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Over 200 Consumer Cases Stuck as Vacancies Render Cachar Commission Non-Functional

Silchar advocate Dharmananda Deb seeks urgent government intervention to fill vacant posts, restore regular hearings and clear the mounting backlog at the district consumer forum

KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

SILCHAR: More than 200 consumer complaints remain pending as the Cachar District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission has been virtually non-functional since January 2025 due to vacancies in its two member posts, prompting a Silchar-based advocate to seek urgent intervention from the Assam government.

Advocate Dharmananda Deb has submitted separate representations to the Assam Chief Secretary, the Commissioner and Secretary of the Food, Public Distribution and Consumer Affairs Department, the president of the Assam State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission and the Registrar General of the Gauhati High Court, urging immediate steps



to restore the functioning of the district-level forum.

In his representations, Deb pointed out that the post of the female member has remained vacant since November 30, 2023, while the male member's post fell vacant on January 10, 2025. The prolonged vacancies, he said, have deprived the commission of the statutory quorum required to conduct regular proceedings.

Citing Sections 28(2) and 36(1) of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, Deb stated that a district commission is required to comprise a president and at least two members, while its proceedings must be conducted by the president and at least one member sitting together.

He stressed that district consumer commissions provide ordinary citizens with an accessible legal platform to seek redressal against defective products, deficient services and unfair trade practices. Under the applicable provisions, the district commission has jurisdiction over complaints involving consideration paid up to Rs 50 lakh.

The prolonged suspension of hearings has left more than 200 complainants waiting for their cases to be taken up. Consumers who approached the statutory forum expecting relatively affordable and speedy justice are now facing uncertainty, while continuing to bear expenses related to legal representation, travel and other incidental costs.

Deb also warned that prolonged delays could affect the preservation and production of evidence in pending cases, further complicating the process of securing justice.

Referring to the legal position governing appointments to consumer commissions, he cited the Supreme Court's May 21, 2025, judgment in Ganeshkumar Rajeshwarrao Selukar versus Dr Mahendra Bhaskar Limaye, which struck down certain provisions relating to the appointment and tenure of consumer commission members and directed the Centre to frame fresh rules.

He also referred to an interim order passed by the Gauhati High Court on July 31, 2026, concerning appointments to the Assam State Consumer Commission. However, Deb clarified that the order does not prevent the authorities from filling the vacant member posts at the Cachar district commission.

Calling for immediate administrative intervention, the advocate urged the government to expedite the appointment process, resume regular hearings and introduce special measures to dispose of the accumulated cases.

He maintained that administrative delays and vacant posts should not leave consumers without access to the justice mechanism established specifically to protect their rights.

PERSPECTIVE

No response is a response.
And it's a powerful one.

Meghalaya Only Indian Destination on BBC's 20 Best Places to Travel in 2027 List

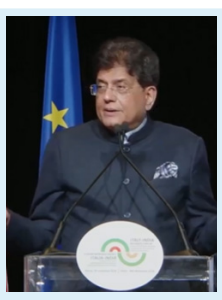
SHILLONG

Meghalaya has secured a place among the BBC's 20 Best Places to Travel in 2027, emerging as the only destination from India to feature in the international travel list.The recognition highlights the state's distinctive combination of natural landscapes, indigenous culture and community-driven tourism, placing it alongside destinations such as Burgundy in France, Sardinia in Italy, Christchurch in New Zealand and Madagascar.Welcoming the recognition, Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma said Meghalaya's inclusion reflected its natural beauty, cultural heritage and unique tourism experiences.

"This global recognition is a wonderful honour for our state and a testament to the beauty, culture, heritage and unique experiences that Meghalaya has to offer. The world is taking notice. Meghalaya is ready to welcome the world!" Sangma said in a post on X.The BBC feature draws attention to Meghalaya's centuries-old living root bridges, sacred forests and indigenous communities, whose traditional practices have helped preserve the state's close relationship with nature.Among the major attractions is the iconic double-decker living root bridge at Nongriat, created over generations by Khasi communities. The remarkable structures are formed by guiding the aerial roots of rubber fig trees across streams and deep gorges, creating natural bridges that become stronger over time.

The feature also highlights the sacred groves of Mawphlang, the Nokrek Biosphere Reserve and Shillong's Cherry Blossom Festival, which has emerged as a major cultural and tourism attraction during November.

WHO SAID WHAT



496 million people lifted out of extreme poverty in just 12 years.

With a growing middle class, rising aspirations among its youth and increasing incomes, India is opening its doors wider to international trade and global partnerships. ~ Piyush Goyal, Union Minister of Commerce & Industry

Manipur Army Vehicle Accident Claims Second Life; CM, Governor Pay Last Respects to Soldiers



IMPHAL

The death toll in Wednesday's Army vehicle accident in Manipur's Imphal East district has risen to two after an injured soldier succumbed to his injuries at a private hospital in Imphal.

The deceased was identified as Sepoy Mali Jayesh Himmat, 24, of the 8th Bihar Regiment, a resident of Rami village in Maharashtra's Dhule district. He was among the personnel injured when their military vehicle plunged into the Itam River on Wednesday afternoon.

Captain Dr Hanuman Ram, 29, of the same regiment, died at the accident site. He hailed from Sunapee village under Phalodi tehsil in Rajasthan's Jodhpur district.

Three other personnel were injured in the incident. They were identified as Sepoy Mali Jayesh Himmat, Sepoy Rakesh Sarpate, 37, and Agniveer Akhilesh Kumar Shah, 19. Himmat later died during treatment.

On Thursday, Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh and Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla paid floral tributes to the two deceased soldiers at the Air Cargo Terminal of Imphal International Airport in Chingmeirong.

The Governor led the wreath-laying ceremony, while the Chief Minister also laid a wreath on the mortal remains. A two-minute silence was observed in honour of the deceased personnel.

In a social media post, the Chief Minister expressed condolences and paid tribute to Captain Hanuman Ram and Sepoy Mali Jayesh Himmat, acknowledging their service and dedication to the nation.

According to the Chief Minister's Secretariat, one of the two surviving injured personnel was undergoing treatment at Babina Hospital in Sajiwa, while the other had been discharged.

The solemn farewell ceremony was attended by Chief Secretary Rajeev Singh Thakur, Security Advisor Kuldiep Singh, Additional Director General of Police L Dorjee, Inspector General of Police Themthing Masangba, senior Army and police officers and other government officials.

The Chief Minister expressed deep respect and gratitude for the sacrifices and service of the two soldiers.

Assam HS Final Exam 2027 to Begin on March 12, ASSEB Announces Timetable

GUWAHATI

The Assam State School Education Board (ASSEB), Division-II, formerly known as the Assam Higher Secondary Education Council (AHSEC), has announced the timetable for the Higher Secondary (HS) Final Examination 2027, with the theory examinations scheduled to begin on March 12.

According to the schedule, the examinations will continue until April 5 and will be conducted in two shifts. The morning session will run from 9 am to 12 noon, while the afternoon session is scheduled from 1.30 pm to 4.30 pm.

English will be the first paper on March 12, followed by Entrepreneurship Development on March 13. The Modern Indian Languages (MIL)/Alternative English examination is scheduled for March 15.The timetable covers a wide range of subjects, including Economics, Business Studies, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Accountancy, Political Science, Geography, Psychology, Sociology and Statistics.Examinations will also be held in Computer Science and Application, Multimedia and Web Technology, Artificial Intelligence and various skill-based subjects.The board has separately announced the schedule for practical examinations. Practical tests for skill subjects carrying 50 marks will be conducted from January 18 to 24, 2027. Those for subjects carrying 30 marks are scheduled between January 27 and 30 at the respective institutions.

