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## PERSPECTIVE

### NO MAN CAN SERVE TWO MASTERS

## Assam completes 100% railway electrification: Himanta Biswa Sarma

GUWAHATI

Assam has achieved 100 per cent electrification of its railway network, marking a major milestone in the state's rail infrastructure, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Monday.

Sarma said the completion of the electrification programme will enable electric traction across the entire railway network in Assam, paving the way for cleaner and more energy-efficient train operations.

In a post on X, the chief minister said the achievement was the result of infrastructure development undertaken over the past 12 years. He also noted that several parts of Assam lacked broad-gauge railway connectivity before 2014.

Sarma credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi with giving a major push to railway infrastructure in the state and strengthening Assam's integration with the national rail network.

He also acknowledged the contributions of Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and former Railway Ministers Piyush Goyal and Suresh Prabhu to the electrification drive since 2014.

According to Sarma, Vaishnaw played a key role in taking the electrification programme to completion, while Goyal and Prabhu helped advance the initiative during their respective tenures.

The completion of electrification is expected to reduce Assam's dependence on diesel-powered locomotives and support cleaner and more energy-efficient rail transport across the state.

#### WHO SAID WHAT



**ENGINEERS'**  
Happy #EngineersDay to all remarkable engineers, the people who build, innovate and provide solutions for a better tomorrow. Tributes to Sir M. Visvesvaraya, whose engineering genius and nation-building vision continue to inspire.

~ Narendra Modi, PM

# KRC TIMES

STAY ENRICHED

VOLUME:1, ISSUE 874 | SILCHAR TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2026. EAST AND NE INDIA EDITION | e-mail: krctimes@gmail.com ,www.krctimes.com

## Nitin Nabin backs Manipur push to address illegal immigration concerns

IMPHAL

BJP national president Nitin Nabin has assured Manipur leaders that concerns over illegal immigration and its alleged demographic impact on the state will be taken up at the national level, Manipur Home Minister Govindas Konhoujam said on Tuesday.

The assurance came during a meeting in New Delhi between Nabin, Konhoujam and BJP MLA Sapam Kunjakeswor Singh. According to Konhoujam, the discussions focused on illegal migration and its implications for Manipur's demographic profile.

Konhoujam said Nabin had acknowledged the seriousness of the issue and assured the delegation that it would be pursued at the national level for an "appropriate and early solution".

The minister linked the discussions to recent remarks by Union Home Minister Amit Shah on illegal infiltration, and said protecting Manipur's demographic character was essential for the state's future.

The issue also figured prominently



at an all-party meeting chaired by Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh in Imphal on Monday evening, where updating the National Register of Citizens (NRC) was among the key issues discussed.

Representatives of the BJP, Congress, CPI, CPI(M), RPI and Forward Bloc, besides 14 civil society organisations, attended the meeting, which lasted about two-and-a-half hours.

Khemchand Singh later said political parties had discussed "various issues including updating of NRC in the state in the interest of the people".

Nahakpam Santa, convenor of the 14 civil society organisations under Kangleipak, said participants agreed to press the government to issue a Gazette notification for updating the NRC in Manipur.

The meeting also decided to constitute a sub-committee comprising representatives of political parties and civil society organisations. The panel is expected to seek an appointment with Shah during his proposed visit to Manipur next month and urge the Centre to take up the NRC update process in the state.

The renewed push for an NRC comes amid a wider political debate in Manipur over undocumented migration, demographic change and the identification of indigenous residents.

## NSCN (IM) alleges Centre backing Kuki groups to pressure Nagas

IMPHAL

The NSCN (Isak-Muivah) has accused the Centre of allegedly using Kuki armed groups as "proxy forces" to target Nagas and exert military pressure on Naga-inhabited areas, while claiming that the 2015 Indo-Naga Framework Agreement remains unimplemented.

In a statement, the Naga organisation alleged that the Centre had failed to discharge its constitutional responsibility to protect the Naga people and address the decades-old political conflict through a transparent mechanism.

The NSCN (IM) claimed that state institutions were instead facilitating the activities of groups it described as proxies against Naga settlements. It alleged that the Centre was allowing ethnic tensions to escalate to weaken Naga political resistance. The organisation further alleged that weapons and logistical support were being provided to the Kuki National Army (KNA), and claimed there was coordination with the Kuki National Army-Burma, which operates from Myanmar.

The allegations could not be independently verified. The NSCN (IM) also

criticised the Centre's international diplomatic messaging, arguing that its advocacy of human rights, institutional reforms and peaceful conflict resolution abroad contrasted with what the group described as the suppression of indigenous communities in India. The organisation said the Naga people had shown restraint in negotiations since the 1997 ceasefire but warned that continued military pressure and alleged proxy warfare could make it increasingly difficult to sustain the peace process. It said meaningful negotiations could continue only if both sides approached the process with sincerity and respect for commitments already made.

The NSCN (IM) also accused New Delhi of applying "double standards" by advocating dialogue and peaceful solutions internationally while allegedly failing to implement political commitments reached with the Nagas.

It pointed specifically to the Framework Agreement signed between the Centre and the NSCN (IM) on August 3, 2015. The group said the agreement recognised the distinct history and political identity of the Naga people.

## Manipur all-party meet discusses NRC update, indigenous identity



IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh chaired an all-party meeting to discuss updating the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in the state, with political leaders and civil society representatives stressing the need to safeguard indigenous identity and security.

The meeting at the Chief Minister's Secretariat was attended by senior leaders of the BJP and Congress, besides representatives of civil society organisations, officials said.

According to an official statement, the participants discussed various issues concerning the state, with the NRC emerging as a key subject in

the context of protecting Manipur's indigenous population and its future.

Khemchand heard suggestions and concerns from representatives of different political parties and civil society groups. The meeting ended on a positive note, the statement said.

In a social media post after the meeting, the chief minister said the participants had discussed several issues concerning Manipur, including updating the NRC "in the interest of the people" of the state.

The meeting comes amid a continuing debate in Manipur over the identification of indigenous residents and measures to address concerns over migration and demographic change.

## UPI payments above Rs 2,000 may no longer remain free



NEW DELHI

UPI transactions above Rs 2,000 may not remain free, with the government on Monday directing banks and payment service providers not to charge customers for transactions made through RuPay debit cards or UPI for up to Rs 2,000.

The move provides a statutory basis for keeping these digital payment modes free for users within the specified limit.

This means that UPI transactions above Rs 2,000 could attract a Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) or a fee that the banks and payment gateways charge from the merchant for processing the payment.

While the government has yet to announce the MDR, sources have pegged the rate at anywhere from 0.25% to 0.4% of the transaction amount.

The government had earlier said that any MDR, if introduced, would apply only to a limited set of merchant transactions above a specified threshold and at a nominal rate, much lower than MDRs of debit and credit cards.

All Person-to-Person (P2P) transactions will continue to be free of charge.

## NIA to take over probe into killing of couple in Manipur's Tamenglong



IMPHAL

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) will take over the investigation into the killing of a couple in Tollen village in Manipur's Tamenglong district, officials said on Tuesday.

The decision followed mounting public pressure and an ultimatum from Kuki-Zo civil society organisations demanding a central agency probe into the September 13 killings.

The transfer of the case was formalised through an agreement between government officials, including the Tamenglong superintendent of police and the Tousem sub-divisional officer, and a Joint Action Committee (JAC) formed following the incident.

