "kind of fallen off a little bit over the last few months" but said the meeting would explore whether there's an opportunity to renew talks.

"We have to have a relationship with the Russian government, even though we have areas of disagreement," Rubio said, noting that they are two largest nuclear-armed countries.

Lavrov, speaking to reporters at the ASEAN meeting, said he would ask Rubio about the latest statements by U.S. President Donald Trump predicting that a settlement is getting close.

"I will ask Marco Rubio about it tomorrow," Lavrov said.

Expectations for renewed discussions about ending the war comes as

Ukraine has made significant progress this year but a rift between defense leaders has threatened to derail its efforts. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has undertaken a major government reshuffle, including its top military brass.

But Ukraine would not be the only issue on the table. Rubio said he would use the meeting to find other areas of potential cooperation between the U.S. and Russia — the kind of wide-ranging agenda that the ministers have touched on in their huddles around the ASEAN meeting.

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong renewed her country's alarm over the Chinese navy's recent test-launch of a missile from a nuclear-powered submarine in the region, which she said "came with too little information and notification, including to the Philippines — over which the missile flew — and Pacific nations, near where

the missile landed."

"It comes in the context of a rapid military build-up of China's nuclear arsenal without the transparency or reassurance the region expects," Wong told a university forum in Manila on Thursday. "This is why Australia has described the test as provocative and destabilizing."

China has defended its actions, saying the launch was part of annual exercises and that it gave countries in the area appropriate notice in advance.

Rubio also had a long meeting Wednesday with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and separately with Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar.

Rubio told reporters he and Wang discussed a new altercation this week between Chinese and Filipino forces in a disputed shoal in the South China Sea, which Beijing claims virtually in its entirety. Rubio called the incident "escalatory."

"Those need to be managed very carefully, because obviously, a conflict — be it economic or otherwise — between the U.S. and China would have a dramatic global impact," Rubio said.

The Trump administration has repeatedly criticized China's assertive actions in the South China Sea to the disadvantage of smaller claimant countries like the Philippines, Washington's oldest treaty ally in Asia. Taiwan and ASEAN members Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei have also been involved in the often-tense territorial standoffs.

ASEAN foreign ministers discussed the territorial disputes Tuesday, welcoming progress in yearslong negotiations between China and their regional bloc on a proposed non-aggression pact that both sides hope to conclude this year, according to a draft of a joint communique seen by The Associated Press.

The so-called code of conduct aims to prevent a major conflict in the disputed waters, a key global trade route, that could draw in the United States.

France recorded 5,700 more deaths than usual during its historic June heat wave



PARIS

France recorded at least 5,700 more deaths than usual during a historic heat wave last month, the public health agency said Wednesday, sharply increasing its estimates of the feared toll from record-shattering temperatures.

Public Health France said regions hit by the heat from June 17 to July 2 recorded 21,674 deaths from all causes. But without a heat wave, those same regions would have been expected to have seen far fewer deaths, or 15,910, based on statistical modeling using data from previous years, it said.

The difference between expected and actual deaths — a total of 5,764 — are therefore considered to be "excess" deaths during the heat wave, the agency said.

It said the excess mortality, with 36% more deaths than would normally have been expected, was the highest from any heat wave since 2003. A historic heat wave that year caused an estimated 15,000 deaths in France.

France registered its hottest-ever days on June 24 and June 25 this year — with a national average of 30 C (86

F) — as well as record heat at night and peak temperatures that soared well above 40 C (104 F) in many places.

Just over half of the unexpected deaths occurred during and in the immediate wake of that hottest period, over three days from June 25 to June 27, the public health agency said.

"This unprecedented episode, characterized by its early onset, intensity, and duration, exposed nearly the entire population to extreme heat during a period when school and work activities were still in full swing," the agency noted.

All told, across Europe, extreme temperatures that hit exceptionally early and hard this year saw well over 10,000 more deaths at the height of the heat wave than would normally have been expected, according to figures that are still emerging across the continent.

In France, the Paris region appears to have been hardest hit, recording 1,999 unexpected deaths — around 80% more than would otherwise have been anticipated without a heat wave, the French health agency said.

Funeral service directors in Paris said they struggled to find places to store bodies

before burial or cremation, with some mortuaries saying they were full and having to turn bodies away.