Assam Education Minister Ranoj Pegu shared the examination schedule on social media.Candidates have been advised to consult the official ASSEB timetable for subject-wise examination dates and other instructions. Students should also remain in contact with their respective institutions for practical examination arrangements.

Himanta Biswa Sarma Meets Nirmala Sitharaman, Discusses Assam's Economic Growth and Development



NEW DELHI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday met Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in New Delhi and discussed the state's economic growth, development priorities and continued financial support from the Centre.

The meeting covered India's economic resilience amid global uncertainties, Assam's economic performance and the progress of various development initiatives being undertaken by the state government.

Sarma appreciated Sitharaman's continued support for Assam, describing her approach to the state's priorities as pragmatic and her engagement as instrumental in advancing its development objectives.

The Chief Minister also highlighted India's ability to sustain economic momentum despite global economic headwinds, saying the country's performance reflected its growing leadership in an increasingly uncertain international environment.

Sitharaman, meanwhile, reaffirmed the Union government's support for Assam's development goals.

The meeting comes amid the state's continued efforts to strengthen its economy, accelerate infrastructure development and expand investment opportunities with support from the Centre.

Lovlina Borgohain, Mirabai Chanu and Nagaland Filmmaker Theja Rio Feature in TIME100 Next India 2026

The three Northeast personalities figure in TIME's inaugural list of 100 emerging Indians, recognising their contributions to international sport and indigenous storytelling.

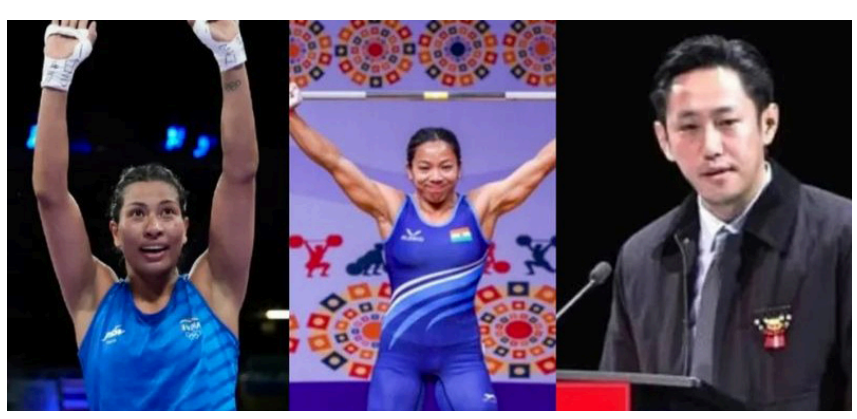
KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

GUWAHATI: Three prominent personalities from Northeast India - Olympic medallists Lovlina Borgohain and Mirabai Chanu, and Nagaland filmmaker Theja Rio - have been featured in the inaugural TIME100 Next India 2026 list, which recognises 100 emerging figures shaping the country's future across different fields.

Their inclusion highlights the growing national and international visibility of the Northeast, with achievements in competitive sport and indigenous filmmaking finding recognition on a wider platform.

Assam-born boxer Lovlina Borgohain made history by becoming the state's first Olympic medallist after winning bronze at the Tokyo Olympics. She subsequently claimed the gold medal in the 75-kg category at the 2023 World Championships, silver at the 2023 Hangzhou Asian Games and gold at the 2026 Asian Games.

In her TIME profile, sports journalist Sharda Ugra highlighted Lovlina's connection with Assam and her role in inspiring a new generation of women boxers. She described the pugilist as embodying the spirit of her home state



and helping Indian women fighters establish themselves in the international boxing arena.

Weightlifting star Mirabai Chanu has also earned a place on the list following an illustrious international career that includes an Olympic silver medal, a World Championship gold and multiple Commonwealth Games honours. Her latest achievement, a silver medal at the 2026 Asian Games, has further strengthened her standing among India's leading weightlifters. TIME's profile also drew attention to Chanu's efforts to promote the sport beyond her own competitive career. Through her Weightlifting Warriors academy in Modinagar, she is working to train and encourage the next generation of Indian weightlifters.

The third Northeast personality on the list is Nagaland filmmaker Theja Rio, whose debut feature film Angh has attracted international attention for its portrayal of the indigenous Konyak community.

Rooted in the cultural identity and lived experiences of the Konyak people, the film explores the changing social and cultural realities of a village in Nagaland. It won the Platform Prize at the Toronto International Film Festival, bringing Rio international recognition.

The film also entered the conversation surrounding India's Oscar prospects for Best International Feature Film, following the festival's revised rules, as noted in TIME's profile.

Rio's approach to filmmaking centres on representing indigenous communities from within rather than through an outsider's perspective. Explaining his creative philosophy, he said, "The film is from the perspective of the subject not the explorer." He also emphasised casting members of the Konyak community who speak their mother tongue.The inclusion of Borgohain, Chanu and Rio brings three distinct Northeast narratives into the spotlight - sporting excellence, the development of future athletes and the preservation of indigenous voices through cinema.Their recognition reflects the expanding reach of talent from the region across international sporting and creative platforms.

Two Army Personnel Killed as Armoured Vehicle Plunges into River in Manipur; Two Injured



IMPHAL

An Army captain and a sepoy were killed, while two other personnel sustained injuries after an armoured military vehicle plunged into the Itam River in Manipur's Imphal East district on Wednesday, officials said.

The accident occurred around 2 pm at Lamlai Challou, when the vehicle carrying personnel of the 8th Bihar Regiment fell into the river and remained submerged for some time.

The injured soldiers were rescued and rushed to BABINA Hospital for treatment. However, Captain Hanuman Ram, 29, succumbed to his injuries at the hospital.

Another soldier, Sepoy Mali Jayesh Himmat, 24, also died despite medical intervention.

The two other injured personnel have been identified as Sepoy Rakesh Sarpate, 37, and Agniveer Akhilesh Kumar Shah, 19. Both were initially reported to be in serious condition.

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HEALTHCARE BEYOND THE PROFIT MOTIVE

The rapid corporatisation of private healthcare, rising treatment costs and inadequate insurance coverage are exposing deep inequalities in India's medical system. Universal healthcare cannot be achieved through insurance schemes alone. Strengthening public hospitals, enforcing clinical standards and introducing community-led social audits must become national priorities.

India's ambition of becoming a developed nation cannot be measured solely by economic growth, modern infrastructure or the expansion of private investment. The quality of life of its citizens, particularly their access to affordable and reliable healthcare, must be an equally important measure of development. A country cannot claim to be on the path to becoming Viksit Bharat when access to quality medical treatment increasingly depends on one's ability to pay.

India's healthcare sector is undergoing a significant transformation. Private hospitals are expanding, corporate healthcare chains are consolidating their presence, and foreign private equity and investment funds are acquiring healthcare businesses across several states. From Kerala and Telangana to Maharashtra and West Bengal, this trend is increasingly visible, extending beyond metropolitan centres into smaller cities and towns.

There is nothing inherently wrong with private investment in healthcare. Private institutions can introduce modern technology, improve management practices and fill gaps in specialised medical services where public facilities are inadequate. The concern, however, lies in the growing influence of commercial interests over a sector that should fundamentally be guided by public welfare.

Healthcare is not an ordinary business. Its purpose cannot be reduced to maximising returns on investment. Yet, as corporate ownership expands, financial performance increasingly becomes a determining factor in hospital management. Revenue targets, high-margin procedures and expensive diagnostic packages can acquire greater importance than the actual medical needs of patients.