The couple, Seikhoneh Singnit and Lhingjangai Singnit, were killed in an armed attack at Tollen

village on September 13. Their four children, aged 12, 10, seven and four, were left without their parents. The youngest child was also critically injured in the attack.

Under the six-point agreement, the government assured the JAC that the case would be handed over to the NIA without delay.

The administration also agreed to bear the injured child's medical expenses until recovery, provide immediate ex-gratia assistance to the bereaved family and arrange long-term rehabilitation and financial support for the four children until they reach adulthood.

The agreement also provides for the deployment of additional Central security forces in vulnerable areas, including Tollen, Kaimai and Thingtuhbung-Kulbung, to strengthen security and prevent further attacks.

Both sides agreed to implement the commitments within 30 days. The government also accepted responsibility for any further incidents if the agreed security measures were not implemented within the stipulated period.

The development comes amid heightened tensions in the region following attacks in Tollen and Longpi villages, in which four civilians were killed.

Before the agreement, the Kuki Inpi Jiribam, Tamenglong and Noney, along with other civil society organisations, had demanded stringent action against those responsible and stronger security arrangements in vulnerable Kuki-Zo settlements.

# India exports 500 tonnes of hilsa to Bangladesh amid supply shortage

KOLKATA

The hilsa trade between India and Bangladesh has taken an unusual turn this year, with India exporting around 500 tonnes of the prized fish to Bangladesh over the past two months as the neighbouring country faces a shortage.

Another 150-200 tonnes could be exported to Bangladesh in the coming weeks, according to members of the Howrah Wholesale Fish Importers' Association.

"In the last two months, some 500 tonnes have been exported, and another 150-200 tonnes are slated in the coming weeks," an association member said.

The development marks a reversal of the traditional trade pattern, under which Bangladesh has supplied hilsa to India, particularly ahead of the Durga Puja season.

The latest consignments have largely originated in Gujarat and been shipped through Bha-



ruch port. Some consignments have also reached Bangladesh through the Howrah wholesale fish market in West Bengal, traders said.

"Bangladesh has been importing hilsa from India for the first

time. We usually send fish such as boal, rohu, parse and tangra to Bangladesh. This year there is a shortage of hilsa there," said Syed Anwar Maqsood, secretary of the Howrah Wholesale Fish Importers' Association.

Gujarat hilsa finds a market. Hilsa caught along the Gujarat coast has traditionally had relatively limited demand in the Indian market, largely because of its high roe content. That same characteristic, however, has made it attractive to Bangladeshi consumers.

Traders said roe-rich Gujarat hilsa is particularly popular in markets in Chattogram and Sylhet.

"Gujarat hilsa contains a lot of roe, which is highly sought after in Bangladesh. The eggs are also being sold separately for processing and re-exported to other countries by them," Maqsood said.

Some of the imported fish is also being processed for export, while hilsa is being dried and sold as salted fish in Bangladesh, he said.

Bangladesh remains one of the world's major hilsa-producing countries, with the fish deeply embedded in its culinary and

cultural traditions.

Traditional flow uncertain. The latest exports have also raised questions over whether Bangladesh will send hilsa to India ahead of the festive season this year.

There is currently no clarity on exports of Padma River hilsa from Bangladesh to India. Last year, the Bangladesh government had permitted the export of 1,200 tonnes of hilsa to India ahead of the festive season.

The reversal in trade this year comes as Bangladesh grapples with reduced hilsa availability, prompting traders there to look towards Indian sources to meet domestic demand.

For decades, hilsa has been more than a commodity in the India-Bangladesh trade relationship. This year, however, changing supply patterns have turned the traditional flow on its head, with Indian hilsa crossing the border to fill a gap in one of its biggest producing markets.



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VOLUME:1, ISSUE 874

# India-China: Cooperation Without Complacency

Geography has imposed on India and China a relationship that neither country can escape. The two Asian powers share a long and contested Himalayan frontier, command enormous economic weight and influence the security and prosperity of much of the region. Their relationship, therefore, cannot be reduced to either strategic rivalry or economic partnership. It is a difficult combination of both-and managing that contradiction will remain one of India's most consequential foreign-policy challenges.

The case for engagement is compelling. China is a manufacturing and technological giant with a commanding position in critical supply chains, including rare earths and advanced industrial components. India, meanwhile, possesses one of the world's largest consumer markets, a growing manufacturing base and a young workforce. Their economic relationship, despite its substantial imbalance in China's favour, demonstrates that interdependence already exists. The sensible objective for New Delhi is not to dismantle that relationship but to make it more balanced, resilient and beneficial to Indian industry.

That requires a distinction between economic engagement and strategic dependence. India cannot afford to become excessively reliant on Chinese supplies in sectors critical to national security and industrial resilience. At the same time, completely shutting out Chinese trade and investment would impose costs on Indian consumers and manufacturers. Diversification of supply chains, greater domestic manufacturing and carefully negotiated market access offer a more sustainable response than indiscriminate economic disengagement.

The changing international environment makes this balance even more important. Trade tensions, tariff disputes, wars and growing fragmentation of the global economy are forcing countries to reduce excessive dependence on any single power. India's engagement with BRICS and other platforms reflects its preference for a multipolar international order. China has similar interests in reducing strategic vulnerability. Yet the credibility of such cooperation will remain limited if India and China cannot manage their own bilateral tensions.

There are signs that both sides understand the need for stabilisation. The resumption of direct flights, the return of the Kailash Mansarovar pilgrimage and the reopening of some channels of border trade point towards a cautious restoration of normal ties. High-level diplomatic engagement, including talks between National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and the meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping, has also created space for sustained dialogue.

These developments are welcome, but they should not be confused with a settlement.

The boundary dispute remains the central obstacle to genuine trust. Large stretches of the India-China border remain contested, and developments along the Line of Actual Control can rapidly undo diplomatic progress. For India, the lesson of the 2020 crisis remains particularly important: economic interdependence cannot substitute for strategic preparedness, military vigilance or clear political signalling.

This is why cooperation with China must be pursued from a position of confidence rather than complacency. India needs strong border infrastructure, credible deterrence and diversified supply chains even as it seeks dialogue. Engagement is not a concession; nor is vigilance an act of hostility. The two can and must coexist.

China, for its part, has an interest in demonstrating that stabilising relations with India is more valuable than tactical pressure along the frontier. A relationship based on mutual sensitivity cannot work if one side repeatedly believes that the other is attempting to alter the status quo through pressure. Durable cooperation requires predictability, respect for existing understandings and a genuine effort to reduce the sources of confrontation.

There is also a larger Asian dimension. India and China are not merely neighbouring states; their decisions affect South Asia, the Indian Ocean, the Himalayan region and the wider developing world. Both countries have repeatedly spoken of a more representative and multipolar global order. Such an order will have little credibility if Asia's two largest powers remain trapped in a cycle of distrust.

The objective, therefore, should not be an artificial friendship. Nor should India pursue confrontation for its own sake. The realistic goal is a stable competition with sufficient cooperation to prevent rivalry from becoming conflict.

That will require patience. Border negotiations may take years. Trade imbalances will not disappear overnight. Strategic mistrust cannot be erased by a few high-level meetings. But communication, restored economic links, people-to-people exchanges and regular diplomatic engagement can create habits of restraint.

India should neither romanticise cooperation with China nor fear it. It should approach Beijing with clarity about its interests, confidence in its capabilities and an equally clear understanding of the costs of prolonged confrontation.

