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PERSPECTIVE

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Supreme Court to Hear Shyamkanu Mahanta's Bail Plea in Zubeen Garg Death Case

GUWAHATI
The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday the bail plea of Shyamkanu Mahanta, one of the key accused in the case linked to the death of Assamese singer Zubeen Garg in Singapore last year. Mahanta has challenged the May 29 order of the Gauhati High Court, which rejected his bail application. The Supreme Court had earlier issued notice to the Assam government and sought its response to the plea. Mahanta, who organised the North East India Festival in Singapore, was arrested in October 2025 and is among seven accused in the case. A fast-track court in Assam has framed murder charges against four accused, including Mahanta, while the remaining three face charges under other provisions. All the accused have pleaded not guilty. The trial began on June 8 with the recording of witness evidence. The Gauhati High Court rejected Mahanta's bail plea after hearing arguments from both the prosecution and defence. The prosecution had opposed bail, while Mahanta's counsel sought his release. The High Court passed its order after charges had been framed and the trial had commenced. The case stems from Garg's death on September 19, 2025, during a yacht outing in Singapore. Singapore authorities had concluded that there was no evidence of foul play, while the state coroner determined that the singer died due to accidental drowning. The subsequent investigation in Assam led to a separate criminal case and charges against the accused. The Special Investigation Team probing the case has also submitted electronic devices and other digital material before the trial court. Investigators have said the material forms part of the evidence relied upon in the chargesheet.

WHO SAID WHAT



Floods are hitting communities across Myanmar, with 900,000 people affected, reports the Country Director for Myanmar @mickunford .World Food Programme is delivering emergency food assistance, but warns that hunger & hardship will deepen without sustained access and urgent resources. ~ Univer Nations, Geneva

‘A prosperous Assam, a peaceful society’:Kaushik Rai

GUWAHATI
Assam Minister Kaushik Rai on Saturday highlighted the State government's development initiatives and called upon people to work collectively towards building "a strong India, a prosperous Assam and a peaceful society" during the 80th Independence Day celebrations in Silchar. Rai hoisted the National Flag at DSA Stadium as the chief guest and highlighted major infrastructure, connectivity, healthcare, education, agriculture, investment and welfare projects underway in Cachar and the Barak Valley. Speaking at the ceremony organised by the Cachar district administration, Rai paid tribute to freedom fighters and martyrs and said their sacrifices had placed a responsibility on citizens to contribute to nation-building. He said Assam was moving towards becoming an important development hub in the North-east, with the government focusing on infrastructure, investment, employment, healthcare, education and rural development. Among the major projects



highlighted were the Rs 664-crore Silchar Trunk Road-Capital Point-Rangirkhari flyover, the Rs 621-crore Sribhumi Medical College and Hospital, and the Rs 166-crore 500-bed Emergency Hospital at Silchar Medical College and Hospital. Rai also referred to the Rs 22,864-crore Barapani-Silchar High Speed Express Highway, the Rs 6,724-crore Silchar-Churaibari four-laning project, the Rs 957-crore Silchar-Jiribam Package-I and the Rs 1,973-crore Silchar-Vairengte four-laning project. He said 1,450 km of roads had been sanctioned in Cachar over the past five years at a cost of Rs 2,126 crore, with 828 km already completed. On healthcare, Rai said Assam's maternal mortality ratio had declined from 480 in 2004-06 to 84 in 2022-24, while the infant mortality rate had fallen to 29. He also highlighted welfare schemes, saying 1,85,518 women in Cachar had benefited under Orunodoi 3.0 and 1,26,234 women under the Mukhyamantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan. Under the PM Awas Yojana, 1,47,160 houses had been sanctioned in the district, of which 1,12,237 had been

completed. Rai said Assam had attracted investment commitments worth Rs 5.18 lakh crore through Advantage Assam 2.0, with around 60 per cent of the projects reportedly at the implementation stage. He described the Tata semiconductor project at Jagiroad as a potential catalyst for the State's economic growth. He also spoke about measures for tea garden communities, farmers, youth and other vulnerable sections, stressing that development should reach the last mile. Rai said the Barak Valley Development Department, established in December 2024, was working with various Central and State departments to accelerate development in Cachar, Sribhumi and Hailakandi. Earlier, Rai paid floral tributes at the Gandhibagh Martyrs' Memorial. Independence Day celebrations were also held in Lakhipur and Dholai co-districts. The celebrations in Silchar concluded with a friendly football match between Cachar District Administration XI and Cachar District Bar Association XI, with the administration team winning 2-1.

Assam Disburses Nearly Rs 150 Crore in Flood Relief as Damage Assessment Nears Completion

GUWAHATI
The Assam government has disbursed nearly Rs 150 crore in interim flood relief, with damage assessment across affected areas reaching around 75 per cent, officials said during a review meeting on the state's flood response. The government has set August 17 as the target to settle all remaining eligible interim relief claims. More than 1,000 surveyors are currently engaged in the field to complete the assessment process at the earliest. The review meeting also examined the restoration of essential services and public infrastructure damaged by the floods. Repairs are underway at 793 schools, with authorities working to make them ready for reopening. Restoration of flood-damaged roads and other government infrastructure is also being carried out on a priority basis. In Sivasagar, high-capacity pumps have been operating continuously to drain stagnant water from low-lying areas and help affected communities return to normalcy. The Health Department has expanded medical camps in flood-hit areas and is monitoring the situation for water-borne diseases and other health risks associated with prolonged inundation. Officials also reviewed assistance related to loans and insurance. Eligible beneficiaries have been asked to submit their claims by August 30 to ensure timely processing. The government is mapping compensation and other assistance to identify affected households and ensure that all eligible families receive the support due to them. Departments have been directed to accelerate relief, restoration and reconstruction work. The government has also warned that delays or negligence in implementing flood-response measures will invite strict action.



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Manipur Protests Intensify Over Demand for NRC Update Before Census

Manipur Group Calls Two-Day Strike Over Census, NRC Demand

IMPHAL
Protests demanding updation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) before the Census were held at several locations across Manipur on August 17, as the government continued preparations for the upcoming population enumeration exercise. The demonstrations were organised under the banner of the Campaign for Just and Fair Delimitation (JFD), with protesters raising slogans including "NRC Updation Before Census", "No NRC, No Census" and "No IDP Settlement, No Census". Members of the JFD's student wing attempted to disrupt Census training sessions at DM Teacher Training College and Hindi Teachers Training College. Security personnel reportedly clashed with protesters while attempting to disperse them. A separate sit-in was held at Khwairamband Ima Market in Imphal, where several shops remained closed as traders and others

joined the protest. Demonstrators demanded that the NRC be updated before the Census, citing concerns over the alleged presence of illegal immigrants in the state. A large group of students also took out a rally carrying similar demands. The procession began at Tiddim Ground and proceeded towards Keishampat Junction before turning back. During the rally, protesters also demanded the suspension of a police officer whom they accused of using excessive force during a recent agitation at the Directorate of Census. Speaking during the sit-in at Khwairamband Ima Market, JFD organising secretary Longjam Ratan said the issue of illegal immigration had remained a concern in Manipur for decades and claimed that repeated demands had been made to protect the state's indigenous population. Ratan referred to a 16-point agreement signed

between the Manipur government and representatives on the issue of illegal immigration in 1980, which was reaffirmed in 1994. He alleged that despite the agreements, effective measures had not been taken to address the issue. According to Ratan, the JFD was formed in 2025 amid renewed concerns over illegal immigration. The organisation has been demanding that the NRC be updated with 1951 as the base year. He said the group had submitted representations and memoranda to both the state and Central governments but had yet to receive a response. The JFD has since continued its agitation and warned that protests would be intensified if its demands were not addressed. The demonstrations come as preparations for the Census gather pace in Manipur, adding to growing tensions over the sequencing of NRC-related measures, Census operations and the

rehabilitation of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The Campaign for Just and Fair Delimitation (JFD) has called a two-day general strike across Manipur from midnight on August 17, opposing the government's decision to proceed with the Census exercise without first updating the National Register of Citizens (NRC). Addressing a press conference in Imphal, JFD convenor Jeetendra Ningombam said the organisation had repeatedly urged the state government to complete the NRC updation before beginning the Census, but alleged that its appeals had gone unanswered. Ningombam said the government was moving ahead with the Census process, including self-enumeration, despite concerns raised by the organisation over the presence of alleged illegal immigrants in the state. Calling the decision "unfortunate", he said the demand for NRC updation

was being raised with the interests of future generations of indigenous people in mind. "Our demand for NRC updation before Census is legitimate," Ningombam said, adding that the issue of illegal immigration was a serious concern for the state and required government intervention. He said the strike was not aimed at inconveniencing the public but had been called after the government allegedly failed to respond to repeated representations and protests. Ningombam warned that the JFD would intensify its agitation if the government remained unresponsive even after the two-day strike. Representatives of civil society organisations from the Naga and Meitei Pangal communities also attended the press conference and extended their support to the proposed shutdown.