This creates a serious conflict between the commercial priorities of healthcare providers and the ethical responsibility of medical institutions. Reports of unnecessary investigations, excessive billing and procedures that may not always be medically essential have raised questions about the accountability of private hospitals. The Supreme Court's observations on these practices underline the need for stronger regulatory oversight.

The financial consequences are particularly severe for ordinary households. Medical expenditure in private hospitals remains substantially higher than in government facilities. Available government survey data indicate that out-of-pocket expenditure for hospitalisation in private institutions is several times higher than in public hospitals. Rising treatment costs have made even routine medical emergencies financially destabilising for families.

For millions of Indians, a serious illness can mean borrowing money, selling assets or exhausting years of savings. The problem is not confined to those without insurance. Insurance policies frequently have exclusions, limits and deductibles, while outpatient consultations, medicines and several diagnostic expenses remain outside comprehensive coverage. Disputes over claim settlements further complicate the situation.

The expansion of health insurance, therefore, should not be mistaken for the achievement of universal healthcare. Insurance coverage and actual access to treatment are two different things. A household may possess an insurance card but still struggle to obtain timely medical attention, medicines or specialised treatment.

Government-funded insurance schemes have undoubtedly widened financial protection for sections of the population. However, their reach and effectiveness remain constrained by gaps in registration, awareness, service availability and implementation. Women working in agriculture, construction, sanitation and home-based occupations are among those who can remain outside formal coverage systems.

More importantly, insurance cannot compensate for the absence of functioning public hospitals, adequate medical personnel, diagnostic facilities and essential medicines. A system that finances treatment without ensuring the availability and quality of healthcare services risks addressing the financial consequences of illness while neglecting its underlying institutional weaknesses.

The priority must therefore be to rebuild and strengthen public healthcare. Primary healthcare centres, Ayushman Arogya Mandirs, community health centres, district hospitals and medical colleges should function as an integrated referral network. Primary facilities must be equipped to provide preventive care, early diagnosis and routine treatment, while secondary and tertiary institutions should be capable of handling increasingly complex medical needs.

Public hospitals must receive adequate funding, modern equipment and sufficient medical and nursing personnel. Equally important is managerial accountability. Shortages of medicines, diagnostic delays, overcrowding and inadequate infrastructure cannot be accepted as permanent features of government healthcare.

Regulation of private healthcare also requires urgent attention. The Clinical Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Act, 2010, was intended to establish minimum standards for medical facilities, services and patient care across public and private institutions. However, its implementation remains limited to 11 states and most Union territories. This uneven regulatory framework leaves significant gaps in the oversight of healthcare providers.

The legislation must be expanded and effectively enforced across the country. Registration alone is insufficient. Hospitals should be required to disclose treatment costs, follow transparent billing practices, maintain minimum standards of care and justify expensive procedures where questions arise. Patients must have accessible mechanisms for lodging complaints and obtaining redress.The government should also examine the pricing of medical devices, implants, diagnostic investigations and imaging services. The intervention that brought down the prices of cardiac stents and pacemakers demonstrates that public regulation can make essential medical technologies more affordable. Similar scrutiny is necessary wherever excessive trade margins and opaque pricing increase the financial burden on patients.

Recommendations to benchmark basic room charges in private metropolitan hospitals against the average tariffs of nearby three-star hotels also deserve serious consideration. Such proposals, however, will remain ineffective unless translated into enforceable rules and transparent monitoring mechanisms.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Every lie is a poison; there are no harmless lies. Only the truth is safe. Only the truth gives me consolation - it is the one unbreakable diamond." ~ Leo Tolstoy

Sonia Gandhi: Some Veils Lifted, But the Mystery Remains Why Does the Enigma Still Persist?



POONAM I. KAUSHISH

Until recently, Sonia Gandhi remained an intensely enigmatic figure, a personality shrouded in layers of mystery. She guarded her privacy with almost the same determination with which one might protect a nation's classified secrets. However, the publication of her book, Belonging: A Journey of Love, has brought to light several intimate aspects of her early life, her years in Italy, her romance and eventual marriage to Rajiv Gandhi. It is a deeply personal narrative, filled with love, separation, emotional attachment and poignant memories.

But this is precisely where the real questions begin.

Readers expecting the book to unravel the mysteries surrounding the Gandhi family's political legacy, offer a closer understanding of the woman who occupied the centre of power, objectively assess her political inheritance or explain some of the darkest chapters in Indian politics may have to search for answers between the lines. The book offers a portrait of a woman, her emotions and her memories. But where is Sonia the politician? Where is the accounting of her role in the exercise of power?

Sonia Gandhi has always been known for speaking sparingly and revealing little. Silence has been an integral part of her political persona. It has fuelled speculation, deepened the mystery and allowed her critics to construct their own interpretations. Now, through her memoir, she has broken that silence, but strictly on her own terms. She maintains that the book is a personal memoir, not a political account. The distinction matters. It would be unreasonable to expect every personal memoir to serve as a public document of political scrutiny.

Yet the question remains: What does the book actually reveal about Sonia Gandhi? What does it tell us about the politician who has carefully managed her public image throughout her career? As the Congress party's longest-serving and most influential political leader, Sonia played a decisive role in several major policy and political decisions during the UPA-I and UPA-II governments between 2004 and 2014, despite never holding constitutional office. Does her political career not leave behind a multitude of unresolved questions?

Ultimately, the enigmatic political sphinx has spoken, but the central question persists: Has she told her story, or merely presented the version of history she wishes future generations to remember? Has the opening of a family album come at the cost of keeping the document of political accountability firmly shut? No political family can claim credit for every achievement while conveniently assigning responsibility for its failures to others.

Is this truly an autobiography, a carefully orchestrated attempt to rehabilitate a political legacy, or an exercise in compensating for political setbacks? In the case of a family that has claimed such a prominent place in India's political inheritance, what the book leaves unsaid may be far more significant than what it reveals.

When the Emergency became an electoral catastrophe for the Congress, Sanjay Gandhi was portrayed as the villain who had led his mother, Indira Gandhi, astray. When relationships within the family fractured, Maneka Gandhi was presented as an ambitious and troublesome daughter-in-law who eventually walked out of the household. On the Shah Bano controversy, Sonia offers a middle-ground defence of Rajiv Gandhi's decision. According to her, despite pressure from conservative Muslim leadership, Rajiv attempted to balance religious freedom with gender justice. This interpretation, however, does little to explain how the decision reduced the Congress's ideological commitment to secularism to a matter of electoral arithmetic.

Even more striking is her reported attempt to attribute responsibility for the 1984 anti-Sikh massacre, often discussed in the context of Rajiv Gandhi's infamous remark, "When a big tree falls, the earth shakes", to administrative and bureaucratic failures. Then came the Bofors scandal, which became an enduring albatross around the Gandhi family's neck, with the name of Italian businessman Ottavio Quattrocchi, widely regarded as close to the family, becoming central to the controversy.

Decades later, during the UPA government's tenure, allegations of corruption involving the 2G spectrum and coal allocation controversies, alongside policy paralysis, engulfed the government. Yet the burden of constitutional accountability fell primarily on Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, while Sonia Gandhi remained at the centre of political authority. Was this merely a coincidence, a consequence of family dynamics, or a calculated strategy to remain distanced from direct political accountability?

Sonia Gandhi's decision to decline the prime ministership in 2004 has been portrayed as an extraordinary act of sacrifice and renunciation. Perhaps it was an act of personal restraint, but she did not relinquish power. Instead, she found a more convenient way of exercising it. As Congress president, she led the UPA coalition and also headed the National Advisory Council (NAC), which significantly influenced the government's social and legislative agenda.