For two nuclear-armed neighbours sharing a contested frontier, dialogue is not a sign of weakness. It is an instrument of national interest. The challenge for both governments is to ensure that competition remains manageable and that cooperation, where interests converge, is not sacrificed to suspicion. In the India-China relationship, peace need not mean agreement-and cooperation need not mean trust without verification. What matters is building enough stability to keep disagreement from becoming conflict.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. Therefore, no American can afford to be apathetic about the problem of racial justice. It is a problem that meets every man at his front door.  
- Martin Luther King, Jr.

# BEYOND CHINA VS WEST AT BRICS

GURJIT SINGH

At the 18th BRICS Summit in New Delhi, China seemingly got what it wanted—at least on the surface. President Xi Jinping was an honoured guest in India and, as his country was endorsed as the next BRICS chair, will host the next summit in 2027. Yet, the more significant outcome may be what China did not get—a BRICS organised primarily around its geopolitical contest with the West.

The 140-paragraph New Delhi Declaration (NDD), the longest BRICS declaration so far, reveals a subtle but significant shift. The bloc is beginning to move beyond a loose grouping of emerging economies towards a platform through which the Global South can gain greater voice, bargaining power and strategic autonomy. In this transformation, China remains the most powerful member. But it is no longer clear that it can define what BRICS means for everyone else.

This tension is central to BRICS. China is a major global power with ambitions to reshape the international order. Most other members are developing countries with different priorities. They do not want to wholly replace dependence on the West with dependence on China. They want more choices, more bargaining power and greater autonomy in dealing with both.

New Delhi brought this distinction into the open.

Xi's vision for BRICS is ambitious. In his address, he presented it as an important platform for emerging-market and developing countries, and called for greater cooperation in artificial intelligence, supply chains, peace and stability, WTO-centred trade and global governance reform. He also proposed cooperation with China on AI-driven industrialisation.

Much of this language found its way into the NDD. But the context changed. These ideas were absorbed into a broader multilateral agenda rather than becoming the blueprint for a China-led alternative order.

cross-border payments and settlements; but it stops well short of a common BRICS currency or a formal de-dollarisation programme.

Instead, the Indian approach emphasises practical measures: interoperability of payment systems, the proposed BRICS Risk Lab in Gujarat's GIFT City and continued work on investment and financial infrastructure.

This difference matters. For China, alternatives to the dollar can be part of a larger effort to reduce Western influence over the international financial system. For much of the Global South, the objective is more practical. They want options. They want Chinese finance without Chinese financial dependence. They want access to Western markets and institutions without the West dictating terms. They want the dollar to have competition, not necessarily to disappear. That is a quite different proposition from de-dollarisation.

Trade presents the same dilemma. The NDD opposes unilateral tariffs, non-tariff measures and protectionism, while it supports WTO reform. This can certainly be interpreted as a criticism of Western policies; it also exposes a contradiction within BRICS itself.

China is by far the largest trading power in the grouping. Yet many developing countries worry about market access to China, trade imbalances and non-tariff barriers. They want greater access to Chinese markets just as much as they want relief from Western trade restrictions. A call against protectionism cannot simply be read as an anti-American position. It is also a demand for China to open its markets further.

Technology brings the issue into a sharper focus. China has formidable strengths in AI, manufacturing, digital infrastructure and supply chains. Naturally, it wants BRICS cooperation to reinforce these advantages. The developing countries want technology, investment, skills and access to global value chains. But they do

important than some of the headlines surrounding the summit. It moves BRICS beyond the familiar China-versus-West narrative. The issue is not simply whether the US dollar should be replaced and Western institutions challenged. The more fundamental question is whether developing countries can create enough space to negotiate with everyone. India's position at the summit illustrated this.

Xi's visit to India, his first since 2019, and his meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi were themselves significant. Peace and stability on the border, trade imbalances, supply chains, people-to-people exchanges and rebuilding trust were among the issues discussed. Modi made clear that border stability was essential to improving bilateral relations. India was, thus, engaging China without aligning with China.

That distinction is important. India is simultaneously a member of BRICS and the Quad; a partner to the US, Europe and Japan; a G7 invitee; and a country with a continuing boundary dispute with China. Its participation in BRICS cannot, therefore, be interpreted as acceptance of a Beijing-led order.

India's idea of multipolarity is different. It is not about replacing one hegemon with another. It is about ensuring that no single power can dominate the choices available to developing countries.

This may also explain why New Delhi was able to produce consensus among countries whose interests often diverge. The summit did not attempt to erase those differences. Instead, it created enough space for them to coexist within a common framework. Even on West Asia, where positions are often sharply divergent, the group achieved consensus with considerable diplomatic precision.

There is an irony here. China remains BRICS's economic heavyweight and will take over the chairship in 2027. It has considerable resources with which to shape the organisation. Yet

come a stronger pole in a changing world order. The Global South wants BRICS to give it greater weight within that order, and greater room to negotiate with China itself. That distinction could determine the bloc's future.

If BRICS becomes an instrument of great-power rivalry, its developing-country members may eventually see it as another arena where they are expected to choose sides. If it becomes an instrument of Global South agency, its value will be very different.

The irony of the New Delhi summit, therefore, may be that

## DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Shortly after midnight, we concluded the two-day District Commissioners' Conference in Jorhat: over 27 hours of rigorous deliberations with Ministers, DCs and senior officers, covering 15 departments. My message was clear: our DCs must shed the vestiges of a colonial administrative mindset and bring the discipline, efficiency and professionalism of the private sector to public service. Technology and AI must become integral to everyday governance. Each DC will now convene meetings with line departments to ensure every directive reaches field officers without delay and translates into action. Assam's districts must compete to excel. I expect every DC to work towards making their district the finest in the country. Alongside these discussions, I also cleared over 85 files and wrote over 34 Notes and letters to dignitaries. The day-to-day work of governance must keep pace with the reforms we pursue. These deliberations will deliver tangible changes on the ground. That is the commitment we leave Jorhat with. The weight of the mandate is now with the administration and they must rise to the occasion. I'll share a more detailed reflection on my Substack soon.

~ Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM, Assam



though China came to strengthen BRICS as a pole of power, the



The financial agenda is perhaps the clearest example. China and Russia strongly support reducing dependence on Western financial systems, increasing local-currency settlements and developing alternatives to the dollar.

The NDD supports greater use of local currencies for

not want to simply become consumers of Chinese technology or suppliers of raw materials. The real demand of the Global South is therefore not technological dependence with a Chinese label; it is technological capability.

This is why the NDD is more

the group's broader political direction may be moving in a way that is not entirely comfortable for Beijing. The more BRICS expands, the more difficult it becomes for any one power to define its agenda. This is the real story from New Delhi.

China wants BRICS to be-

Global South used it to strengthen it as a space for choice. In the long run, the ability to choose may prove more important than the ability to dominate.

Gurjit Singh | Former Ambassador to Germany and author of The Durian Flavour

# Meghalaya's tech push gains pace with jobs, AI and new IT parks

**SHILLONG**

Meghalaya's technology sector is beginning to move beyond infrastructure creation, with IT companies generating local employment, a second phase of the Shillong Technology Park nearing completion and artificial intelligence emerging as a key area for skilling, entrepreneurship and public services.