Assam Congress to Launch Statewide Campaign Against Coal, Stone and Sand Syndicates



GUWAHATI
The Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) has announced a statewide mass awareness campaign against coal, stone and sand syndicates, alleging that unregulated activities linked to these syndicates contributed to the recent floods in the state. The decision was taken at an APCC meeting chaired by party president Gaurav Gogoi on Sunday, August 16. The meeting reviewed the party's organisational preparedness for upcoming elections, including the Lok Sabha by-election, autonomous council polls and municipal elections. According to the APCC, coal, stone and sand syndicates were among the "primary drivers" of the recent flood-related devastation in Upper Assam. The party said it would mobilise public opinion and launch a sustained campaign against such activities. The meeting also reviewed relief and rehabilitation work undertaken by district Congress committees and

party organisations, including the Seva Dal, Mahila Congress, Youth Congress and NSUI, in flood-affected areas. Congress workers have been involved in rebuilding damaged houses, cleaning schools and public and religious institutions, and undertaking shramdaan to help schools resume classes. Party workers have also assisted farmers by providing paddy seedlings and helping with transplantation. The APCC adopted resolutions opposing the proposed reduction of the eco-sensitive zone around Kaziranga National Park from 10 km to 1 km. It also opposed the proposed acquisition of indigenous land at Eng Leng Pathar for handing it over to large corporate entities. The party said it would launch a broader mass movement against what it termed "anti-people policies" and seek greater public participation in the campaign. The meeting also discussed zonal training programmes for Pradesh Congress workers, the appointment of RSS-affiliated individuals as vice-chancellors in Assam and other universities, and alleged ideological considerations in the appointment of college principals. Congress leaders also raised concerns over growing dissatisfaction among Gen-Z with aspects of the education system and approved a proposal to organise a state-level youth convention. Separately, the APCC's social media department held a meeting as part of the party's wider organisational review.

Air India Express apologises to Tripura woman over 'inappropriate treatment' of autistic son

GUWAHATI
Air India Express has apologised to a Tripura woman over the "inappropriate treatment" allegedly meted out to her 30-year-old autistic son by two airline staff members at Maharaja Bir Bikram Airport in Agartala. Dr Ratnabali Ray Sengupta had brought the "deeply distressing incident" to the airline's notice. She said she was travelling to Kolkata with her husband, who is a heart patient, and their son. "Before security checking when I was waiting, two airline staff members... reprimanded me because my son was making involuntary sounds, a behaviour associated with his autism but he was not violent," Sengupta wrote. "I was told that the pilot might remove us from the aircraft, that fellow passengers could object to our journey, and that I should give my son sleeping medication. These remarks caused me immense mental distress and fear throughout the journey," she further wrote. Sengupta said her son made some sounds during the flight but no passenger or cabin crew member raised any objection. She called the behaviour of the two staff members "insensitive and discriminatory" and said persons with autism and other disabilities had the same right to travel with dignity and access necessary medical and educational services. The woman said she was travelling to Kolkata for her husband's treatment and that of their son. "I never faced such a situation, although I was asked during earlier travels if my son could become violent," she said, adding, "He cooperates and does not become violent." In its reply, Air India Express expressed regret over the distress caused to the family and acknowledged that the experience must have been upsetting. "Please accept our heartfelt apologies for the inconvenience and emotional distress you experienced. Air India Express is committed to treating all guests with dignity, respect, and empathy, and we regret that your experience did not reflect these values," the airline said.

Biren Singh, BJP MLA K Joykishan Leave for Delhi Amid Manipur Cabinet Expansion Buzz



IMPHAL
Former Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh and BJP MLA K Joykishan Singh left for New Delhi on Sunday amid indications that the party's central leadership may hold discussions on a possible expansion of the state council of ministers and the prevailing political situation in Manipur. Biren Singh confirmed to reporters at Imphal airport that he was travelling to the national capital. K Joykishan Singh, the BJP legislator from Thangmeiband, also departed for Delhi at around 1 pm. A senior BJP functionary said the two leaders were expected to meet senior party leaders in Delhi for consultations on a possible cabinet expansion and other developments in the state. Manipur Home Minister Govindas Konhoujam was also seen at the Imphal airport. However, he did not disclose his destination

or provide details about his travel plans when approached by mediapersons. The reported consultations come amid ongoing political developments in Manipur, where the BJP-led government is dealing with the fallout of the ethnic conflict that erupted in May 2023. The possible cabinet expansion is expected to focus on the composition of the council of ministers and could involve discussions on political and organisational matters within the state BJP. The Delhi visit by senior BJP leaders from Manipur has fuelled speculation about impending changes in the state government. However, there has been no formal announcement from the party or the state government regarding a cabinet expansion so far. Further consultations with the BJP's central leadership are expected to determine the timing and composition of any proposed expansion.



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EGOISTIC
ENCOUNTERS
ARE PARALYSING
PARLIAMENT

Democracy does not die only when elections are cancelled, governments are overthrown or constitutions are suspended. It can also be quietly crippled when the institutions created to make democracy work cease to perform their constitutional functions. When argument gives way to assertion, negotiation to confrontation and deliberation to the brute arithmetic of a majority, democracy may remain alive in form but become hollow in substance.

Parliament is supposed to be the principal arena where competing political visions meet, clash and, ideally, produce workable decisions. Conflict is not a weakness of parliamentary democracy; it is its very essence. But conflict must be channelled through dialogue, debate and deliberation. Only then can a fourth D - decision - acquire democratic legitimacy.

India's Parliament is increasingly struggling with the first three Ds.

The recently concluded monsoon session offered yet another disturbing illustration. Eleven Bills were passed by both Houses, but seven reportedly received five minutes or less of discussion in the Lok Sabha, accounting for barely 28 minutes of debate. Nine of the 11 Bills were passed without any member other than the minister concerned speaking on them.

Such statistics should concern every defender of parliamentary democracy, regardless of political allegiance. A Bill may be passed by a majority, but legislation is not merely an exercise in counting heads. Laws shape the lives of citizens for years, sometimes generations. They deserve scrutiny, criticism and competing perspectives before the majority finally decides.

The final day of the session was particularly revealing. The Prime Minister was present. The Home Minister was present after weeks of opposition demands that he respond to questions concerning police action against students. The Leader of the Opposition and other senior opposition leaders were also in the House. In other words, the principal political actors were physically present at precisely the place where their differences ought to have been confronted - Parliament.

Yet the House failed to convert political confrontation into parliamentary debate.

Outside the chamber, rival groups of MPs protested against one another. Inside, slogans drowned out speeches until the Speaker adjourned the House sine die. The exchange between the government and the Opposition became a contest over who was willing to debate and who was allegedly running away from it.

This is not how a mature parliamentary system is supposed to function.

The government argued that it was ready for a full debate and that the Home Minister was prepared to answer questions. The Opposition, however, rejected the government's terms and insisted on its own conditions. Both sides may have had legitimate political calculations. But when procedural disagreements become more important than the substantive questions before the country, Parliament becomes the casualty.

The Opposition undoubtedly has a duty to hold the government accountable. It must question, investigate, expose contradictions and demand answers. But disruption cannot become the principal instrument of accountability. If the Home Minister is willing to answer, the stronger parliamentary strategy would be to let him speak - and then dismantle his arguments with facts, evidence and pointed questions.

That would make for a far more powerful opposition than a chorus of slogans.

The government, too, cannot escape responsibility. A parliamentary majority is a mandate to govern, not a licence to dismiss the Opposition as an inconvenience. The government has the right to pursue its legislative programme, but the Opposition has an equally legitimate right to demand that legislation be properly examined.

A majority can decide. It cannot make scrutiny unnecessary. India's parliamentary decline, however, did not begin with the present government. The problem is deeper and more systemic. Parliamentary disruptions have long been used by opposition parties as a political weapon, while ruling parties have frequently responded by relying on their numerical strength to push business through with limited discussion.