This arrangement was unusual and remains open to debate. Was it simply a division of responsibilities, or a means of exercising authority while avoiding direct accountability? Can power and responsibility be separated simply by distributing constitutional and organisational positions among different individuals? The arrangement raised a fundamental democratic question: Who, ultimately, was running the country?

Through a carefully framed personal love story, Sonia Gandhi appears to have separated decades of consequential political decisions from the realm of public scrutiny. While the authenticity of her personal grief and emotional suffering deserves recognition, critics may argue that the book reads less like an impartial historical record and more like a selective defence of the Nehru-Gandhi family's political legacy.The memoir also appears to avoid several uncomfortable chapters in the Congress party's history. There is little or no discussion of the strained relationship with former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao. Nor does it address the controversial episode in which his mortal remains were reportedly not allowed to enter the Congress headquarters after his death. Similarly, the administrative failures of UPA-II receive little attention. Indeed, the more one reads the book, the more persistent becomes the question: Has the effort to open the album of family memories pushed the record of political accountability into the background?

Sonia Gandhi also does not adequately address the allegations of minority appeasement against the Congress, particularly the party's handling of the Babri Masjid controversy. These developments alienated sections of Hindu voters and provided the BJP with an opportunity to consolidate its Hindutva politics through the Ram Janmabhoomi movement. The Congress's political credibility suffered in the process.

While the Congress has defended the book as Sonia Gandhi's personal account, arguing that it is a subjective reconstruction of memories rather than a judicial commission's report, the BJP has dismissed Belonging as an attempt to evade political accountability and whitewash history. The party alleges that political responsibility is being shifted onto external circumstances and subordinate officials. A senior BJP leader reportedly quipped: "In the Gandhi family, the scapegoat may change, but the question of who holds the axe never goes away."

There is little doubt that Belonging brings to light several previously unexplored aspects of Sonia Gandhi's personal life. However, it falls short of offering a searching examination of the failures of Congress leadership. Instead, it places greater emphasis on criticising the BJP and communal politics. This enables Sonia to portray her political life as an ideological struggle while avoiding a serious discussion of the organisational decline that unfolded under her leadership.

To be fair, Sonia Gandhi has every right to write a memoir about her private life. Holding an influential public position does not automatically oblige anyone to produce a comprehensive confession of personal or political failures. But neither can a public figure who influenced the country's politics for decades expect history to judge her exclusively through the prism of personal suffering and individual sacrifice.

Ultimately, Sonia Gandhi's memoir may help readers understand how a young woman from Italy became connected to India and gradually made it her home. But it offers little insight into how the Gandhi family came to believe that India, politically speaking, belongs to it. The family's achievements have often been presented as part of the nation's inheritance, while responsibility for its failures appears to have been assigned elsewhere.

Belonging may well be a story of love and emotional attachment. A love story deserves empathy, and personal tragedy deserves compassion. But the yardsticks of political power are accountability and public scrutiny. Sonia Gandhi cannot expect history to remember her merely as Rajiv Gandhi's widow or Indira Gandhi's reluctant daughter-in-law. She was also an influential political strategist who played a decisive role during the UPA's decade in power. Her legacy cannot be confined to the memories she chooses to share. History will also judge her on the questions she has left unanswered.

After all, history is neither a love letter nor a family inheritance that can be polished, edited and handed down to the next generation. It is a rigorous accounting of power, responsibility and consequences. It does not function like a family's drawing room or WhatsApp group, where uncomfortable members can be muted, embarrassing episodes deleted, blame shifted to others and inconvenient memories conveniently buried.

Memories are not merely a means of recalling the past; they also shape how history remembers us. No political family can claim ownership of the nation's achievements, evade responsibility for its darker chapters and then expect the country to applaud the entire performance.

Sonia Gandhi may have broken her silence. The political sphinx may finally have spoken. Yet the mystery remains. A memoir can reshape memories, polish an image and rearrange the roles of villains and heroes, but it cannot rewrite history. India's account of political accountability remains unsettled.

History, ultimately, is still waiting for answers.



DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

On the birth anniversary of our #BelovedZubeen, I approved the first phase of work on Zubeen Kshetra, a place that will keep his memories and legacy alive for generations to come. ~ Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM, Assam



Manipur Cabinet Approves New Handloom Department, 100-Seat Medical College

Key decisions include regularisation of 352.85 acres of converted agricultural land and recruitment of 113 teaching and non-teaching personnel at two state universities.

KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

IMPHAL: The Manipur Cabinet has approved a series of measures to strengthen the state's handloom sector, expand healthcare and higher education infrastructure, and regularise converted agricultural land.

Among the five major decisions taken by the Cabinet are the creation of a separate Handloom, Textiles and Handicraft Department, establishment of a Government Medical College in Senapati with an annual intake of 100 MBBS students, and regularisation of 352.85 acres of agricultural land converted for non-agricultural purposes.

Separate Department for Handloom Sector

The Cabinet approved the creation of a dedicated Handloom, Textiles and Handicraft Department through an amendment to the Business of the Government of Manipur (Allocation) Rules, 2009.

Manipur has 2,16,192 handlooms and 2,24,684 weavers, including more than 2.11 lakh women. The new department is expected to provide focused policy support, training, modernisation and better market access to weavers and artisans, while promoting employment and preserving the state's traditional heritage.

1,097 Land Applications Approved

The Cabinet also cleared the regularisation of agricultural land converted for residential and other non-agricultural purposes before September 10, 2014.

The decision covers 1,097 applications involving 352.85 acres in Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal and Bishnupur districts. The applications were examined through field inspections and satellite imagery supplied by the Manipur Remote Sensing Applications Centre (MARSAC).

The regularisation process is expected to provide landowners with legal clarity and updated land records, allowing them to use their properties as collateral for loans for house construction and business activities.

The government is expected to collect more than Rs 47 crore in one-time penalties, besides generating additional annual land revenue. The Cabinet said the exercise would not require any expenditure from the state exchequer.

Recruitment at Technical University and Dhanamanjuri UniversityThe Cabinet approved the regular recruitment of 15 teaching staff at Manipur Technical University, including six Professors and nine Associate Professors. It also cleared the appointment of 21 non-teaching personnel, comprising three regular, five contractual and 13 daily-wage positions.The appointments are expected to strengthen academic activities and facilitate the introduction of new M.Tech and PhD programmes, besides supporting the development of the university's Heirok campus. The move is also aimed at helping the institution secure NAAC accreditation and UGC 12(B) status.Separately, the Cabinet approved the first phase of recruitment for 77 posts at Dhanamanjuri University.The sanctioned positions include one Professor, 28 Assistant Professors and one Deputy Registrar on a regular basis, one contractual Assistant Librarian and 46 non-teaching personnel on daily wages.The recruitment is expected to improve academic and administrative functioning across the university's five constituent colleges and support its 13 new programmes. It is also intended to strengthen the institution's eligibility for UGC 12(B) status and central funding.In a major boost to healthcare infrastructure in Manipur's hill districts, the Cabinet approved the District Hospital campus and adjoining Autonomous District Council land at Senapati headquarters for setting up a Government Medical College.

Assam expels 38 alleged illegal immigrants in early-morning operation: Himanta



GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said 38 alleged illegal immigrants had been expelled from the state following an operation conducted in the early hours of the day.

In a social media post, Sarma said the individuals were apprehended while allegedly attempting to stay in Assam illegally and were subsequently sent out of the state. Emphasising the scale of the operation, he said the action involved 38 people, rather than just one or two.