The shift is most visible at the Shillong Technology Park in Umsawli, New Shillong, where the first phase is now fully occupied by IT and IT-enabled services companies, banks, software firms and other technology businesses.

The park has generated more than 1,400 jobs, with women accounting for over 700

positions. The employment numbers indicate a growing technology workforce in a state where many young people have traditionally had to seek opportunities outside Meghalaya.

Shillong park set for expansion  
The state's technology infrastructure is set to expand further with the second phase of the Shillong Technology Park, spread across around 1.8 lakh square feet, nearing completion.

The expansion is part of Meghalaya's broader effort to attract investment and develop its digital economy under the Meghalaya Information Technology and Information Technology Enabled Services (IT & ITeS) Promotion Policy, 2024.

The government has set a target of

building a \$16-billion economy by 2032 and aims to place Meghalaya among India's top 10 states in IT and IT-enabled services over the next decade.

The technology push is also extending beyond the state capital.

The Tura IT Park, being developed on the outskirts of Doldegre in Tura, was announced in 2024 and received ₹126.94 crore from the Union Ministry of Development of Northeastern Region under the PM-DevINE scheme.

By late August 2026, the project had achieved 78.67 per cent physical progress, with construction continuing as scheduled.

The facility is expected to provide Meghalaya with another base for IT and IT-enabled services, while widening the

geographical spread of technology-driven employment beyond Shillong.

Alongside physical infrastructure, the state is attempting to build a talent pipeline for the emerging technology sector. AI trainers are being recruited for institutions such as Shillong Polytechnic, ITI Rynjah and ITI Tura, while the Meghalaya State Skill Development Society is expanding training programmes in artificial intelligence and machine learning.

Industry engagement has also increased. A regional AI impact conference in Meghalaya drew more than 700 participants, while AI SPARK: Accelerating Meghalaya Startups was organised at the Shillong Technology Park.

A NASSCOM industry leaders' meet-

ing in Shillong in May 2026 also brought together representatives from the technology and business-processing sectors to discuss IT, skilling and employment opportunities.

Meghalaya's technology strategy is not limited to attracting private companies. AI-based systems are increasingly being incorporated into public services.

Shillong's Integrated Command and Control Centre, established under the Smart City Mission, uses AI-enabled video analytics and camera networks for surveillance, traffic management, crime detection and emergency response. The state is also working on additional Data and AI Labs and an AI Centre of Excellence, while exploring applications that use local languages.

Technology is also being deployed to address specific challenges. An Internet of Things-based sensor network has been installed across 70,000 water springs to collect real-time information for water-resource management and conservation. For Meghalaya, the next challenge is to convert these investments into a sustainable technology ecosystem rather than isolated infrastructure projects.

With the first phase of the Shillong Technology Park already generating employment, its second phase nearing completion, the Tura IT Park progressing and AI becoming part of education, industry and governance, the state is gradually putting in place the building blocks of a locally driven digital economy.

## Higher-level meeting likely to resolve Tripura-Mizoram border row

**AGARTALA**

A higher-level meeting between Tripura and Mizoram is likely to be held soon to address a long-standing border dispute involving a small stretch of land, Tripura Home Secretary Abhishek Singh said on Monday.

His remarks followed detailed discussions between officials of the two states in Agartala, where both sides examined documents and records concerning the disputed area. A preliminary meeting between officials was held on September 9, while Monday's talks focused on the disputed stretch in the Phudunsei Village Council area, Singh said.

"An open discussion was held on the Tripura-Mizoram border dispute. We observed that the issue is related to a small portion of land," he said.

Officials from the Survey of India, Tripura Revenue Department and Tripura Police, along with the District Magistrate and Superintendent of Police of North Tripura, attended the meeting.

"From our end, we presented our documents, and Mizoram also presented its documents. Based on these, we held discussions," Singh said.

According to the Home Secretary, the disputed land is currently under Tripura's possession. He said documents held by the Tripura government, along with Survey of India records, indicate that the area falls within Tripura's jurisdiction.

Following Monday's discussions, a report has been prepared, Singh said. Tripura and Mizoram will submit their respective reports to their governments before the issue is taken up for further deliberations at a higher level.

"We are hopeful that a higher-level meeting would be held next time to solve the matter," Singh said.

## Siang project row: Villagers block road, hold ritual in Arunachal

**ITANAGAR**

Tensions over the proposed Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP) resurfaced in Arunachal Pradesh on September 14 as a large number of villagers blocked a road leading towards the Siang area at Ueng village, protesting activities linked to the proposed project.

The protesters also performed a traditional ritual at the site to reaffirm their opposition to the project. A large contingent of police personnel was deployed to maintain law and order, but the villagers continued the ritual and remained firm in their opposition.

The villagers said development projects that could affect their land, livelihoods and natural resources should be undertaken only with the consent and participation of communities directly affected by them.

Opposition to Siang project continues

The SUMP has faced sustained opposition from sections of local communities, who have expressed concerns over its possible impact on land, livelihoods and the region's ecological resources.

The latest protest at Ueng reflects the continuing resistance to project-related activities and highlights demands for greater community participation in decisions concerning development in the Siang region.

The proposed multipurpose project has remained a contentious issue in the area, with local communities seeking assurances over the protection of their land and traditional resources.

The September 14 mobilisation also underscored the sensitivity surrounding project-related activities in the region, as villagers used a traditional community ritual to publicly register their opposition.

## Manipur CM warns contractual staff against bribery for regularisation



**IMPHAL**

Manipur Chief Minister Y. Khemchand Singh warned contractual employees against paying bribes to secure regularisation,

urging them to place their service records and genuine claims before the government through proper and transparent channels.

Singh made the remarks while addressing a programme at the Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences (JNIMS) for the inauguration, launch and foundation stone laying of various projects.

Expressing concern over reports of alleged bribery linked to the regularisation of nurses, the Chief Minister said employees who had served the state with dedication, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, should not resort to corrupt practices to secure permanent appointments.

More than 200 nurses were appointed on a contractual basis in Manipur amid increased healthcare requirements during the pandemic,

**IMPHAL**

Fuel tanker drivers in Manipur have called off their steering-down strike following assurances from Chief Minister Y. Khemchand Singh, including compensation for drivers injured in the recent Noney attack. However, movement of petroleum tankers and LPG vehicles will remain suspended until a stakeholders' meeting with the government on September 15.

An office-bearer of the All Manipur Petroleum Products Drivers' Association (AMPPDA) said the association expects the meeting with government authorities on Tuesday, after which drivers would decide on resuming operations. "We're expecting a stakeholders' meeting with the government authority on September 15," the functionary said. The drivers are expected to resume loading petrol and diesel from the Malom depot and LPG from the Sekmai bottling plant, besides transporting loaded petroleum products from Jiribam to Imphal, once the meeting is concluded.



The strike was called after a September 10 attack on an oil tanker convoy in Noney along NH-37, in which several drivers were injured and vehicles were damaged. The drivers had demanded safe passage for fuel tankers and stronger security arrangements before resuming operations. The Chief Minister's assurances, including monetary compensation for drivers who suffered grievous injuries, prompted the association to suspend the strike.

The association said drivers from all communities transport

## Congress fields Sibamoni Bora for Nagaon bypoll



**GUWAHATI**

The Congress named former Batadrava MLA Sibamoni Bora as its candidate for the Nagaon Lok Sabha bypoll, completing the line-up for a four-way contest involving the BJP, AIUDF and Trinamool Congress.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge approved Bora's candidature for the by-election to the 9-Nagaon Parliamentary Constituency, the party said in a statement.