The institutional consequences are serious. The 13th Lok Sabha sat for 356 days, the 14th for 332, the 15th for 357 and the 16th for 331. The 17th Lok Sabha sat for only 274 days, the lowest for a full five-year term. The 15th Lok Sabha alone lost 808 hours to disruptions. When Parliament sits for fewer days, loses precious hours to disorder and sends fewer Bills to committees for detailed examination, executive power inevitably expands. That is not merely a parliamentary inconvenience. It is a democratic deficit. The same problem is visible in state legislatures, many of which meet for fewer than 50 days a year. Elections may provide democratic legitimacy to governments, but elections alone cannot sustain democracy. Legislatures require adequate time, institutional authority and political seriousness if they are to scrutinise executive power effectively. The deeper problem is the disappearance of the old culture of parliamentary negotiation.

Previous generations of political managers could fight fiercely in public while negotiating privately. Leaders such as Pramod Mahajan, Kamal Nath and Ghulam Nabi Azad understood that parliamentary politics required a distinction between political combat and institutional functioning. They could oppose each other vigorously while recognising that the House had to work the following morning. That quiet art of persuasion appears increasingly absent from contemporary politics.

Political communication today rewards confrontation. Television and social media amplify the sharpest soundbite, the most aggressive accusation and the most dramatic protest. Compromise is easily portrayed as weakness. Concession is treated as surrender. Yet parliamentary democracy depends precisely on the ability to compromise without surrendering principle.

The government must therefore learn to distinguish between authority and institutional legitimacy. Electoral victory gives a party the authority to govern. It does not give it ownership of Parliament. The House belongs to the Constitution and, ultimately, to the people. Likewise, the Opposition must distinguish between obstruction and resistance. It has no right to veto the government's legislative agenda merely because it disagrees with it. But it has every right to insist that Bills receive adequate scrutiny, that ministers answer difficult questions and that parliamentary procedures are respected.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

What a child doesn't receive he can seldom later give.

- P. D. James

FROM FREEDOM TO
FULFILMENT: BUILDING THE
INDIA OF 2047



COL SHIV CHOUDHARY (RETD)

Every Independence Day is more than a celebration of freedom. It is an occasion for national introspection, reminding us of the sacrifices of countless patriots who secured India's Independence in 1947 and challenging us to ask whether we are fulfilling its promise. Political independence was only the beginning. The greater mission is to build a nation that guarantees prosperity, justice, dignity, security and equal opportunity for every citizen.

When India attained Independence, it inherited enormous challenges. Poverty was widespread, literacy low, industries undeveloped, food production inadequate, infrastructure rudimentary and institutions fragile. National security consumed half of the first interim budget despite severe financial constraints. Yet determination, visionary leadership and collective effort transformed adversity into opportunity.

Eight decades later, India's transformation is among modern history's greatest development stories. From a food deficient nation, it has become self-sufficient in food grains, the world's largest milk producer and one of the fastest growing major economies. Today, India is a global leader in IT, pharmaceuticals, digital public infrastructure, renewable energy and space exploration. Aadhaar, UPI, DBT and the Chandrayaan missions exemplify its ability to combine technological innovation with large-scale public service. Equally remarkable is India's resilience, sustained through constitutional governance, peaceful electoral transitions and diversity.

India's influence today extends well beyond economics and geographical boundaries. Its scientific institutions, entrepreneurial ecosystem, expanding manufacturing base, cultural heritage, yoga, Ayurveda and democratic values have enhanced its standing across the world. Indian professionals lead global corporations, researchers contribute to scientific advancement and the nation increasingly serves as a trusted voice on international platforms. These achievements deserve admiration. Yet genuine patriotism demands the courage to confront challenges with honesty and the determination to overcome them.

"A nation's destiny is not secured on the day it gains freedom. It is shaped every day thereafter by the character of its people, the

The vision of Developed India 2047 cannot therefore be a mere slogan; it would require a thirty- to forty trillion dollar economy by 2047, according to experts. However, the size of an economy alone does not define national prosperity. In 2026, the United States, with a GDP of about \$32.4 trillion, enjoys a per capita income of approx. \$94,430, while China, despite a \$21 trillion economy, records around \$14,874 per capita. Germany (\$5.5 trillion) and Japan (\$4.3 trillion) generate per capita incomes of roughly \$65,303 and \$35,730, respectively, while the UK (\$4.2 trillion) stands at nearly \$61,056. India, although the world's fourth-largest economy at around \$4.1 trillion, has a per capita income of only about \$2,813.

The challenge before India is therefore not merely to expand the economy nearly tenfold by 2047, but to convert

its enormous opportunity into inclusive prosperity. Even if India becomes the world's second-largest economy by 2047, success will remain incomplete unless the average Indian experiences a dramatic improvement in income, education, healthcare, housing, social security, and quality of life. Development cannot remain concentrated in metro cities while millions continue to struggle in villages, small towns, and urban slums.

India's foremost challenge is to convert its demographic advantage into a demographic dividend. Millions of young people enter the workforce annually, yet many remain unemployed because education is often disconnected from industry needs. Degrees alone no longer guarantee employment. India must foster critical thinking, innovation, entrepreneurship and scientific temper while creating jobs through manufacturing, agriculture, tourism, logistics, defence production, renewable energy, digital services and start-ups, ensuring its youthful population becomes its greatest strength rather than a number.

Healthcare represents another national priority and its inadequacy was seen during Covid19 pandemic. Considerable progress has been made through expanded medical infrastructure and public health programmes, yet affordable quality healthcare remains uneven, particularly in rural and remote regions. Greater emphasis on preventive healthcare, nutrition, maternal and mental health, medical research and universal access to quality treatment will be essential for building a healthy and productive society.

Agriculture, the backbone of rural India, needs structural transformation. Farmers continue to face fragmented landholdings, climate uncertainty, water scarcity, inadequate power supply and volatile markets. Scientific irrigation, climate-resilient farming, mechanisation, food processing and better market access can enhance their prosperity. At the same time, rapid urbanisation demands advance planning, efficient public transport, affordable housing, waste management and sustainable infrastructure without neglecting rural development.

Building the India of 2047 demands not merely faster growth but wiser vision. Economic prosperity alone cannot define a developed nation. History shows that enduring nations are built upon trusted institutions, ethical leadership and responsible citizens who place the common good above personal or political gains. The true measure of India's success will therefore lie not only in the size of its economy but in the integrity of its governance, the efficiency of its institutions and the values that shape public life.

Good governance begins where corruption ends. Every rupee lost to corruption is a school not built, a hospital not equipped and an opportunity denied to a deserving citizen. Digital governance has improved transparency, but honest leadership, institutional accountability, efficient administration and swift justice remain the true foundations of public trust. With over 5.6 crore cases pending, judicial reforms are urgent to deliver timely justice and accountability, while modern police reforms and technology-driven

law enforcement and investigations are equally essential. Together, they will strengthen institutions, reinforce the rule of law and enhance public faith.

Environmental sustainability will be a defining test of a developed India. Climate change is evident in rising temperatures, shrinking water resources, deteriorating air quality, erratic rainfall and frequent natural disasters. Development at the cost of nature is ultimately self-defeating. India must therefore balance economic growth with ecological responsibility through renewable energy, afforestation, river linking, water conservation, sustainable agriculture and scientific waste management. Preserving natural resources must take precedence over increasing production.

No nation can realise its full potential while half its population remains constrained by unequal opportunities. Women are excelling across science, education, business, entrepreneurship, governance, sports and the Armed Forces, yet challenges of safety, discrimination and equal opportunity persist. A developed India must guarantee quality education, dignity and equal opportunities based solely on talent, integrity and merit. Empowering women is not merely a social imperative or political slogan; it is one of the strongest drivers of national development.

National security is the foundation of India's rise. Economic prosperity, democratic stability and global influence depend upon a secure nation. Today, India faces multiple challenges, including China's assertiveness, Pakistan sponsored cross border terrorism, instability in the neighbourhood, cyber warfare, misinformation campaigns, maritime competition and shifting geopolitical realities. Modern national security therefore extends far beyond territorial defence to encompass cyber, energy, food, water, technology, supply chain and critical digital and undersea infrastructure security.