The Chief Minister, however, did not specify the international border through which the individuals were expelled or provide details about their identities and nationalities.

The latest operation comes amid the Assam government's ongoing drive to identify and remove people it describes as illegal immigrants. The state government has repeatedly cited demographic and security concerns while defending its actions.

Details about the circumstances of the apprehension, the legal process followed and the authorities involved were not immediately available.

Cachar Man Goes Missing After Travelling to Russia; Family Suspects Possible Recruitment into Russian Army

SILCHAR

A family in Assam's Cachar district has appealed to the Centre and the state government for help in tracing a man who went to Russia reportedly in search of employment and has remained missing for nearly three months. His family fears that he may have joined the Russian military. Abdul Muqtadir Laskar, also known as Munna, a resident of Tular Gram Part-I under the Sonai Assembly constituency, has reportedly been out of contact with his family since August 26.According to family members, they found an air ticket indicating that Laskar was scheduled to travel from Mumbai to Moscow via Baku on July 14. A return ticket to India was also reportedly booked for July 30. However, the family has no information about whether he returned as scheduled or remained in Russia.

Their concerns intensified after they came across a photograph on Facebook showing Laskar posing with several foreign nationals dressed in Russian military uniforms. The family suspects that he may have been recruited into the Russian armed forces after reaching the country.His last reported conversation with his wife, Salma, took place on August 26. Since then, repeated attempts to establish contact with him have reportedly failed.However, there is no official confirmation regarding Laskar's present whereabouts, his alleged recruitment into the Russian military or any possible involvement in the Russia-Ukraine war.His disappearance has left his wife and two young children - a one-year-old daughter and a three-year-old son - waiting anxiously for his return.

The family has appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to intervene. They have sought diplomatic assistance to establish contact with Russian authorities, ascertain Laskar's whereabouts and facilitate his safe return to India.

Khandu backs Siang protesters' sentiments, alleges 'bad elements' trying to create unrest

KRC TIMES NEWS DESK



ITANAGAR: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Wednesday said his government respected the sentiments behind the protests in Siang district but alleged that certain "bad elements" were attempting to create disorder and disturb peace in the state.

Khandu made the remarks while addressing a rally organised by the BJP and its NDA partners in Itanagar under the campaign slogan "Loktantra Bachao, Arajakta Hatao" (Save Democracy, Remove Anarchy). The mobilisation was held in support of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.

The rally began at Nyokum Lapang and concluded at IG Park, with Khandu and BJP state president Kaling Moyong leading the procession. Thousands of party workers and supporters took part. NDA allies, including the Janata Dal (United), Nationalist Congress Party's Ajit Pawar faction, National People's Party and People's Party of Arunachal, also joined the event.

Defending the SIR exercise, Khandu described electoral roll revision as an essential democratic process to ensure that only eligible citizens are included in voter lists. He accused opposition parties of spreading misleading narratives about the exercise and attempting to create confusion among the public.

Addressing the protests in Siang district, the Chief Minister said the government understood and respected people's concerns. However, he alleged that some elements were taking advantage of the situation to create unrest and an atmosphere of anarchy. He warned against any attempt to disrupt peace in the state.

Khandu also targeted the Congress, alleging that the party was unable to accept its repeated electoral defeats and was trying to mislead young people through its political campaigns.

Referring to the Bharat Summit in Telangana, he questioned the involvement of foreign political parties in discussions on Indian democracy, maintaining that the country's democratic institutions did not need validation from outside political forces. He also criticised Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's initiative, alleging that it sought to undermine the country's democratic discourse.

BJP state president Kaling Moyong said the participation of NDA allies demonstrated their collective commitment to electoral transparency, accountability and democratic institutions.

Participants at the rally raised slogans in support of the SIR process and accused the opposition of spreading misinformation about the revision exercise.

Manipur Killings: NPCM Holds Sit-in in Imphal, Demands Arrests in Ukhrul Attacks

KRC TIMES NEWS DESK



IMPHAL: Pressure mounted on the Manipur government to arrest those responsible for a series of civilian killings as the Native People Committee Manipur (NPCM), along with indigenous civil society organisations, staged a joint sit-in protest in Imphal on Wednesday.

The demonstration was held at the Mao Market premises and witnessed participation mainly from women and representatives of Meitei and Naga civil society organisations.

The protest came a day after the NPCM's 24-hour statewide general strike, called over the November 13 killings along the Imphal-Ukhrul road, concluded at midnight on November 16.

NPCM convenor Dr L Phaomei said the sit-in was organised in coordination with various indigenous civil society groups to protest the recent killings and what the committee described as the government's failure to arrest those involved.

He said the committee would continue its agitation through different forms of protest until its demands were met.

The NPCM has demanded the immediate arrest of those allegedly involved in two separate incidents - the November 13 killings along the Imphal-Ukhrul road and the October 19 attack in the Khongban Tangkhul Sunurok area.

On November 13, four civilians, including a mother and her son, were killed after unidentified armed assailants opened fire on a hatchback car and a pickup vehicle at New Haven along National Highway 102 in Ukhrul district, under Litan police station.

Earlier, on October 19, four civilians collecting firewood were killed in an attack in the hill ranges of the Khongban Tangkhul Sunurok area.

The latest sit-in marks a continuation of the committee's campaign for accountability and swift action against those responsible for the attacks.

NPCM representatives said the organisation would decide on its next course of action after consultations with civil society groups and members at a meeting.

Tripura's Government Workforce Shrunk to Below 1 Lakh Under BJP Rule: Manik Sarkar



AGARTALA

CPI(M) leader and former Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar has accused the BJP-led government of sharply reducing the state's government workforce, claiming that the number of employees has fallen from 1.65 lakh in 2018 to below one lakh.Addressing an election rally on Wednesday, Sarkar alleged that the BJP had failed to honour its major promises made ahead of the 2018 Assembly elections, particularly its commitment to fill 50,000 vacant posts across government departments.

He recalled that the BJP's election vision document had promised that a proposal to fill the vacancies would be cleared at the first Cabinet meeting after the party came to power.

"At the time the Left Front government demitted office in 2018, the number of government employees stood at 1.65 lakh. Now it has fallen below one lakh," Sarkar claimed, questioning the BJP's performance during its tenure.

The CPI(M) Politburo member also accused the BJP of misleading government employees and unemployed youths by promising to implement the recommendations of the 7th Central Pay Commission ahead of the 2018 elections.

He further alleged that the ruling party had failed to fulfil the 293 commitments listed in its election vision document.

Turning to the November 27 urban local body elections, Sarkar accused the BJP of using intimidation and violence to prevent Opposition candidates from filing nominations. He claimed that the ruling party had already secured control of six civic bodies by obstructing CPI(M) candidates from entering the electoral contest.

Sarkar appealed to voters to use the upcoming civic polls to send a strong political message to the BJP-led government.

The claims regarding the decline in government employment and the alleged obstruction of Opposition candidates were not independently verified.

Silchar Cooperative Bank Rent Row: Junior Assistant Suspended Over Alleged Diversion of Rs 82,000

Departmental inquiry found 10 online payments deposited into the employee's personal bank account without official receipts or corresponding entries in the bank's liquidation accounts.

SILCHAR

A Junior Assistant in the office of the District Deputy Registrar of Cooperative Societies in Assam's Cachar district has been suspended over allegations that he collected Rs 82,000 in shop rent in his personal bank account without authorisation.

An order issued on November 18 by Uttam Das, In-charge District Deputy Registrar of Cooperative Societies, Cachar, identified the suspended employee as Nurul Amin Laskar, a Junior Assistant (LDA).