"The Congress President, Shri Mallikarjun Kharge, has approved the candidature of Smt. Sibamoni Bora, Ex-MLA, as party candidate to contest the ensuing byelection to the Lok Sabha from 9-Nagaon Parliamentary Constituency of Assam," the statement said.

The announcement came a

day after Congress Assam in-charge and former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel held a marathon meeting with the state unit at Rajiv Bhawan in Guwahati.

After the meeting, Baghel described the bypoll as a "matter of prestige" for the party and stressed the need for a concerted campaign to win the seat. The Congress had delayed announcing its nominee amid discussions within the party over its choice of candidate. Bora's nomination now sets up a four-cornered contest in the constituency. The AIUDF was the first among the major parties to announce its candidate, naming Rejaul Karim Sarkar on August 13. Despite subsequent speculation that party chief Badruddin Ajmal could replace him, the party retained Sarkar. The Trinamool Congress entered the race after the Election Commission announced the poll schedule and fielded Dhing College vice-principal Prof Abdul Salam. The BJP has nominated former Nagaon Deputy Commissioner Devashish Sharma. With the four principal contenders now announced, campaigning is expected to intensify ahead of the September 16 deadline for filing nominations.

## Sikkim landslides: 128 evacuated in Gyalshing as rain worsens risk

**GANGTOK**

Heavy rainfall has intensified landslide activity in Sikkim's Gyalshing district, prompting authorities to evacuate 28 houses housing 128 people from vulnerable areas of Rimbi as debris and floodwaters threaten homes and infrastructure.

The landslide activity at Singlitam and Rimbi has been reported since September 12, with the district administration and various departments maintaining round-the-clock surveillance and response operations, the Sikkim State Disaster Management Authority (SSDMA) said.

At Rimbi, four houses housing 18 people were initially evacuated from vulnerable locations and the families shifted to relatives' homes. Following heavy rain and flooding on September 14, authorities expanded the evacuation, moving 128 residents from 28 houses to the Rimbi Gram Panchayat Kendra as a precautionary measure.

At Singlitam, seven affected households have been shifted to a relief centre in Singlitam Ward, where more than 33 people, including children and elderly residents, are being provided food and other essential supplies.

District Collector Tenzing Denzongpa has been regularly visiting Singlitam and Rimbi to assess the damage and oversee response measures.



Debris blocks stream, bridge washed away  
Officials have identified the area around Mandir Point as the main zone of landslide activity. The lower-lying areas towards Rimbi Ward remain vulnerable to further landslides, particularly during periods of heavy rainfall.

Debris has accumulated along the NiK Kholsa stream, with rainwater carrying mud and other material towards Rimbi village and affecting houses along the stream. The flow of water and debris has already washed away the RCC bridge at Rimbi.

Authorities have warned that the debris is obstructing the natural flow of water, raising the possibility of a sudden release of accumu-

lated water and debris during further rainfall. Residents have been advised to stay away from active landslide zones, debris accumulation sites and stream courses during periods of rain.

The main Rimbi River has also changed its course and is affecting the roadside flank. The state government is taking steps to construct a Bailey bridge at a higher location after the main road was completely washed away on the night of May 14.

Road, water and relief work underway  
The Roads and Bridges Department is carrying out continuous debris clearance and road restoration to restore vehicular movement.

At Singlitam, lighting has been installed at the affected site to facilitate monitoring of landslide activity during rainfall. Fresh damage to houses and poultry units was reported following the September 14 flooding, with relief assistance for newly affected families scheduled to be distributed on Tuesday.

A temporary bamboo bridge is also scheduled to be constructed from September 15 to restore pedestrian movement. The location was selected in consultation with local residents, panchayat members and officials.

The administration is supplying poly-alkathene water pipes to restore water connectivity to the Rimbi relief camp and the main village water tank.

The Rimbi ICDS Centre, located below the expanding landslide zone, was flooded during the September 14 rainfall. Authorities have advised the concerned department to assess the possibility of shifting the centre to a safer location to protect children. The SDM, Yuskom, is also assessing damage to land. Eligible landowners will receive relief according to prescribed norms after the assessment is completed.

The SSDMA said the district administration, District Disaster Management Authority, line departments and local panchayat representatives were closely monitoring the situation.

Residents in Singlitam, Rimbi and other vulnerable areas have been advised to avoid unnecessary movement during heavy rain, particularly at night, and stay away from rivers, streams and drainage channels.

Authorities have also urged residents to immediately report fresh cracks in the ground, signs of ground movement, unusual sounds or sudden changes in water flow.

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Owaisi says nationwide NRC would be ‘100 times worse’ for minorities; UCC aimed at ‘targeting Muslims’



HYDRABAD

AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi said a nationwide National Register of Citizens (NRC) would be “100 times worse”, citing the difficulties faced by minorities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and migrants during the exercise in Assam.

“NRC is going to be 100 times worse. We’ve already seen how disastrous the NRC has been in Assam. It has caused immense trouble, especially for minorities, SC/STs and migrants,” Owaisi said in a post on X.

He said an NRC would require people to prove their citizenship by producing documents and questioned how those dependent on government rations would be able to establish their citizenship.

“NRC will force everyone to stand in line and prove their citizenship. In a country where 80 crore people depend on ration for food, you want them to find documents and prove their citizenship? To what end?” he said.

Drawing a parallel with the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, Owaisi said ordinary people were being asked to appear for hearings with documents.

“This government wants us to be at the mercy of one babu or another,” he said.

Owaisi also alleged that the BJP-led government’s intention was to conduct the NRC after the

SIR.

“The NRC would once again force people to stand in queues,” he said, describing the SIR as a “nasty joke”.

Owaisi also took strong exception to Union Home Minister Amit Shah’s remarks that BJP-led NDA governments in 21 states would introduce the UCC before 2029.

He alleged that the BJP and Shah were seeking to implement the UCC in violation of Article 25, which guarantees freedom of religion, and Article 14, which guarantees the right to equality, of the Constitution.

“BJP is not doing this (implementation of UCC) for equality. This is only to target Muslims,” he told reporters.

Observing that the “soul” of the country was its pluralism, Owaisi claimed that a Uniform Civil Code would amount to imposing Hindu law on non-Hindus.

He said the Law Commission appointed by the NDA government had concluded that a UCC was neither necessary nor desirable. Citing the different provisions of the UCC in Goa, he asked whether Shah and the BJP would implement the UCC followed in BJP-ruled states such as Uttarakhand in the western state. He also questioned whether NDA leaders such as N Chandrababu Naidu, Nitish Kumar and Chirag Paswan would endorse the provisions of the UCC.

Shah on Sunday said BJP-led NDA governments in 21 states would introduce the UCC before 2029.

“Triple talaq has been abolished, giving Muslim women equal rights. We have introduced the Uniform Civil Code in several states, and I am confident that in the 21 BJP-NDA-ruled states, we will introduce the UCC before 2029,” Shah said in Mumbai.

Owaisi also slammed Shah, saying his “misplaced arrogance” and “chronology” had triggered the anti-CAA/NRC protests in 2019. He recalled that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had subsequently said that there would be no NRC.

His remarks came a day after Shah said the NRC would be implemented in Manipur using the 1951 baseline before the Assembly elections.