India's dependence on imported crude oil, semiconductors, advanced technologies, weapons and critical minerals leaves its economy vulnerable to external shocks. With most of its trade and energy imports transiting the Indian Ocean, disruptions such as those in the Strait of Hormuz can severely impact national interests. Strengthening indigenous manufacturing, renewable energy, maritime security, undersea networks and self-reliance in critical technologies is therefore essential for both economic resilience and long-term strategic autonomy.

The coming decades will belong to nations that lead in knowledge, research and innovation. AI, quantum computing, biotechnology, robotics, semiconductor manufacturing and space technologies are redefining global competitiveness. India must lead in developing, not merely adopting, these technologies by investing more in research and development, industry-academia collaboration, original innovation and an education system that nurtures creativity, scientific inquiry and entrepreneurship. Above all, investment in intellectual capital will be India's greatest strategic asset.

Despite these challenges, India

possesses extraordinary strengths: a youthful population, a vibrant democracy, globally respected scientific institutions, a dynamic entrepreneurial culture and a civilisation admired across the world. Yet these advantages alone cannot build a developed nation. They must be matched by collective discipline, integrity and unwavering leadership's resolve to realise India's full potential.

Governments can frame policies, institutions can provide direction and technology can accelerate progress, but only responsible citizens can build a developed nation. Honest tax compliance, respect for the rule of law, protection of public property and conservation of natural resources reflect true citizenship. Rejecting corruption,

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Modi ji, look at what your NTA has just done.

UGC-NET exams for Sociology, English and Commerce were held between 22 and 30 June. Nearly two months later, NTA has cancelled all three because it set faulty papers and repeated old questions.

Thousands of candidates who prepared for years, filled forms, paid the fees, travelled to distant centres, must now do it all again in September. NTA makes the mistake but the student serves the sentence.

I said this in Kota, in Dehradun, in Prayagraj, and I will keep saying it - this is no longer an education system. It is an extraction machine. It takes your money, your years, your mental health, and your confidence and returns nothing. Not even a job.

NTA still won't answer the real question - were these papers leaked before the exam?

Just like every other arm of the Modi government, NTA never says it's their fault. Just like every other compromised paper, I am absolutely sure there will be no accountability. Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation was the first step, not the last. NTA's leadership must be held accountable too.

To every student sitting this exam again in September - you are not the problem. PM Modi built a system that cannot run an exam and then blames the students who take it.

Your years are being stolen and we will not stop until PM Modi answers for it. ~ Rahul Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition, Lok Sabha

resisting divisive politics, demanding accountability and performing one's duties with integrity are acts of patriotism no less important than celebrating Independence Day.

India's diversity across languages, faiths, cultures and regions is its greatest strength, with the Constitution providing the common bond that unites the nation. Development that leaves people behind cannot be sustainable, nor can leadership that places electoral gains above national interest. The India of 2047 must rise above divisions of caste, religion, region and reservation politics to pursue a shared constitutional vision of national development.

Building the India of 2047 is far more than an economic milestone. It envisions an India that is prosperous yet compassionate, technologically advanced yet environmentally responsible, economically strong yet socially inclusive, militarily secure yet committed to peace, and globally respected while rooted in its timeless civilisational values. Realising this vision demands institutional reforms, ethical leadership, transparent governance, policy continuity and a national commitment that rises above political cycles.

As we celebrate another Independence Day, let us remember that freedom is not merely a legacy inherited from our forefathers; it is a responsibility entrusted to every generation. The men and women who won India's Independence fulfilled their historic duty with extraordinary courage and sacrifice. Our generation carries an equally sacred responsibility: to build an India worthy of that sacrifice.

When the Tricolour unfurls over a century old independent India, let it symbolise a nation where opportunity replaces poverty, merit triumphs over privilege, institutions command public trust, government is transparent, none is deprived of employment, justice prevails without delay, no woman lives in fear, no farmer feels neglected, integrity defines public life, no one depends on freebies, the environment is protected and national unity rises above every divide.

Achieving these aspirations, alongside building a \$30-40 trillion economy, is undoubtedly a formidable challenge. Yet history reminds us that nations which unite visionary leadership, strong institutions and determined citizens can achieve it. The India of 2047 will be defined by the choices we make today. Let us ensure that history remembers 1947 as the year India won freedom and 2047 as the year it fulfilled that promise by emerging as one of the world's most strong, innovative, ethical and respected nations. We all have a role, and the time to start is now.

(The writer is motivational speaker, columnist and a change maker).

Manipur CM Khemchand Calls for Trust, Justice and Dignity on Independence Day

IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Saturday called for mutual trust, justice and dignity among all communities as the state marked the 80th Independence Day amid continuing efforts to restore peace following the ethnic conflict that erupted in 2023.

The state-level Independence Day ceremony was held at the 1st Manipur Rifles Parade Ground in Imphal, where Singh hoisted the national flag and inspected the Guard of Honour.

The Chief Minister also took the salute at the ceremonial march-past featuring 23 contingents from the security forces, police, civil departments, youth and educational institutions. The parade was commanded by Haobam Sanghamita, MPS, Commanding Officer of

the 19th Indian Reserve Battalion.

Ministers, MLAs, senior government officials and members of the public attended the ceremony.

In his address, Singh condemned the incident reported in Kangpokpi district on Friday and appealed to all sections of society to rebuild mutual trust and work towards peaceful coexistence.

He said peace was fundamental to development and called for lasting stability based on mutual trust, justice, dignity and participation of all communities.

Acknowledging the Central Government's support in efforts to restore peace, Singh urged people to work collectively towards peace, development and a stronger Manipur.

Recalling the sacrifices of freedom fighters and ancestors who contributed

to India's independence, the Chief Minister highlighted the country's progress in infrastructure, manufacturing, innovation and inclusive development.

He said initiatives such as Aatmanirbhar Bharat and Digital India were creating employment opportunities, strengthening domestic manufacturing and expanding access to public services and digital payments.

On the Viksit Bharat vision, Singh said the objective was to transform India into a developed, self-reliant and globally competitive nation by 2047.

Highlighting development initiatives in Manipur, Singh said infrastructure projects were being undertaken across rural and urban areas, while healthcare services were being extended to remote hill regions through Mobile Medical Units, PM-JANMAN and

the Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Ut-karsh Abhiyan.

He also highlighted efforts under Jal Jeevan Mission 2.0 to strengthen rural drinking water supply.

On employment and rural livelihoods, the Chief Minister said the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rojgar and Aajeevika Mission (Grameen) had increased the guaranteed employment period from 100 to 125 days and wages from Rs 263 to Rs 300. He also referred to the Pradhan Mantri Viksit Bharat Rojgar Yojana as an initiative aimed at promoting formal employment. In agriculture, Singh said a bio-reactor unit for bio-fertiliser production had been established at CSIR-NEIST to support organic farming and improve soil fertility.

On social welfare, he said 35 internally displaced persons suffering from

chronic illnesses had recently received financial assistance of Rs 1 lakh each. Around 2.4 lakh beneficiaries had also received Rs 91 crore under 17 social welfare schemes, he said. An Integrated Monthly Pension Processing Scheme has also been launched to ensure timely and transparent delivery of social security benefits.

On law and order, Singh said 477 new vehicles had been provided to the Manipur Police and the ERSS-112 emergency response system had been launched.

A Manipur Police Museum has also been established to preserve the history and legacy of the force.

He said an exclusive Special NIA Court had been established in Thoubal district, while the Nodera Emergency Response Application had been

launched in Noney to facilitate reporting of emergencies.

In the education sector, the Chief Minister highlighted the establishment of a District Institute of Education and Training building at Salam and a school library at Heirangoithong High School.

Under the 77th Van Mahotsav, 15 lakh tree saplings were planted across Manipur, Singh said.

He also highlighted campaigns aimed at preventing drug abuse among young people, including the Nasha Mukti Yuva for Viksit Bharat Sankalp Abhiyan and the 10-Crore Addiction-Free Pledge Mega Campaign.

Initiatives such as Jan-Bhagidari-Sabse Dur, Sabse Pehle and Jan Kalyan Shivr were cited as efforts to ensure direct and people-centric delivery of government services.

Assam Flood Situation Improves, Affected Population Falls to 62,443

GUWAHATI

The flood situation in Assam showed signs of improvement as the number of affected people fell to 62,443, with flooding receding in two more districts and the number of affected districts dropping to five, according to the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA).

No new flood-related deaths were reported during the previous 24 hours, keeping the state's flood death toll at 104 this year, ASDMA said.