Nearly half of the more than 21,600 people who died passed away in hospitals, which wrestled with surges of patients suffering from heat-related ailments. About a third died at home and the rest were mostly deaths in care homes for older people, the agency said.

The latest estimated death toll, which the agency said will be updated later in the year with more complete data, was sharply higher than initial figures it had given. It had previously reported around 2,000 additional deaths from all causes for the week of June 22 to June 28, the peak in France of the heat wave that also broke temperature records in many other parts of Europe.

Experts caution that it takes a while for a full picture to emerge, and that many heat-related deaths will never formally be recorded as such. For example, a heart attack, which can be triggered by extreme heat exposure, especially in people who are older or have underlying health issues, may be listed on a death certificate simply as a heart attack.

Red Sea and Hormuz Disruptions Leave Half a Million Tonnes of Indian Rice Stranded, THREATENING BASMATI EXPORTS



India's basmati rice export industry is facing one of its most challenging periods in recent years as continuing disruptions in the Red Sea and the Strait of Hormuz have severely affected shipments to key markets in the Middle East and Europe. Exporters warn that prolonged uncertainty along these critical maritime routes has not only delayed deliveries but also pushed up freight and insurance costs, placing significant financial strain on the sector.

Industry estimates indicate that nearly 0.5 million metric tonnes of basmati and non-basmati rice are currently stranded at Container Freight Stations (CFS) in Gujarat's Mundra and Kandla ports. Of this, around 0.3 million metric tonnes of basmati rice was originally destined for Iran, one of India's largest overseas markets for the premium grain.

The crisis has highlighted the vulnerability of India's agricultural exports to geopolitical tensions in strategically important waterways. The Bab al-Mandab Strait, connecting the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden, and the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's busiest energy and trade corridors, are vital shipping routes for Indian exports heading to West Asia, Europe and beyond.

Key Markets Under Pressure

India is the world's largest rice exporter, accounting for nearly 45 per cent of global rice trade and supplying rice to more than 140 countries. The country competes with major exporters such as Thailand and Pakistan and remains heavily dependent on maritime trade routes for agricultural exports.

Saudi Arabia and Iran together represent the backbone of India's basmati export market. Saudi Arabia imports approximately 1.2 million metric tonnes of Indian basmati rice annually, making it the largest destination for the commodity. Iran follows closely, importing nearly 0.8 million metric tonnes during the previous financial year.

Combined, the two countries purchase nearly 2 million metric tonnes of Indian basmati rice every year. Consequently, any disruption in shipping routes serving the Gulf region immediately affects exporters, traders, logistics providers and farmers linked to the basmati value chain.

Despite these challenges, India's rice exports showed resilience during the first quarter of FY-26. Rice exports during the April-June period rose by over 4 per cent year-on-year to around \$3.03 billion. In June alone, exports exceeded \$1 billion, recording a nearly 16 per cent increase compared to the same month last year, aided by a temporary easing of regional tensions and partial restoration of supply chains.

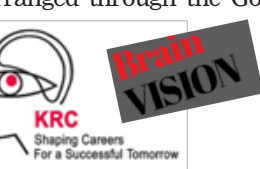
However, the broader annual picture remains concerning. India's total rice exports, including both basmati and non-basmati varieties, declined by 7.5 per cent year-on-year to \$11.53 billion in FY-26, reflecting the impact of trade disruptions and market uncertainties.

Cargo Pile-Up at Ports

Exporters say the situation has worsened in recent months as shipping companies and vessel operators remain cautious about navigating through conflict-prone waters.

Ranjit Singh Jossan, Vice-President of the Basmati Rice Millers and Exporters Association, described the current situation as unprecedented for the industry.

According to him, nearly half a million tonnes of rice cargo remain stranded at Container Freight Stations in Gujarat because of uncertainty surrounding maritime movement through the Strait of Hormuz. A substantial portion of this cargo was contracted by Iranian buyers, including imports arranged through the Government Trading Corporation of Iran and several major private importers.



Believe in yourself, even when everyone else doesn't.

"The simultaneous disruption around the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab al-Mandab has created an



unprecedented challenge for India's export sector," Jossan said.

He noted that Saudi Arabia and Iran remain the two largest importers of Indian basmati rice, while the broader Middle East continues to be one of the most important destinations for Indian agricultural exports.

"Any disruption in these strategic shipping routes immediately affects India's agricultural exports and global food supply chains," he added.