The action followed an inquiry into complaints lodged by Priyanka Roy of Shlok Traders and Subrata Dhar, proprietor of Shri Vinayak Fruits Co. They alleged that Laskar collected monthly rent from shops located on the premises of the Silchar Urban Co-operative Bank Ltd (under liquidation) at Capital Point, Banipara, Club Road, without issuing official rent receipts.

According to the inquiry report dated November 7, a total of 10 online transactions amounting to Rs 82,000 were credited to Laskar's personal bank account between June 18, 2025, and May 3, 2026. The payment descriptions in some transactions specifically referred to monthly shop rent.



The inquiry found that no official receipts had been issued for the payments and that no corresponding deposits appeared in the bank accounts maintained for the liquidation process as of October 31, 2026.

The two officials who served as liquidators of the cooperative bank - former liquidator Munindra Kumar Baisya and subsequent ex-officio liquidator Nurul Hasan Mazumder - denied authorising Laskar to collect rent on behalf of the institution.

The report also noted that the transactions occurred while Laskar was attached to the bank's Liquidation Branch between July 6, 2024, and August 19, 2026.

The complainants alleged that most rent payments had initially been made in cash and that the actual amount collected could be considerably higher than Rs 82,000. However, the inquiry officer said the allegation could not be verified in the absence of documentary evidence and therefore did not form part of the basis for the suspension order.

The inquiry report observed that depositing institutional rental income into a personal bank account without authorisation, issuing receipts or accounting for the money in official liquidation records raised serious questions about financial propriety and accountability. It added that, if established, such conduct could amount to criminal breach of trust by a public servant.The suspension order stated that a prima facie case of serious misconduct had been established and that allowing Laskar to continue in office could adversely affect the fairness of the inquiry and the security of official records.Laskar has been directed to hand over all official documents, files, registers, receipt books, cash, keys and other government property in his possession. He has also been prohibited from contacting or influencing the complainants and witnesses and cannot leave his headquarters without prior written permission.

The order clarified that the suspension would not prevent further disciplinary proceedings, recovery of any amount found due or the initiation of civil and criminal action in accordance with the law.

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NATIONAL

India develops first home-grown H5N1 bird flu vaccine for chickens



NEW DELHI

In a major breakthrough after years of research and trials, India is set to launch its first indigenous H5N1 bird flu vaccine, raising hopes within the poultry industry of preventing recurring bird flu outbreaks.

The vaccine, based on indigenously developed technology, is an Inactivated H5N1 (Clade 2.3.2.1a) formulation that protects against the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) virus strain circulating in the country. Of late, this dangerous strain has also spilled over in various animal species, including mammals, along with three recent human cases.

Between 2006 and 2021, India experienced 341 outbreaks of bird flu across 24 states. Of these, 284 cases were attributed to the H5N1 virus and 57 to H5N8. While there is a vaccine available for lower-risk pathogens, there is currently no specific vaccine against the H5N1 virus of Clade 2.3.2.1a. The vaccine was developed by scientists at the Indian Council for Agricultural Research-National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases (ICAR-NIHSAD) in Bhopal. "This marks a major milestone in safeguarding poultry health, strengthening farm resilience, and advancing Atmanirbharta (self-reliance) in veterinary biologicals," Aniket Sanyal, Director of ICAR-NIHSAD, told this daily. The development of this vaccine represents a significant achievement for Indian science in combating Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), commonly known as bird flu. HPAI is a severe disease, and outbreaks can lead to nearly 100% mortality among infected birds. This results in substantial financial losses for poultry farmers due to large-scale culling of birds and trade restrictions. The impact is not limited to poultry farms; it can also disrupt global trade, inflate prices of poultry products, and threaten the livelihoods of farmers. PAI has a near 100% mortality among infected birds. A significant outbreak of bird flu could reduce India's GDP growth by up to 1.5%, with more than 20% of the country's poultry population at risk if the disease spreads unchecked. The 2006 bird flu outbreak caused estimated direct and indirect losses between Rs 2,200 crore and Rs 3,000 crore.

India and Japan 'indispensable' to shaping a free, open Indo-Pacific, says Jaishankar



NEW DELHI

India and Japan 'indispensable' to shaping a free, open Indo-Pac External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday described India and Japan as "indispensable" partners in shaping a free, open and rules-based Indo-Pacific, saying their strategic partnership contributed to regional stability and global economic prosperity.

In a video message to the ninth India-Japan Indo-Pacific Forum in New Delhi, Jaishankar said the two countries, as major Asian democracies, dynamic market economies and maritime nations, shared a common strategic outlook and worked together through initiatives such as the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative and Vision Mahasagar.

He said Japan's manufacturing expertise and advanced technologies complemented India's entrepreneurial dynamism, scale and talent. Japan was an important foreign direct investment partner and contributed to India's goals of becoming a developed and self-reliant nation, he added.

"Japan, for us, is an important FDI partner and contributes to our goal of Viksit and Atmanirbhar Bharat. In turn, India's stable economic growth provides an opportunity for Japanese businesses to make in India and make for the world," Jaishankar said.

The minister also stressed the need for India and Japan to build resilient and reliable global supply chains, particularly in key sectors, and address challenges such as connectivity bottlenecks and gaps in critical infrastructure.

He said defence and security cooperation, economic security, energy resilience, technology and innovation, and people-to-people ties would remain priorities under the Special Strategic and Global Partnership.

Jaishankar referred to Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's visit to India in July, during which the two countries reaffirmed their ambition for the partnership. He said the year 2027 would mark 75 years of diplomatic relations and would be observed as the "India-Japan Year of Shared Horizons", with young people at the centre of commemorative activities.

The celebrations have already begun with a historic cricket match between India and Japan on the sidelines of the Asian Games in Nagoya, he said.

Jaishankar also recalled former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe's speech that helped establish the Indo-Pacific as a geostrategic concept. The two countries should appropriately mark 20 years of that vision next year, he said.

Jaishankar is in Japan for the fourth India-Japan Foreign and Defence Ministers' Dialogue (2+2), which he will co-chair on Thursday with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and their Japanese counterparts, Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi and Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi.

INTERNATIONAL

Trump meets Xi and Putin in China as nuclear arms, Ukraine and Iran conflicts on the agenda

SHENZHEN



Chinese President Xi Jinping, US President Donald Trump and Russia's Vladimir Putin posed for a group photograph at a regional forum on Thursday ahead of a closely watched trilateral summit in China.

Xi, Trump and Putin stood at the centre of the photograph marking the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in Shenzhen. Other leaders, including Canada's Mark Carney, Australia's Anthony Albanese and Japan's Sanae Takaichi, also took part.

Thursday's meeting could mark a turning point in world history - or become a quickly forgotten photo opportunity.

Trump, who will test his reputation as a dealmaker at the trilateral meeting, has promoted his talks with Xi and Putin - two of America's leading rivals - as an opportunity to discuss rules for controlling nuclear arms and begin resolving the wars in Ukraine and Iran. Experts, however, have kept expectations low for major breakthroughs.

The president said the advantage of meeting the two autocrats at the same time was that their countries worked together. "They both like Trump. Now, what happens after me? That I can't tell you," Trump said in a Thursday interview with Fox News.

Trump plans to hold a separate one-on-one meeting with Xi - his third substantial meeting with him this year - immediately before the trilateral summit. He has also added a separate meeting with Putin to his schedule, marking the first time the leaders have held talks since their discussions in Alaska last year failed to broker a deal to end Russia's war in Ukraine.