According to the latest flood bulletin, waterlogging and inundation continued in 235 villages across 16 revenue circles in Golaghat, Hojai, Nagaon, Sivasagar and Jorhat. Nagaon continued to account for the largest number of affected people, with 33,332 residents impacted by the floods.

Golaghat reported 12,641 affected people, while Jorhat had 8,523. The situation has improved significantly from Friday, when seven districts were affected and more than 78,000 people were reported to be impacted. Authorities are currently sheltering more than 4,800 displaced people in 28 relief camps across the affected areas. Nine additional relief distribution centres are also operating to provide essential supplies to flood-hit communities. Despite the overall improvement, floodwaters continue to affect agricultural land and livestock. Around 4,954.43 hectares of farmland remain submerged, while the number of affected animals has crossed 21,000. The livestock affected include more than 10,000 large animals and around 3,500 poultry, according to officials.

Authorities have also reported damage to residential properties, livestock shelters, fish farming operations and medical facilities in the flood-affected areas. With floodwaters receding in several locations, the administration is continuing relief and rehabilitation measures while monitoring vulnerable areas for further changes in the situation.

BJP-Tipra Motha Alliance Likely for Tripura Village Council Polls, Says CM Saha

AGARTALA

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Sunday indicated that the BJP and Tipra Motha could enter into an electoral alliance for the upcoming Village Council elections, saying talks between the two parties are underway.

Speaking to reporters, Saha said discussions were being held on the BJP's side regarding a possible alliance with Tipra Motha. The Chief Minister noted that the BJP and Tipra Motha are already alliance partners and suggested that differences and developments witnessed during the previous Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) election should be treated as a matter of the past. "Talks are on and I cannot say that it cannot happen," Saha said, keeping open the possibility of an electoral understanding between the two

parties.

He stressed that the BJP remained open to continuing alliances and said the party did not walk away from its alliance partners.

The Chief Minister, however, added that if any partner chooses to leave an alliance, there is little the BJP can do about it.

"There are high chances of an alliance in the Village Council election," Saha said.

His remarks come ahead of the Village Council polls, with discussions between the two parties expected to cover seat-sharing and other aspects of a possible electoral arrangement. The proposed understanding could bring the BJP and Tipra Motha together for the local body elections despite differences that emerged during the previous TTAADC polls. For now, however, no formal seat-sharing agreement has been announced by either party.

Nagaon Bypoll Set for Multi-Cornered Contest as BJP, Congress and AIUDF Sharpen Positions

GUWAHATI

The upcoming Nagaon Lok Sabha by-election is emerging as a multi-cornered contest, with the BJP acknowledging a tough electoral battle even as the Congress and AIUDF prepare to mount their respective campaigns.

Assam BJP president Dilip Saikia on Sunday described the bypoll as "tough and challenging" but maintained that the party would contest the seat with the aim of securing victory.

"The Nagaon by-election is tough and challenging for us, but we will contest to secure victory," Saikia said.

Responding to questions on rival candidates, Saikia said each political party was free to decide its nominee but asserted that the BJP would "go all out" to win the seat.

BJP banks on development agenda

Saikia said the BJP's position in both the Assam government and at the Centre would work in



its favour, with the party seeking to turn its development agenda into an electoral advantage.

"Since our government has been working for the people and development, and with the BJP in power both in Assam and at the Centre, people will definitely support the BJP candidate," he said.

The BJP has already begun preparations for the bypoll. At an organisational meeting in Morigaon, party leaders reportedly set an ambitious target of securing a lead of around 90,000 votes from the constituency.

Congress confident of victory
Assam Pradesh Congress Committee president and Jorhat

MP Gaurav Gogoi, meanwhile, expressed confidence that the Congress would win the bypoll.

Gogoi said the party was awaiting the Election Commission's notification and details of the election schedule before finalising its strategy.

"We are waiting for the election details and dates from the Election Commission. Congress will secure victory once again in the Nagaon bypoll. Consider this as an announcement," he said.

Gogoi also targeted the AIUDF, alleging that the party remained politically aligned with the BJP.

"Assam's people know AIUDF's politics. Nothing has changed in their political strategy. They remain a B-team of the BJP as they were earlier," he alleged.

The AIUDF has rejected the possibility of an alliance with the Congress and has already announced Rejaul Karim Sarkar as its candidate.

Party chief Badruddin Ajmal recently turned down the Congress's

proposal for a joint contest, making it clear that the AIUDF would fight the bypoll independently.

Rajior Dal yet to decide
The Rajior Dal has not yet taken a final decision on whether to enter the contest.

Party president and Sivasagar MLA Akhil Gogoi has questioned the rationale behind supporting the Congress, alleging that several Congress representatives have either switched political sides or compromised with the BJP.

The regional party is currently weighing its options before announcing its decision.

With the BJP preparing an aggressive campaign, the Congress confident of retaining the seat and the AIUDF already in the fray, the Nagaon bypoll is likely to witness a closely fought contest.

The final list of candidates, the Election Commission's schedule and the possibility of additional parties entering the race are expected to further shape the electoral battle in the coming weeks.

15 Personnel from Assam Receive Gallantry and Service Medals on Independence Day

NEW DELHI

Fifteen personnel from Assam have been honoured with gallantry and service medals on the occasion of Independence Day, recognising their bravery, distinguished service and dedication to duty.

The awardees include one President's Medal for Distinguished Service, 11 Medals for Meritorious Service and honours for personnel from the Fire Services and Home Guard and Civil Defence.

IGP Devojioti Mukherjee gets President's Medal

Inspector General of Police Devojioti Mukherjee is the sole recipient from Assam this year of the President's Medal for Distinguished Service.

The medal recognises sustained and distinguished service in policing and related public safety duties.

Eleven Assam Police personnel have been selected for the Medal for Meritorious Service. They are:

- Inspector General V Siva Prasad Ganjala
- Assistant Inspector General Sarmistha Barua
- Commandant Santanu Kumar Dutta
- Superintendent of Police Amitav Basumatary
- Superintendent of Police Subhasish Baruah

- Superintendent of Police Suman Chakraborty
- Deputy Superintendent of Police Aker Ali
- Lance Naik Ripon Paul
- Lance Naik Nanda Tripura
- Lance Naik Surajit Mozumder

Assistant Sub-Inspector Prabir Baro

Fire Services, Civil Defence personnel honoured

Two Assam Fire Services personnel - Leading Fireman Lohit Saikia and Sub-Officer Md Shah Alom Sikdar - were also recognised for their service.

Abiram Islary, a Platoon Commander, received the award in the Home Guard and Civil Defence category.

The annual Independence Day honours recognise personnel across police, firefighting, civil defence, home guards and correctional services for exemplary service and acts of courage.

Northeast personnel also among awardees

Several personnel from other northeastern states were also recognised this year.

From Arunachal Pradesh, Superintendent of Police Sudhanshu Dhama received the Medal for Gallantry, making him the only recipient of the gallantry medal from the Northeast in this year's list.

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Nagaland CM Rio Seeks Early Naga Settlement, Faster Rollout of Frontier Authority

KOHIMA

Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio on Saturday called for an early and "honourable" settlement of the long-pending Naga Political Issue and urged the Centre to expedite the constitution and operationalisation of the Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNTA).

Addressing the state-level Independence Day celebration at the Civil Secretariat Plaza in Kohima, Rio said the Naga Political Issue remained unresolved despite years of negotiations and reiterated the people's demand for an early settlement.

He referred to the consultative meeting held on September 12, 2024, which brought together tribal bodies, civil society organisations, churches, NGOs, student groups and political parties. The meeting had called for the peace process to be elevated to the highest political level through an interlocutor with political or ministerial authority, he said.

Rio said the demand was reiterated during his meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah on February 5, following which the Centre constituted a committee headed by the Minister of State for Home Affairs to lead the peace talks.

He urged the Centre to engage with all negotiating parties with "urgency



and clarity" and assured that the state government would continue to facilitate the process towards an "honourable and acceptable Solution".

Rio backs Frontier Nagaland authority

On the demand for greater development and administrative empowerment in eastern Nagaland, Rio said the state government would support the constitution and early operationalisation of the FNTA.

He referred to the February 5 Memorandum of Agreement between the Centre, the Nagaland government and the Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation for the constitution of the authority within Nagaland.

Describing the agreement as a "historic milestone", Rio assured the eastern districts that the state government would extend all necessary cooperation to ensure the early constitution and operationalisation of the FNTA.

CM condemns Chümoukedima blast

Rio said Nagaland remained largely peaceful but expressed concern over the recent IED blast in Chümoukedima district targeting an Assam Rifles vehicle.