Asked about a timeline for implementing the NRC nationwide, Shah said the government was discussing the matter with its allies and political parties in Manipur.

“We are discussing these issues with our allies and also with the political parties of Manipur. Whatever decision is taken, we will inform you,” he said. Owaisi also questioned the government’s handling of India-China relations following the BRICS summit in Delhi, asking whether improved bilateral ties meant India had lost its patrolling rights along the India-China border. He alleged that China had provided weapons to Pakistan during Operation Sindoor and asked why the government “fears Trump (US President Donald Trump) and China so much”.

Taking a dig at Shah, Owaisi said those who could not stop the alleged theft at the Ram temple in Ayodhya were talking about the UCC and NRC.

India, China should be partners, not rivals, Modi-Xi agreed: Foreign Minister Wang Yi

NEW DELHI

China and India should be partners rather than rivals, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed during their meeting on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in New Delhi, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said.

Describing it as the “most important consensus” reached by the two leaders, Wang said they had a candid and in-depth exchange on the strategic, long-term and directional issues shaping bilateral ties.

“President Xi said that China and India can draw on each other’s strengths, support one another, help each other succeed and pursue common development,” Wang said in comments to Chinese official media on Sunday.

The two sides agreed to maintain peace and tranquillity along the border and to support each other as they take over the rotating chairmanship of BRICS, he said. China will assume the BRICS chair for 2027.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry said the relationship had gradually moved away from a low point, progressing from a “restart” to a “renewed elevation”.

Trade had reached record levels, while people-to-people exchanges were also expanding, it said.

Wang said the two countries had agreed to strengthen political trust, manage differences appropriately and ensure that dialogue and cooperation remained the prevailing trend.

According to him, Modi told Xi that India was ready to be a “partner, not an adversary” to China and viewed each other’s development as an opportunity rather than a challenge.

“India’s approach to its relationship with China is independent of third-party influence, and it will not allow any forces to conduct anti-China activities on its territory,” Wang quoted PM Modi as saying.

Modi also reaffirmed India’s



readiness for high-level exchanges, greater strategic communication and expanded people-to-people ties with China, Wang said.

The two leaders agreed to deepen cooperation in areas including cultural and people-to-people exchanges and direct air connectivity. They also agreed to strengthen coordination at the United Nations, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

and the G20, and to work together on issues concerning the Global South.

Wang said Mr. Xi had urged both sides to use “political wisdom” based on mutual respect and understanding to overcome disruptions and pursue parallel progress on bilateral ties and the border issue.

He said the border question should be viewed in the broader context of China-India relations,

while the two countries should continue working towards their respective development goals and contribute to regional and global peace and prosperity.

The Modi-Xi meeting, held during Mr. Xi’s two-day visit to New Delhi on September 12-13 for the 18th BRICS Summit, drew considerable international attention, Wang said.

INTERNATIONAL

‘Window of opportunity’: Russia intensifies attacks seeking to intimidate Ukraine, Europe

PARIS

Russia has in recent weeks intensified attacks against civilian targets in Ukraine, seeking to drain Ukrainian morale and intimidate Kyiv’s European allies at a time when Moscow believes it has the advantage in weapons production, analysts say.

Capitalising on the depleted stocks of Ukrainian air defence missiles, Russia’s own industrial might and the development of jet-powered drones, Moscow has bombarded Ukraine with increasing intensity since the summer, targeting sites of no obvious military significance.

In the latest escalation and in a potential stark message to Europe, Russian strikes at the weekend close to the Polish border hit a Warsaw-bound train near a frontier checkpoint, just after another train passed carrying several European Union officials and British ex-Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

With Ukrainian airspace closed, trains to Poland have been a main route out of the country, widely used by Ukrainians but also the numerous Western dignitaries who travel to Kyiv to show their support for President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Vyacheslav Chaus, the governor of Ukraine’s Chernigiv region, said such strikes on civilian infrastructure, including petrol stations, water infrastructure and energy facilities, are a daily occurrence.

The strikes come as Ukraine’s harsh winter looms, with temperatures often many degrees below freezing and residents waiting anxiously to see if the infrastructure can survive into 2027.

“We are working every day to improve our resilience, but the problem is that for the past two months, we have been facing an increasing number of jet-powered drones that



are much harder to shoot down,” Chaus said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin listens to Novgorod Region Governor Alexander Dronov at the Kremlin in Moscow, Monday, Sept. 14, 2026.

Faced with a static front line, Russia is attempting to intensify pressure on the rear -- also with a keen eye on elections in Europe, where far-right parties, sometimes more pro-Moscow, are eyeing gains.

Alexander Gabuev, director of the Berlin-based Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, said Russia believed the jet-powered drones gave it an edge after a period when Europeans were celebrating some Ukrainian success on the battlefield.

“Russia now has this window of opportunity because the military technology in this war evolves in cycle,” he told AFP.

“The jet drones are a weapon of choice for now and they’re trying to use that at scale while they have a window where Ukraine doesn’t have interceptors that are fast enough to

chase them really, and the production numbers really are favouring Russia,” he said.

The new German drones Russia is using have “unravelling part of the interceptor drone architecture put in place by the Ukrainians”, said Stephane Audrand, associate research fellow at the French Institute for International Relations.

Gabuev added the Russian strategy puts “a strain on European resources” and it “gives good ammunition to the populist parties” such as the Alternative for Germany or the National Rally (RN) of French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen.

A top ally of Le Pen earlier this month caused a furore when he declared the RN would “turn off the tap” to Ukraine if it came to power.

Europe provides Ukraine with military aid, intelligence and funding for weapons production, as well as joint ventures manufacturing military equipment for Kyiv such as the German-Ukrainian firm Quantum Frontline Industries, which builds

drones for Ukraine in Bavaria.

“Ukraine’s deep back line is Europe,” said Audrand.

This has also manifested itself in intensification of hybrid attacks that Europeans blame on the Kremlin, although Russia consistently denies involvement.

In Germany, authorities accused Russian intelligence of orchestrating an attempted attack using an explosive-laden drone against Ukrainian aircraft at Leipzig airport this summer.

In early September, the Danish intelligence services (PET) issued a public warning that Russian intelligence services were preparing acts of sabotage targeting Denmark’s defence industry.

“Denmark is building a defence industrial and technological base from scratch through its contacts in Ukraine,” said Audrand, and consequently, Russia is “thinking about sabotaging the factories in Denmark.”

The escalation comes some four-and-a-half years into the conflict sparked by Russia’s full-scale invasion of its neighbour.

Russia has long sought to push Ukraine into a position where impatience from the administration of US President Donald Trump and European fatigue would force Kyiv into a settlement favourable for Moscow.

Trump’s envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner met President Vladimir Putin in Moscow earlier this month, meeting Zelensky in Kyiv the day after, but with no sign of any breakthrough.

“I am sure that in the context of negotiations, the Russians will try to leverage those attacks and send the signal that ‘this thing is getting out of control. So in order to stop it, you just need to put pressure on the Europeans and Kyiv,’” said Gabuev.

Donald Trump Jr’s wedding celebration was partially funded by Russian oligarch



NEW YORK

Donald Trump Jr.’s new wife, Bettina, is confirming that her May wedding weekend celebration was partially funded by a man with close ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

In a post on her Instagram page Monday morning signed by the couple, Bettina Trump wrote that the man, Umar Kremlev, was a “dear friend,” who “very generously hosted two incredible nights of celebrations for us AFTER our wedding.”