Trump has frequently boasted of his rapport with Putin, even as relations between the US and Ukraine appear to have deteriorated recently. Trump rejected new sanctions on Russia, while Kyiv was undermined by disruptions to satellite support for its drones during the war.

Elon Musk is also accompanying Trump on the trip but has so far kept a low profile. His company SpaceX has intermittently throttled the military-grade Starshield satellite system used by Ukraine to launch drones and intercept Russian attacks.

The trilateral summit is scheduled to take place after a session with leaders at the APEC summit on Thursday morning and is expected to be the culmination of Trump's Asia trip, which began on Tuesday in the Philippines.

Trump has said he wants to discuss the leaders' nuclear stockpiles. The last nuclear arms pact between Russia and the United States, known as New START, expired in February, and Trump has said he wants "a new, improved and modernized" deal that includes China.

But China has less incentive to accept limits, given that its arsenal of more than 600 warheads is far smaller than the more than 5,000 warheads believed to be held by each of the US and Russia.

Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, said Trump's showmanship could, at best, begin a process that might eventually lead to sustained talks on reducing nuclear arsenals.

"We need more than diplomatic theater and photo opportunities between Xi, Putin and Trump at APEC," Kimball said. "And one meeting will not likely produce dramatic breakthroughs."

Trump told Fox News in his interview that "it's a very hard thing to do" to ask a leader to reduce nuclear stockpiles.

Trump boasts about his relationships. But the ties between Xi and Putin are stronger. Putin's foreign affairs adviser Yuri Ushakov told reporters that Putin, Trump and Xi would likely discuss the war in Ukraine, although the agenda had not been fully set.

Trump has said he wants to discuss that war, as well as the conflict in Iran. His ambitions recall an era of great power politics when wealthier countries felt entitled to decide the fate of seemingly lesser nations.

Trump is negotiating with China and Russia without Ukraine's involvement - or that of countries such as Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Japan and South Korea, which also have stakes in the outcome of any talks.

The US president has openly pursued a Nobel Peace Prize even as he has taken military action against Venezuela and Iran. He also threatened earlier this year to take Greenland by force from Denmark, a move that led to an agreement for the construction of US military bases.

Trump has long believed that his ability to forge personal connections gives him a diplomatic edge. Xi appealed to his ego on Wednesday by greeting Air Force One on the airport tarmac, as the two leaders turned their handshake into a one-armed hug.

But Trump does not appear to share the same deep relationship based on common interests that Xi and Putin have. Despite the compliments the US president has showered on the two autocrats, the warmth has not always been reciprocated.

On Wednesday at APEC, Xi greeted Putin by calling him "my old friend". The Russian leader responded by declaring Xi to be his "dear friend". China has helped economically support Russia since its 2022 invasion of Ukraine, providing Putin with a financial lifeline after the US and its allies imposed new sanctions.

"China-Russia relations have remained steadfast through storms while taking a long-term view," Xi said to Putin. "They have brought greater stability and certainty to a world marked by intertwined changes and turbulence."

The pair discussed the war in Ukraine during their talks, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Russian state news agency RIA Novosti.

By contrast, when Xi visited the White House for a state visit in September, he was far more restrained with Trump, saying they had built a "personal rapport and stayed in touch". Trump and Xi plan to meet four times this year, with their final meeting scheduled for December at the G20 summit at the Trump National Doral Golf Club in Florida.

NASA's Voyager 1 reaches one light-day from Earth after nearly 50 years in space



WASHINGTON:

NASA's Voyager 1 probe, which has been traveling through space for nearly 50 years, hit a milestone distance of one light-day away from Earth on Wednesday.

Already the most distant man-made object in the universe, the spacecraft is now about 26 billion kilometers (16 billion miles) away, according to the US space agency.

That is the distance a particle of light can travel in 24 hours.

The historic feat is "the best illustration of just how vast space is", said Tiffany Kataria from NASA.

"So much of what we dream about is traveling to other stellar systems," she told .

"And it took Voyager 1 nearly 50 years to get to just the edge of our own solar system, let alone to only a light-day."

She pointed out that many exoplanetary systems, in comparison, are at least several light-years away.

Launched in 1977, Voyager 1 and its twin Voyager 2 are the only spacecraft to have reached interstellar space -- the region beyond our solar system, which they continue to explore.

Messages sent from Earth take about 24 hours to reach Voyager 1 and just as long for teams on the ground to receive a response.

Both Voyager spacecraft carry "Golden Records" -- 30-centimeter (12-inch), gold-plated copper disks intended to convey the story of our world to extraterrestrials.

Some of Voyager 1's equipment, such as cameras, have been remotely switched off to save power, but the probe continues to study invisible phenomena such as magnetic fields, Kataria said.

The data it collects allows researchers like her to study "the gas, the dust and other material that exists between stars, between our Sun and other stars".

Voyagers 1 and 2 have previously explored the outer solar system, which contains the giant planets Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune.

Images of Jupiter taken by Voyager 1 first revealed the existence of rings around the gas giant and helped scientists understand the "really extreme vortices and weather that take place in the atmosphere", Kataria said.

"You could find so many things that both of these spacecraft have really enabled in our understanding."

Silchar's Street Vendors Face Eviction Without Rehabilitation: Urban Beautification Must Not Come at the Cost of Livelihoods

The Silchar Municipal Corporation's drive to remove roadside vendors raises serious questions about the administration's approach to urban development, social responsibility and the livelihood rights of economically vulnerable citizens. Clearing roads and footpaths is necessary, but eviction without providing alternative vending spaces or rehabilitation arrangements risks pushing hundreds of small traders and their families into economic uncertainty.

KRC TIMES DESK

The drive to clear roads and public spaces of street vendors in Silchar has brought an important question to the forefront: should urban beautification and traffic management come at the cost of the livelihoods of some of the city's most economically vulnerable residents?

The Silchar Municipal Corporation has every reason to be concerned about the growing problem of roadside encroachment, traffic congestion and the obstruction of footpaths. A town aspiring to develop into a modern urban centre must have properly organised roads, accessible pedestrian pathways, regulated markets and an efficient civic management system. However, the manner in which these objectives are pursued is equally important.

Removing street vendors from roadsides without first making arrangements for their rehabilitation or providing alternative places to conduct business cannot be considered a comprehensive urban development policy. It may temporarily make certain roads look wider and cleaner, but it does little to address the underlying problem. More importantly, it leaves those who depend on roadside vending for their daily survival facing an uncertain future.

For a considerable number of small traders in Silchar, roadside vending is not a supplementary source of income or a temporary commercial activity. It is their principal means of livelihood. Vegetable sellers, fruit vendors, tea stall owners, small food traders, garment sellers and numerous other petty businessmen depend on their daily earnings to maintain their families. Many operate with extremely limited capital and have no financial resources to establish shops in commercial buildings or rent expensive business premises.

For these families, losing a vending space can mean losing their entire source of income overnight.

There is no denying that unregulated street vending can create difficulties for pedestrians, motorists and other residents. When vendors occupy substantial portions of footpaths or roads, public movement becomes difficult. Traffic congestion increases, and the overall appearance and functioning of the town suffer.

But these problems cannot be addressed through eviction alone. A city administration must recognise that street vending is an integral part of the informal economy and that thousands of people across Indian towns and cities depend on it for survival.

The real challenge before the Silchar Municipal Corporation is to strike a balance between the legitimate interests of the general public and the livelihood rights of street vendors.