One Assam Rifles personnel was killed and four others sustained grievous injuries in the attack.

Condemning the incident, the Chief Minister said those responsible must be brought to justice. He said the National Investigation Agency had taken over the investigation.

'War on Drugs'

On the government's campaign against narcotics, Rio said more than 407 cases had been registered under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act and 677 people arrested between January 2024 and May 2026.

He also outlined initiatives covering road and air connectivity, education, healthcare, sports, skill development, drinking water, power, agriculture and tourism.

The government was also undertaking restoration work following severe monsoon damage, he said.

Among the major projects highlighted were the proposed Indian Institute of Technology at Ciethu, a greenfield AIMS at Nagaki City and the development of Nagaki as an incubation city.

Rio also referred to a tripartite agreement signed in June between Assam, Nagaland and the Centre for oil and natural gas exploration in the Disputed Area Belt.

The Independence Day programme also witnessed the launch of the Nagaland Integrated Information System, the Education Management Information System and a 10 MW solar power plant at Hovukhu in Niuland.

Quest!

A group of wild cats is called a "destruction."

Jharkhand student protesters give CM Soren August 18 ultimatum

RANCHI

Changing their stance on the 23rd day of their stir, the students protesting irregularities in JPSC and JSSC examinations, on Sunday gave an ultimatum to the state government, warning that if their demands are not met, they will lay siege to the CM's residence in Ranchi on August 20. The students said they would stage a 'dharna' outside the CM's residence and, if their demands remained unfulfilled, would seek CM Hemant Soren's resignation.

This is the first time since the agitation began that the protesting students have raised the demand for the CM's resignation. "If our demands are not met by the 18th, the Chief Minister's residence will be surrounded on August

20. We will sit there and demand our rights, and if our rights are not granted, resignations will also be demanded," stated a post by JPSC-JSSC Reform Manch. JPSC-JSSC Reform Manch leader Ravindra Paswan said that the movement would henceforth not follow the path of Gandhi but that of Bhagat Singh. "Today, we are changing the course of our movement. We have had enough of Gandhian methods and peaceful protests. They simply aren't listening. We are now going to adopt the path of Bhagat Singh.

We are prepared to face bullets, even if the government shoots us in the chest, for this cause. We will continue our agitation until our demands are met," said Paswan.

He also issued an ulti-

matum to the government: meet their demands by the 18th of this month, cancel the JSSC results, scrap all exams conducted by the TDPL agency, and order a CBI inquiry into all of them. Meanwhile, Piyush Kumar Singh, representing the platform, accused the government of ignoring the protesting students.

According to the protesters, when their agitation began, Rahul Gandhi had assured them that if CM Soren failed to provide a satisfactory response by August 15, the Congress would withdraw its support from the Jharkhand government.

They alleged that even after August 15 passed, the government took no concrete steps to address their demands and were being fooled.

From Nuclear Power to AI Skills, PM Modi Pitches Self-Reliance Push on Independence Day

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi outlined an ambitious roadmap for strengthening India's self-reliance across nuclear energy, defence, manufacturing and technology, while announcing new initiatives focused on youth skills, competitive examinations and sports ahead of the country's 80th Independence Day.

Addressing the nation from the Red Fort after unfurling the national flag, Modi said India had taken a major step towards self-reliance in nuclear power with the Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) at Kalpakkam in Tamil Nadu attaining criticality earlier this year.

He described nuclear energy as a key pillar of India's energy security and outlined plans to significantly expand the country's nuclear power capacity.

"We have set a target of 200 GW of nuclear energy, with five new nuclear reactors being set up," Modi said.

He said Parliament had also passed the SHANTI Act and the government had set a target of achieving 100 GW of nuclear power capacity by 2047.

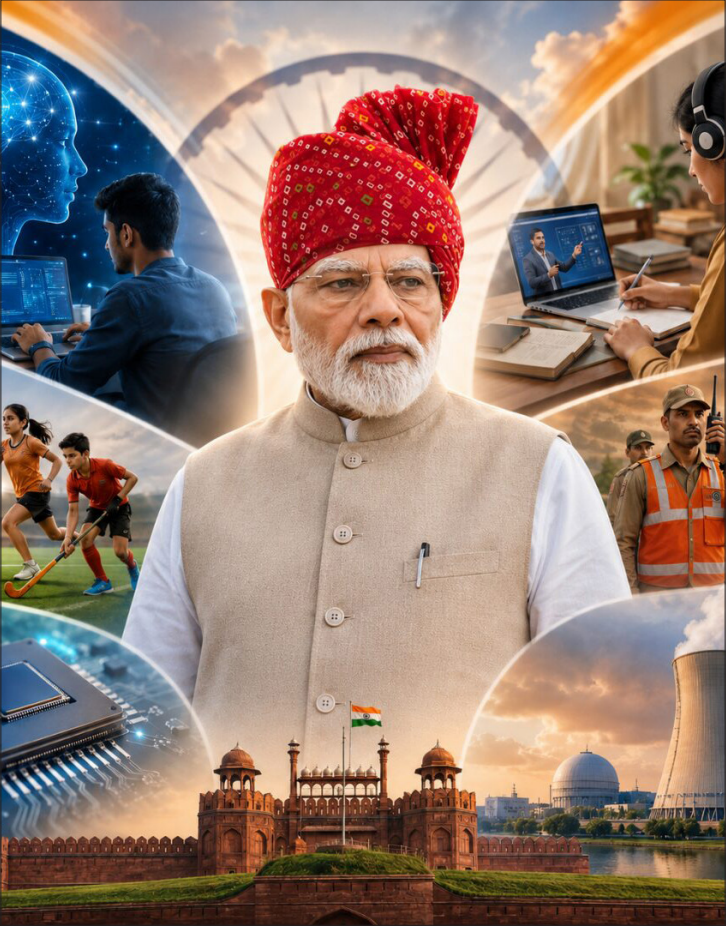
"Energy security is today's need," Modi said, adding that India's mastery of fast breeder technology represented a major step towards self-reliance in nuclear fuel.

Free coaching for competitive exams

Turning to the country's youth, Modi announced free online coaching for various competitive examinations, particularly aimed at reducing the financial burden on poor and middle-class families.

He said families were spending thousands of crores of rupees on coaching and that the government wanted to reduce this burden by providing free online learning opportunities to young people preparing for competitive examinations.

The Prime Minister also announced an initiative to provide AI skills training to one crore Indian youth, positioning emerging technologies as a key component of India's future workforce. Talent hunt ahead of 2036 Olympics



With India set to host the 2036 Olympic Games, Modi announced a nationwide talent identification programme to find promising athletes and provide them with specialised training.

The initiative is aimed at building a stronger pool of athletes and preparing them for international competition ahead of the 2036 Games.

Appeal on Census 2027

Modi also urged young people to participate actively in the ongoing Census 2027, including by helping their families provide accurate information through the digital self-enumeration process.

He said the Census was not merely an exercise in counting people but an important tool for policymaking and planning.

"The information is used to formulate policies and schemes and prepare the country's roadmap for progress," he said.

Defence, manufacturing and infrastructure

Highlighting India's industrial and infrastructure growth, Modi said defence production had increased fourfold over the past 12 years, while electronics manufacturing had grown sevenfold. Railway coach production, he

said, had increased 21-fold and mobile phone production had risen 33-fold.

He also highlighted India's progress in the digital and innovation ecosystem and improvements in the delivery of basic amenities. According to the Prime Minister, tap water connections were being provided 15 times faster, gas connections six times faster, toilets for poor households four times faster and houses for the poor three times faster than previously.

Fertiliser support for farmers

Modi also highlighted government measures to ensure the availability of urea and DAP fertilisers at affordable prices despite rising global prices amid geopolitical tensions.

He said the government was absorbing a substantial portion of the cost of fertilisers to protect farmers from international price pressures.

According to Modi, urea was being supplied to farmers at Rs 300 per bag, despite procurement costs of around Rs 3,000 in the global market. He said DAP, whose global market price had risen to around Rs 5,000, continued to be made available to farmers at Rs 1,350 per bag. "Today, there is gas, petrol and urea available in our country," Modi said while highlighting measures taken to cushion the impact of global disruptions.