“It was an extraordinarily generous wedding gift from a friend, and something for which we were and remain incredibly grateful,” it went on.

ProPublica, a nonprofit investigative website, reported earlier Monday that the wedding between Trump Jr. and socialite Bettina Anderson in the Bahamas was heavily funded by Kremlev, a Russian oligarch who heads the International Boxing Association. ProPublica reported that Kremlev “footed the bill for hundreds of thou-

sands of dollars of wedding expenses,” including paying to rent out one of two private islands where the three-day party was held and a fireworks show.

In the post, Bettina Trump said that she and the president’s son were married in a private ceremony “surrounded ONLY by our family.”

“The weekend that followed had actually been planned well in advance as a fun weekend with friends. It was never intended to be our wedding weekend. When our original wedding plans changed, we simply decided to get married before it and arrived at an already planned weekend as newlyweds,” it went on. “It’s unfortunate that something so personal and happy can be recast as something political or sinister simply because of who someone is or where they come from. Friendship doesn’t require a political motive. Generosity doesn’t automatically come with an agenda. And sometimes a wedding gift is simply a wedding gift.”

That gift comes as Russia remains at war following its

invasion of Ukraine and as the president has failed to broker a promised peace deal between the nations.

Kremlev was recently honored with the Order of Friendship by Putin, according to the International Boxing Association, and accompanied Putin to China as part of a Russian delegation, according to the Chinese state media cited by the outlet.

Trump Jr. has previously been scrutinized over his Russian ties. During the 2016 campaign, his meeting with Russian attorney Natalia Veselnitskaya in Trump Tower was the subject of intense scrutiny by federal and congressional investigators probing whether the Trump campaign coordinated with Russia to meddle in the election.

The meeting had been billed as an opportunity to discuss potentially incriminating information about the president’s then-Democrat opponent, Hillary Rodham Clinton, as part of the Russian government’s efforts to help Trump Jr.’s father win the White House.

# Government School Education: WHICH WAY FORWARD?



PRADIP DUTTA ROY

At a Teachers' Day programme recently, Assam Education Minister Ranaj Pegu highlighted a disturbing statistic. He said that around 5.5 lakh students aged 15-18 who had enrolled in government schools this year stopped attending after two or three months. The government has reportedly engaged an NGO to conduct a month-long field study to identify the reasons for this dropout and suggest measures to bring the students, particularly girls, back to school.

The development highlights some of the continuing challenges before India's government-school system.

The issue has gained wider attention following the Kokrajhar Janata Party (CJP)'s "Save Government Schools" campaign, which has raised questions about school infrastructure, teacher shortages, teaching time and accountability. Its demands have generated a welcome national debate. How justified are these concerns when examined against available evidence?

What is the CJP demanding?

The CJP's campaign broadly focuses on three areas: restoring safe and functional school infrastructure; ensuring adequate teachers and teaching time; and making government schools sufficiently reliable for ministers, bureaucrats, teachers and other influential sections to trust them for their own children.

The interesting point is that most of these demands are already recognised in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The policy emphasises equitable and inclusive quality education, foundational literacy and numeracy, safe infrastructure, adequate and trained teachers, conceptual learning instead of rote memorisation, support for disadvantaged children, examination reform and greater transparency and accountability. Thus, the central issue is not whether these objectives are desirable—they clearly are—but how effectively they are being implemented.

The state of government schools

Public perception of government-school infrastructure is often more negative than the national picture suggested by official data.

According to UDISE+ 2024-25, India has roughly 10 lakh government schools and about one crore teachers. Reported availability of facilities includes functional electricity in 92.3% of schools, drinking water in 99%, functional toilets in 95.8%, libraries in 93.4%, computers in 60.2%, internet in 58.6% and smart classrooms in 28.6%. The average government school has 6.9 teachers and the average pupil-teacher ratio is 24.1. Yet nearly one lakh government schools still have only one teacher. There are also substantial state-wise variations. Moreover, availability does not necessarily mean quality. Unsafe buildings, inadequate maintenance and non-functional facilities remain concerns. Recent Gen Alpha protests and the CJP's civic audits have brought some of these deficiencies into public focus.

Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to portray the entire government-school infrastructure as being in a state of collapse. India has made considerable progress in expanding basic facilities. The more important challenge now is to ensure quality, functionality and equitable distribution.

Private schools: choice, quality and inequality

Private education has become a major component of Indian schooling. In 2024-25, around 3.40 lakh recognised unaided private schools catered to approximately 9.59 crore students.

Broadly, private schools range from low-fee neighbourhood schools to middle-fee English-medium schools and high-fee premium institutions. Their facilities and quality vary enormously.

The financial gap is equally striking. Government data from the 2017-18 national survey put average annual expenditure per primary student at around 1,253 in government institutions, compared with approximately 14,485 in private unaided institutions. Actual private-school fees today are considerably higher in many places.

However, private-school outcomes cannot be viewed entirely as a product of school quality. Family income, parental education, private tuition, access to books and technology, and the home learning environment all influence a child's performance.

Private schools therefore offer greater choice and, in many cases, better facilities, but their expansion can also deepen social and economic inequality. The objective should not be to eliminate private education, but to ensure that a family's ability to pay does not become the principal determinant of a child's educational future.

Government schools have a crucial role here because they can provide quality education at relatively low cost to children from all

sections of society.

The Delhi experience

The Arvind Kejriwal-led Delhi government gave government-school education considerable priority. Education expenditure increased from about 6,554 crore in 2014-15 to 16,396 crore in 2024-25. Government figures indicate that 22,711 new classrooms were constructed between 2015 and 2024, along with improvements in school buildings, laboratories, libraries, smart classrooms, sports facilities and furniture. Perhaps more significant was the change in public perception. Government schools increasingly came to be regarded as credible alternatives to private schools. Board results provided some ev-

comprehension, writing, mathematics and subject knowledge should be assessed, with targeted intervention in weaker schools. Fifth, school-level accountability must improve. Head teachers should have sufficient administrative authority, while teacher attendance, teaching time and student progress should be monitored.

Sixth, technology and libraries should be expanded, but technology should complement rather than replace teachers.