Unfortunately, urban development initiatives often tend to concentrate more on visible changes than on the social consequences of administrative decisions. Clearing roadside stalls may produce an immediate impression of improvement, but unless the displaced vendors are provided with alternative spaces, the exercise risks becoming an act of displacement rather than meaningful reform.

The administration must understand that a clean and organised city cannot be built by simply removing economically weaker sections from public spaces. It requires planning, consultation, regulation and rehabilitation.

The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, provides an important legal framework for regulating street vending while protecting the livelihood interests of vendors.

The legislation recognises the contribution of street vendors to the urban economy and seeks to ensure that their activities are regulated through a systematic and transparent mechanism.

It provides for surveys of street vendors, the constitution of Town Vending Committees, the issuance of certificates of vending and the identification of vending and non-vending zones. It also establishes safeguards relating to relocation and eviction.

The spirit of the legislation is clear: urban authorities must regulate street vending without unnecessarily destroying the livelihoods of those engaged in it.

Therefore, the Silchar Municipal Corporation must ensure that any eviction or relocation exercise follows the applicable legal provisions. It should clarify whether a comprehensive survey of street vendors has been completed, whether the necessary institutional arrangements are in place and whether alternative vending locations have been identified.

The law does not suggest that street vendors should be allowed to occupy every available public space. Equally, it does not support the idea that they can simply be removed without following due process and considering their livelihood interests.

This is perhaps the most important question that the Municipal Corporation needs to answer.

If roadside vendors are removed from their existing locations, where are they expected to conduct their businesses? Has the Corporation identified suitable alternative sites? Will the new locations be accessible to customers? Will the vendors be provided with basic facilities such as drinking water, sanitation, drainage and waste disposal?

A vending zone located far away from residential areas or commercial centres may technically provide space to traders, but it may not offer them a viable opportunity to earn a living. The success of rehabilitation cannot be measured merely by allocating an empty plot of land. The alternative location must have reasonable commercial viability and accessibility.



The authorities must also consider the financial limitations of small traders. They cannot be expected to pay high rental charges, licence fees or other expenses that make their businesses economically unviable.

Rehabilitation must therefore be practical, affordable and designed around the actual needs of the affected vendors.

One of the major shortcomings of top-down urban administration is the tendency to take decisions affecting ordinary citizens without adequately consulting those who will be directly impacted.

The street vendors of Silchar should not be treated merely as recipients of municipal orders. They must be recognised as stakeholders in the city's development process.

Before undertaking any major eviction or relocation exercise, the Municipal Corporation should hold consultations with representatives of street vendors, local market associations, residents' groups and other relevant stakeholders.

Such consultations could help identify areas where vending creates genuine obstruction, locations where vending can be permitted under regulation and places suitable for developing organised vending markets.

A transparent mechanism should also be established to address complaints and disputes relating to vending spaces. This would prevent arbitrary allocation, discrimination and unnecessary conflict between vendors and municipal authorities.

The administration should also consider issuing or updating vending certificates in accordance with the applicable legal framework so that eligible vendors have clarity about their rights and responsibilities.

Instead of treating street vendors as a problem, the Silchar Municipal Corporation should consider developing organised vending markets in suitable locations across the town.

Dedicated vending zones could be established in areas where commercial activity is possible without obstructing major roads or pedestrian movement. These zones should have clearly demarcated stalls, adequate space for customers, proper drainage, drinking water, lighting, sanitation facilities and arrangements for regular waste collection.

The Corporation could introduce a regulated system of operating hours in congested areas. In certain locations, vending could be permitted during designated hours, while sensitive stretches such as major intersections, emergency access routes and heavily used footpaths could be kept free from obstruction.

A transparent allotment system would ensure that vending spaces are distributed fairly among eligible traders.

Such an arrangement would serve multiple purposes. It would reduce congestion, improve sanitation, protect pedestrian access and provide street vendors with a more secure business environment.

It would also help the Corporation bring an important segment of the informal economy into a more organised system of urban governance.

The present controversy also raises a broader question about the nature of urban planning in Silchar.

For years, the town has struggled with traffic congestion, inadequate parking, unregulated commercial activity, drainage problems, poor pedestrian infrastructure and increasing pressure on public spaces. These problems cannot be attributed exclusively to street vendors.

Unplanned commercial expansion, inadequate market infrastructure, insufficient parking facilities and weak enforcement of existing regulations have all contributed to the town's urban management challenges.

It would therefore be unfair to place the entire burden of these failures on small roadside traders.

If the authorities are serious about making Silchar a better-managed city, they must adopt a comprehensive approach. This should include the development of organised markets, improvement of public transport, creation of adequate parking facilities, protection of footpaths, scientific traffic management and strict enforcement of building and commercial regulations.

Street vending must be addressed as one component of a larger urban planning strategy, not as an isolated problem to be solved through periodic eviction drives.

The most disturbing aspect of eviction without rehabilitation is its potential social impact.

A small roadside business may generate only a modest daily income, but that income often supports an entire household. The sudden loss of business can affect children's education, household expenses, healthcare and the ability to repay small loans.

For people already struggling with rising prices and limited employment opportunities, such displacement can deepen financial insecurity.

The administration must also recognise that street vending provides affordable goods and services to a large section of the population. From daily vegetables and fruits to inexpensive meals and essential household items, these small businesses serve an important public purpose.

Their contribution to the urban economy should not be overlooked simply because they operate outside conventional commercial establishments.A humane administration does not ignore the difficulties faced by the general public, but neither does it overlook the economic consequences of its decisions on vulnerable communities.The Silchar Municipal Corporation now has an opportunity to demonstrate that urban development and social justice need not be contradictory objectives.

It should immediately undertake a comprehensive assessment of the affected vendors, identify suitable alternative locations and formulate a time-bound rehabilitation policy. The process should be transparent, legally compliant and based on consultations with the vendors themselves.

The Corporation should also make public its plans regarding vending zones, relocation arrangements and the criteria for allotment of alternative spaces. This would help prevent uncertainty and build public confidence.

Where immediate action is necessary to remove serious obstructions, the authorities should follow due process and ensure that affected vendors are not left without a viable alternative.

The state government, too, should extend the necessary administrative and financial support to help the Municipal Corporation develop properly planned vending infrastructure.

Ultimately, the objective should be to create a city where pedestrians can walk freely, vehicles can move without unnecessary obstruction, markets remain clean and organised, and small traders can earn their livelihood with dignity.

Silchar deserves better roads, cleaner surroundings, improved infrastructure and efficient civic administration. But the measure of a city's development is not simply how attractive its streets appear or how effectively roadside structures are removed.

A truly developed city is one that provides opportunities to its people, protects vulnerable livelihoods and ensures that economic progress is inclusive.

The street vendors of Silchar are not outsiders seeking to benefit from the city. They are part of its everyday economic and social life. They serve its residents, contribute to local commerce and support families through honest, often difficult, labour.

Their problems cannot be solved by making them disappear from the streets.

The Silchar Municipal Corporation must therefore move beyond the narrow approach of eviction and adopt a policy that combines civic discipline with economic protection. If roadside vending needs to be regulated, let it be regulated through proper planning. If vendors need to be relocated, let suitable alternative spaces be provided. And if the city needs to be beautified, let that process include the people whose livelihoods depend on its streets.

Urban development must not become another name for economic displacement. Silchar needs cleaner roads, but it also needs protected livelihoods. Eviction without rehabilitation is not development; it is merely the shifting of an urban problem from one place to another, while the poorest are made to pay the price.

The real test of the Silchar Municipal Corporation will not be how many roadside vendors it can remove, but how successfully it can build an organised city without taking away the right of its ordinary citizens to earn a living with dignity.

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