Self-reliance at the centre of address

Modi's Independence Day address placed self-reliance at the centre of India's development strategy, spanning nuclear energy, defence production, manufacturing, digital technology and critical supplies. At the same time, the Prime Minister's announcements placed significant emphasis on youth development through free competitive-exam coaching and AI training, alongside a nationwide sporting talent hunt and continued support for farmers.

The broader message of the address was that India's push for greater economic and strategic autonomy would depend not only on expanding domestic production but also on building a skilled workforce and investing in the country's young population.

INTERNATIONAL

Bangladesh says PM Tarique Rahman will visit India only after 'conducive environment' created for Hasina's extradition



DHAKA

Bangladesh on Sunday said India needs to create a "conducive environment" for Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's possible visit to New Delhi for the BRICS summit in September, with Dhaka linking the issue to its demand for the extradition of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

The comments came amid uncertainties over Rahman's visit to New Delhi for the BRICS summit on September 12-13.

Rahman met Indian High Commissioner Dinesh Trivedi last

week, and sought former prime minister Sheikh Hasina's extradition to Bangladesh. But there was no clarity on whether he would visit New Delhi.

"We have made our position clear on this matter. We are of the view that an appropriate environment needs to be created for this visit," Bangladesh's foreign ministry spokesperson Shahidul Karim was quoted as saying by the Daily Star newspaper on Sunday.

By an "appropriate environment", Karim highlighted the issue of Bangladesh seeking Hasina's extradition, according

to BDnews24 media portal.

Relations between India and Bangladesh have witnessed strain after Hasina virtually addressed the press on August 5 in New Delhi, where she said she is determined to return home in December to put the country on the "right track" by restoring democracy, notwithstanding the risk of facing the threat of imprisonment or a death sentence.

Bangladesh expressed outrage over the media interaction, saying the event had hurt the sentiments of its people and could adversely affect efforts to improve bilateral

ties with India. They described Hasina as an "absconding, convicted genocider".

However, India's Ministry of External Affairs on August 7 said that it had no role in the media event concerning Hasina and it does not endorse anything said at the forum about the Bangladesh government.

After Rahman's meeting with Trivedi, Bangladesh Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman said the BRICS invitation was not extended to the prime minister personally, but rather "addressed to the chairperson of BIMSTEC."

BIMSTEC is an international group of seven countries - Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Bangladesh holds the official state chairmanship of the regional group.

However, the Ministry of External Affairs said on August 14: "We have extended an invitation to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh for a bilateral visit. We've also extended an invitation to the prime minister of Bangladesh for a visit to India for the outreach session of the BRICS Summit."

Hasina was ousted in August 2024 following violent student-led protests, and fled to India.

In November 2025, she was sentenced to death in absentia by a special tribunal in Bangladesh over alleged "crimes against humanity" during the crackdown on protesters.

Dhaka has since been seeking Hasina's extradition from India, while New Delhi maintains that the extradition request is under examination in accordance with applicable law and established legal procedures.

The Bangladesh government maintains that Hasina shall have to surrender and face the law if she returns.

Iran offers USD 30,000 bounty for killing or capturing American soldiers, doubles reward for women



TEHRAN

Iran's military announced on Sunday that it was offering a bounty equivalent to \$30,000 for killing or capturing US soldiers, with the reward doubled if carried out by a woman.

Army chief Amir Hatami said the plan had been drawn up following a "large number of requests" to participate, according to the IRNA state news agency.

There has been no known deployment of US ground forces in Iran during the Middle East war, with the exception of a rescue mission in April for a downed American airman.

Hatami did not provide any details on where or when the killing or capturing of US soldiers was expected to take place.

"Anyone who kills or captures and hands over an invading American military personnel will receive a reward equivalent to \$30,000 or 5 billion toman from the

Islamic Republic of Iran's Army," Hatami said, using an informal unit equivalent to 10,000 Iranian rials.

"Courageous Iranian women who carry out such an action will receive double the reward," he added.

Hatami repeated Iran's call for the US to leave the Middle East, and said "they no longer have permission to enter the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman or the Strait of Hormuz". The war between Tehran and Washington began on February 28 when the United States and Israel attacked Iran. Just over a month into the war, the US launched a massive rescue operation to retrieve the weapon systems officer of an F-15 jet, involving around 200 US troops and more than 170 aircraft racing to find the airman ahead of Iranian forces.

During the rescue, Iranian troops damaged an A-10 ground attack aircraft which was ditched over friendly territory. The US also reportedly abandoned

and destroyed aircraft used during the mission including a C-130 transport plane.

Days before, the pilot of the F-15 was rescued by a helicopter crew in a smaller operation.

The war was later paused by an April ceasefire after nearly 40 days of fighting, followed by a June framework for peace talks that later collapsed. Iran and the United States have since traded fire sporadically, with fighting mainly centred in southern Iran and around the Strait of Hormuz.

Indirect contact between the two sides via mediators has continued with little sign of any diplomatic breakthrough. Iran has also set out a list of demands for reopening the strait, including war damages.

The number of US military personnel killed since the start of the war stands at 17, with the most recent deaths in July. They have all been killed outside of Iran, in countries including Jordan and Iraq.

The Nation Must Learn to See the Northeast

The absence of Northeast India from the national anthem is not, by itself, proof of exclusion. But when that omission is placed alongside decades of cultural unfamiliarity, inadequate representation, stereotypical portrayals and the everyday experiences of citizens from the region, it becomes part of a larger question: who gets to be imagined as the nation?

Every Indian schoolchild learns to stand when the opening notes of Jana Gana Mana are played. For 52 seconds, classrooms, stadiums, government offices and public ceremonies become spaces of collective national feeling. The words invoke Punjab, Sindh, Gujarat, Maratha, Dravida, Utkala and Banga. They evoke the Himalayas, the Ganga and the Yamuna. They have been sung by generations as an expression of India's unity.

Yet the Northeast remains unnamed. For someone who grows up in the region, the omission may initially appear insignificant. Children learn the anthem because everyone else does. They learn to stand, sing and salute the flag. They participate fully in Independence Day celebrations, Republic Day ceremonies, school parades and national sporting events.

The sense of belonging is real. The questions begin later.

Why does the national song mention regions and identities that seem geographically and historically distant, while saying nothing about Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh or the region that includes them all?

The question is not necessarily about changing the anthem. Nor is it about accusing Rabindranath Tagore of deliberately excluding a region that, in 1911, occupied a very different place in India's political and geographical imagination.

The deeper issue is what happened after 1911. Why did successive generations fail to confront the symbolic absence? Why did school curricula, popular culture and national media reproduce a limited understanding of India? And why, despite decades of constitutional integration, does the Northeast still have to fight to be recognised as an ordinary part of the Indian imagination?

These questions deserve serious discussion. An anthem is more than a list of places

It is tempting to treat Jana Gana Mana as a geographical document and judge it according to whether every part of modern India is represented. That would be a mistake.

A national anthem is not a census. It does not need to enumerate every state, community or linguistic group. Its purpose is symbolic. It creates an emotional experience of belonging.

This is where the concept of phatic communication becomes useful.

The term, associated with anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski, describes forms of communication whose primary purpose is not to exchange information but to establish social connection. A greeting, a handshake or a shared ritual may communicate very little factual information while nevertheless reinforcing the relationship between people.

National rituals work in much the same way. When millions of Indians stand together for the national anthem, they are not learning new information about the country. They are participating in a shared act of belonging.

The anthem says, in effect, we are together.

That is precisely why symbolic representation matters.

For citizens from the Northeast, the experience can be complicated. They participate in the ritual of national belonging, but their region is absent from the words of the ritual.

That does not mean they are less Indian. It means that the symbolic language through which India represents itself has never fully reflected their presence.

And symbols matter because they accumulate meaning over time.

A single omission may be harmless. An omission repeated for generations, however, can become part of a wider pattern of invisibility.

The historical question cannot simply be dismissed

The usual explanation is straightforward: Tagore's 1911 composition referred to major geographical and cultural regions of British India and the broader civilisational landscape of the subcontinent.

But there is an obvious complication.

Assam was under British rule in 1911.

It was not a territory that became part of India decades later. It was already a significant administrative and geographical unit of British India. Yet it was not named.

At the same time, Sindh remains in the anthem even though it became part of Pakistan after Partition.

This does not mean that the anthem is historically defective. Nor does it mean that its words should necessarily be changed.

But it does demonstrate why the Northeast's absence is worth discussing.

The argument becomes even more complicated when one considers the political evolution of the region after Independence.