Security Concerns Disrupt Shipping

The crisis has been compounded by growing security concerns in the Red Sea region. Repeated warnings and attacks linked to regional conflicts have slowed container movement through major ports such as Jeddah, Jizan and Aqaba. Shipping companies have increasingly adopted a cautious approach, leading to delays, rerouting of vessels and cancellations of scheduled voyages.

Industry representatives claim that one vessel carrying cargo for Iran reportedly returned to Jamnagar port after sailing from India due to operational uncertainties and maritime restrictions in the region.

In addition, bookings for three vessels scheduled to transport Indian export cargo to Iran were reportedly cancelled by ship owners because of security concerns. These cancellations have added to the backlog of export cargo awaiting shipment and created uncertainty for exporters with contractual obligations to overseas buyers.

The disruption has also had a cascading effect on container availability and port logistics, with warehouses and freight stations witnessing increasing congestion.

Exporters Face Liquidity Crunch

Beyond the immediate problem of delayed shipments, exporters say the biggest challenge is the growing pressure on working capital.

The basmati rice export business involves substantial upfront investment. Exporters purchase paddy from farmers, process and mill the grain, undertake packaging, transportation and port handling, and then wait for payment upon shipment and delivery.

When cargo remains stranded for weeks or months, the entire financial cycle is disrupted.

"The biggest concern today is blocked working capital," Jossan said. "Exporters have already invested in procurement, processing, packaging and logistics. When shipments are delayed indefinitely, funds remain locked while banks continue charging inter-

est. This creates a serious financial burden."

Many exporters fear that prolonged disruptions could affect their ability to make fresh purchases during the upcoming procurement season, potentially impacting farmers and millers across major basmati-producing states such as Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and parts of Jammu and Kashmir.

Rising Freight and Insurance Costs

Adding to exporters' worries is the sharp increase in shipping costs.

Bal Krishan Bali, President of the Basmati Rice Millers and Exporters Association, said uncertainty in the Red Sea and Gulf region has pushed ocean freight rates to unusually high levels. Marine insurance premiums have also risen significantly as shipping companies classify several routes as high-risk zones.

"The disruption in the Red Sea has become a major challenge for Indian rice exports," Bali said.

According to him, vessels are increasingly taking longer alternative routes to avoid conflict-prone waters. While these diversions enhance safety, they substantially increase transit times and transportation costs.

"Longer sailing routes are increasing freight costs and delaying deliveries, making Indian rice more expensive for buyers, particularly in the Middle East and Europe," he said.

The increased logistics burden is raising concerns about India's competitiveness in global rice markets. Higher export costs could encourage some buyers to seek alternative suppliers, particularly from countries such as Pakistan and Thailand.

Wider Implications for Global Food Trade

Experts note that the crisis extends beyond India's export industry. The Middle East depends heavily on imported food grains, and Indian basmati rice occupies a premium position in several regional markets. Continued disruptions could affect food supply chains, increase prices for consumers and create shortages in certain markets.

For India, the stakes are equally high. Basmati rice is among the country's most valuable agricultural export commodities and generates substantial foreign exchange earnings. The sector supports millions of farmers, mill workers, transport operators and traders across northern India. Industry leaders have urged authorities and international stakeholders to work toward ensuring the safe restoration of maritime trade through the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab al-Mandab. They warn that if the situation persists, exporters may face mounting financial losses, buyers could encounter higher prices, and India's rice trade may experience further setbacks in an already volatile global market.

For now, nearly half a million tonnes of rice remain stranded at ports, symbolising the growing economic cost of geopolitical instability in some of the world's most important shipping corridors. As exporters wait for normal navigation to resume, uncertainty continues to cast a shadow over one of India's most successful agricultural export sectors.

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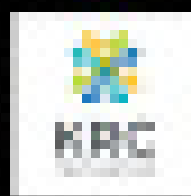


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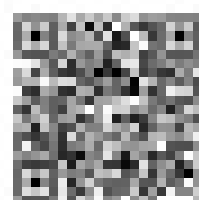


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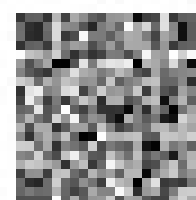


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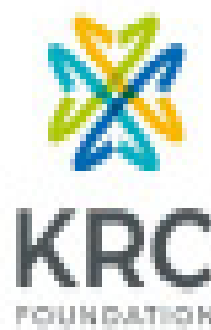
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