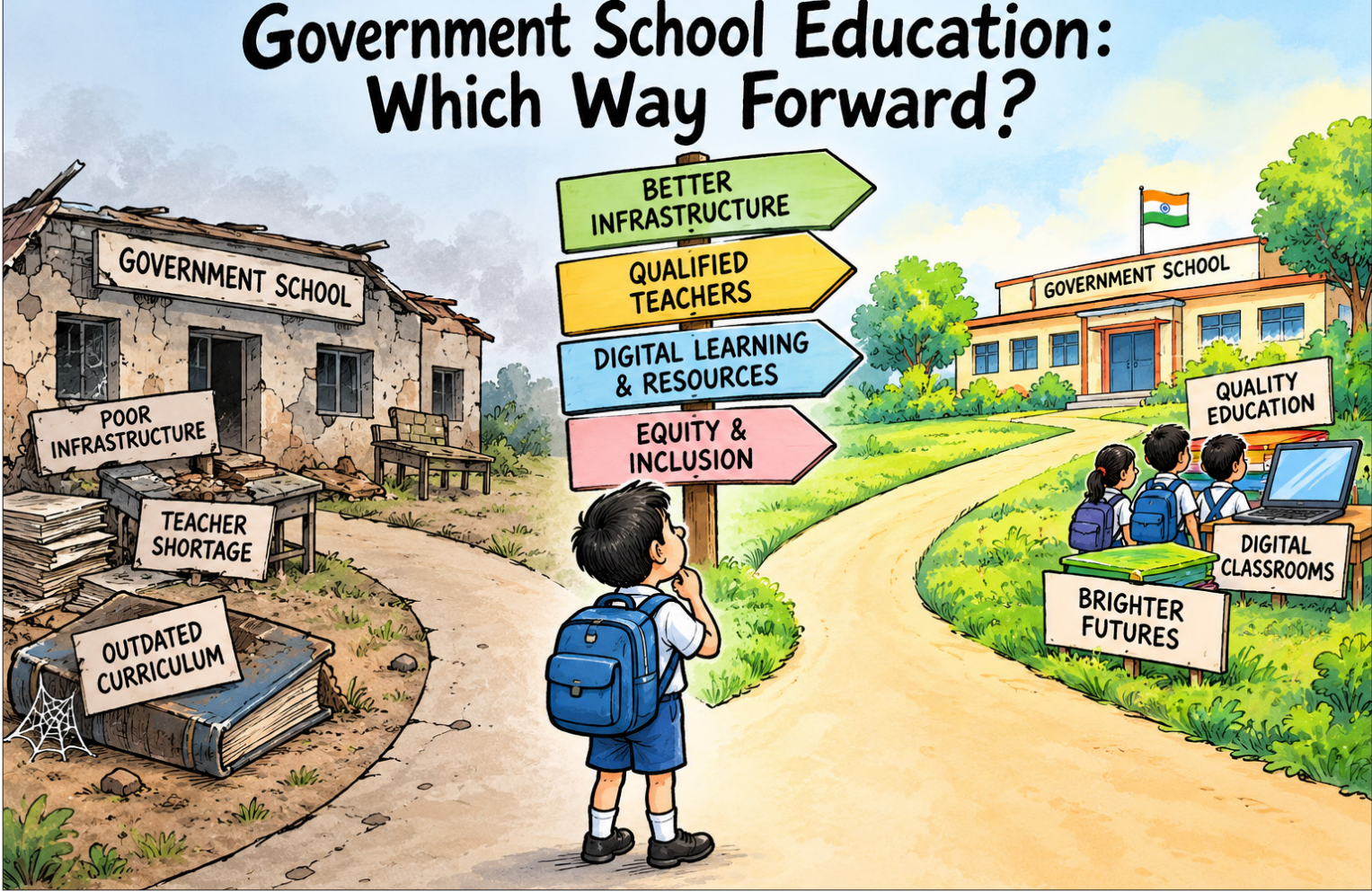
Finally, parents and local communities must have a meaningful role in school oversight. School Management Committees should be strengthened, and public expenditure should be assessed not

that parents voluntarily choose them.

The Delhi experience demonstrates that this is not entirely unrealistic.

The recent Gen Alpha and CJP campaigns are relevant because they seek to move the debate beyond political rhetoric and bring the actual condition of schools under public scrutiny. Their audits and campaigns may sometimes create confrontation, but they also raise an important question: are governments delivering what official policies promise?

The objective should not be to discredit government schools or glorify private education. Nor should education become merely another arena for



idence of this improvement. In 2025, the Class XII pass rate in Delhi government schools was reported at 90.5%, compared with 87.9% in private unaided schools. In 2024, the government-school pass rate was 96.99%. However, the transformation was not complete. Teacher shortages, differences in quality between schools and double-shift schooling in some institutions remained concerns.

More importantly, board examination results cannot adequately measure foundational learning. The Delhi experience should therefore be recognised as a significant strengthening of government education and public confidence, but claims that the entire system became "world-class" would be excessive.

Does more spending mean better education?

Public investment is essential, but higher expenditure does not automatically translate into proportionately better learning outcomes.

In 2026-27, Delhi allocated 21.1% of its total expenditure to education, while Assam allocated 17.5%. Both were above the average of 14.5% for Indian states in 2025-26. Kerala allocated 13.6%, Uttar Pradesh 12.8% and Tamil Nadu 12.2%.

Yet learning outcomes do not follow the same ranking.

Teacher-pupil ratios tell a similar story. In 2024-25, at the primary level, the ratio was approximately 19 students per teacher in Assam, 20 in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh, 22 in Kerala, but 29 in Delhi. At the upper-primary level, the figures were around 13 in Assam, 18 in Tamil Nadu, 18 in Kerala, 22 in Uttar Pradesh and 28 in Delhi.

Clearly, the amount allocated to education is important, but money alone does not determine educational quality.

The ultimate test is learning. According to ASER 2024, among rural government-school students, the proportion of Class V children able to read a Class II-level text was about 58% in Kerala, 50.5% in Uttar Pradesh, 37% in Tamil Nadu and 32.5% in Assam, compared with 44.8% nationally.

For Class VIII government-school students, the corresponding figures were approximately 82% in Kerala, 67% in Uttar Pradesh, 62% in Tamil Nadu and 61% in Assam.

Uttar Pradesh is particularly interesting: between 2022 and 2024, the reading ability of Class V government-school students improved substantially despite its education expenditure being a smaller share of the budget than that of Delhi or Assam.

The lesson is clear: investment creates the foundation for improvement, but the effectiveness of that investment determines whether it reaches the child in the classroom.

The way forward

Government education needs a coordinated reform strategy rather than simply larger budgets.

First, teacher shortages must be addressed. Vacancies should be filled promptly, subject-specific teachers appointed where required, and regular professional development provided.

Second, foundational learning must become the priority. Every child should acquire adequate reading, writing and basic numeracy skills by Class III, with additional support for those falling behind.

Third, infrastructure must be made safe and functional. Every school should have adequate classrooms, electricity, drinking water, functional toilets, libraries, playgrounds, disability-friendly facilities and essential teaching materials. Fourth, learning outcomes must be measured regularly. Pass percentages alone are inadequate. Reading

merely by the amount spent but by its impact on learning.

Beyond political rhetoric

The CJP has demanded that ministers and senior officials demonstrate their faith in government schools by enrolling their own children in them. Similar demands have sometimes been made regarding government-school teachers.

This is certainly debatable and may even be viewed as political symbolism. Yet the uncomfortable truth behind the demand cannot simply be dismissed.

The legitimate public expectation is simpler: government schools should become good enough

political confrontation.

The real challenge is to build a public education system that parents trust, teachers are proud to work in, children want to attend, and society can rely upon.

The growing debate should therefore be seen as an opportunity. Governments must now move beyond enrolment figures, infrastructure statistics and examination results and focus on the one measure that ultimately matters: whether every child is actually learning.

(The views expressed are personal.

The author is an advocate practising in the Gauhati High Court.)

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~ Anne Frank

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- INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT OF NER (ROADS, RAILS, AVIATION, HYDROPOWER & SECURITY)
- PROMOTING TOURISM, MSME, AGRO & HORTICULTURE, ACT EAST DIPLOMACY
- DISASTER MANAGEMENT, ADVENTURE SPORTS & CLIMATE CHANGE
- ART & CULTURE, THEATRE, CINEMA, MEDIA & ENTERTAINMENT
- 5E FOR SUCCESS- PROMOTING EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, EMPLOYABILITY, ENTREPRENEURSHIP & EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

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