Sikkim became part of India in 1975. Nagaland became a state in 1963. Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh acquired their present statehood through later political developments. Manipur and Tripura also underwent different constitutional transitions.

But Assam was there from the beginning.

The argument that the entire Northeast was simply "not part of India" when the anthem was written therefore cannot explain the omission.

Nor can the reference to the Himalayas resolve the issue.

The anthem mentions Himachala, but that is a geographical reference. Punjab, Gujarat, Maratha and Banga are references to historical regions and cultural identities. A mountain range cannot automatically be treated as representation of all the communities living beyond or around it.

The distinction matters.

The Supreme Court and the limits of legal correction

The anthem has also occasionally entered legal and political debate.

In 2005, the Supreme Court



considered a petition concerning the reference to Sindh in Jana Gana Mana. The court declined to intervene, observing that a national anthem is a hymn expressing patriotic sentiments and feelings rather than a legally binding territorial statement.

The judgment effectively placed the anthem beyond the kind of geographical correction that a court could impose.

That was understandable from a constitutional perspective.

A judiciary should not ordinarily rewrite national symbols.

But the judgment also illustrates an important point: not every problem of representation is a legal problem.

The absence of the Northeast cannot be solved by litigation alone.

The more important questions concern education, culture, journalism, political discourse and public attitudes.

A constitutional democracy can formally guarantee equality while its cultural institutions continue to reproduce unequal visibility.

That is where the real challenge lies.

One India must mean more than administrative uniformity

India has increasingly embraced the language of national integration through ideas such as "One Nation, One Election", "One Nation, One Ration Card" and "One Nation, One Tax".

These initiatives may have different policy objectives, but together they reflect a broader political vocabulary: India as one integrated national system.

The principle is powerful.

But integration cannot be measured only through administrative systems.

A nation is also a community of recognition.

If citizens from one region remain unfamiliar to large sections of the country, if their cultures are treated as exotic, if their appearance is routinely interpreted as foreign and if their political and social concerns receive attention primarily during crises, then formal integration has not yet produced complete social integration.

The Northeast illustrates this contradiction particularly sharply.

The region has acquired strategic importance under India's Act East policy. Its geographical location makes it a bridge to Southeast Asia. Connectivity projects, border infrastructure and trade corridors have made the region increasingly important to India's economic and strategic calculations.

But there is a difference between being important as a corridor and being recognised as a community.

The Northeast cannot be reduced to a gateway to Myanmar, Bangladesh or Southeast Asia.

It is home.

It is a place where millions of Indian citizens live ordinary lives, build businesses, attend universities, work in public services, produce art, play sport and participate in India's democratic institutions.

The region must be seen not merely for what it can do for India's strategic interests, but for what it already is: an integral part of India.

The media's missing Northeast

The problem becomes especially visible in national media.

For decades, the Northeast has struggled to secure sustained attention in mainstream newsrooms. The region often enters national coverage during moments of violence, natural disasters, elections, insurgency or political crisis.

The ordinary Northeast receives far less attention

The teacher in Shillong, the entrepreneur in Guwahati, the student in Imphal, the farmer in Arunachal Pradesh, the musician in Mizoram or the sportsperson in Nagaland rarely becomes part of the everyday national narrative.

This produces a distorted picture.

A region appears in the national imagination primarily when something has gone wrong.

Digital media has changed the situation to some extent. Northeastern journalists, writers, filmmakers and content creators can now tell their own stories without waiting for permission from a metropolitan newsroom.

YouTube, Instagram, podcasts and independent digital publications have created alternative platforms.

But individual success cannot substitute for institutional representation.

Algorithms tend to reward scale. Content that appeals to large audiences receives greater visibility, while stories from smaller regions can remain trapped within regional information ecosystems.

The result is a feedback loop.

Because the mainland does not know enough about the Northeast, there is less demand for Northeast-focused coverage. Because there is less coverage, the mainland continues to know little about the region.

The cycle needs to be broken.

Education creates the national imagination

The classroom may be the most important place to begin.

Indian children learn about the country through maps, textbooks, stories, historical figures, festivals and cultural references. What is included becomes familiar. What is repeatedly absent becomes periph-

eral.

This is not necessarily the result of deliberate discrimination.

It is often the consequence of accumulated neglect.

A child who can identify major rivers and historical regions of northern and western India but cannot locate Kohima, Imphal, Aizawl, Shillong, Itanagar, Agartala or Gangtok is experiencing a particular version of India.

A student who learns extensively about major national movements but knows little about the political, cultural and social histories of the Northeast receives an incomplete national narrative.

The answer is not to replace one regional history with another.

The objective should be to create a genuinely plural national curriculum in which every part of India is treated as part of the country's shared story.

The histories of the Northeast should not be taught as an appendix to Indian history.

They are Indian history.

The Anglo-Manipur War, the role of the region in the Second World War, the political movements of Assam, the Naga peace process, the Mizo Accord, the integration of Sikkim, the language movements and the many social movements of the region all belong to the national story.

The everyday experience of being "different"

Symbolic invisibility becomes more painful when it intersects with everyday discrimination.

People from Northeast India have repeatedly reported being asked where they are "really" from, despite being Indian citizens.

Their physical appearance often becomes the basis for assumptions about nationality.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, people with East Asian features faced racist abuse in several parts of India.

The killing of Arunachal Pradesh student Nido Taniam in Delhi in 2014 became one of the most painful reminders of how racial stereotypes can become violence. More recent cases involving students from the Northeast have continued to raise concerns about prejudice and safety.

These incidents cannot be explained by the an-

them alone.

Nor would changing the anthem eliminate racism.

But they belong to the same larger conversation about recognition.

When a citizen is repeatedly treated as a foreigner because of their appearance, it reveals a failure of the national imagination.

India is constitutionally diverse. It is also visually, culturally and ethnically diverse.

The idea that an Indian must look a certain way is incompatible with the reality of the Republic.

Assam's language experience offers another lesson

The Northeast's internal diversity is itself frequently misunderstood.

Assamese and Bengali, for example, are distinct languages with different literary histories and identities, even though they share historical and linguistic relationships.

The history of Assamese demonstrates why cultural recognition matters.

During colonial rule, Bengali was imposed as the language of administration and education in Assam, contributing to a long struggle over linguistic identity. Later language movements reinforced the demand for recognition of Assamese as a distinct language and cultural tradition.

These histories are not widely known outside the region.

That lack of knowledge creates another form of invisibility.

When the country does not know the history of a community, it becomes easier to misunderstand its political demands, cultural anxieties and social movements.

Recognition begins with knowledge.

Inclusion is not about changing the anthem

The strongest version of the argument is therefore not that Jana Gana Mana must be rewritten.

That would reduce a complex question to a symbolic alteration.

The more meaningful demand is that India must expand the imagination behind the anthem.

The Northeast does not need pity.

It does not need token representation once a year.

It does not need to be presented only through tribal costumes, scenic mountains, football tournaments, insurgency or exotic festivals.

It needs to be treated in the same ordinary manner as every other part of India.

Punjabi culture is Indian culture.

Tamil cinema is Indian cinema.

Bengali literature is Indian literature.

Maharashtrian politics is Indian politics.

And Naga, Mizo, Khasi, Manipuri, Assamese, Bodo, Garo, Adi, Apatani and countless other cultural traditions are equally part of India's national inheritance.

The goal should be normalisation, not tokenism.

A person from the Northeast should not have to explain why they are Indian.

A student from Manipur studying in Delhi should not be treated as a foreigner.

A musician from Mizoram should not be introduced merely as an "exotic" performer.

An entrepreneur from Arunachal Pradesh should not be viewed through the prism of geography alone.

They should simply be Indians.

Reimagining the national story

The challenge before India is not merely to add more names to a song.

It is to expand the story that the nation tells about itself.

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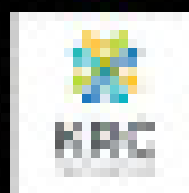


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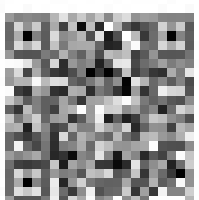


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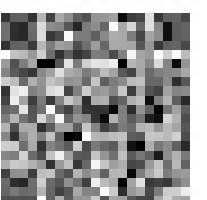


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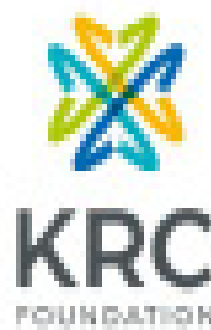
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