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ASSAM SETS EYES ON DEFENCE CORRIDOR



Representative Image

Defence corridor will have areas in the state where defence manufacturing units will be set up, the state only has to provide land and some subsidies

Rahul Chanda
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In its thrust to industrial production in the state, Assam is now looking at a defence industrial corridor and a policy is in the making to facilitate its establishment.

The move, incidentally, comes just more than a year after GPlus in March 2023 had in one of its re-

ports suggested manufacturing of defence equipment in the state.

Defence industrial corridors (DICs) in the country exist in states like Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu - Uttar Pradesh Defence Industrial Corridor (UPDIC) and Tamil Nadu Defence Industrial Corridor (TNDIC) - with an aim to attract investment of about Rs 10,000 crore in each corridor.

Assam requires investment in the industrial sector for devel-

opment and may be considered as a potential state for such a corridor.

A senior officer of Industry and Commerce department talking to GPlus on condition of anonymity said, "We are preparing a policy for the defence corridor and it will be completed within two to three months," adding that the policy will be better than others in the country.

A source in the Ministry of

Defence told GPlus that there were discussions at Assam's ministerial and bureaucratic levels about proposing the corridor to defence ministry, but it has not happened until now.

The source explained that for the defence industrial corridor, the state has to submit a proposal to the Ministry of Defence. If the ministry approves the proposal it will ink a memorandum of understanding with the state

stipulating, among other things, that "100% defence-related products will be procured by the ministry", said the source.

Thereafter, the state, Ministry of Defence and an expert committee will form a tripartite committee and the work will start. The only thing that the state has to provide is the land, said the source.

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Assam sets eyes on defence corridor

FROM PAGE 01

Six nodes, namely Aligarh, Agra, Chitrakoot, Jhansi, Kanpur and Lucknow have been identified for the UP Defence Industrial Corridor.

Five nodes, namely Chennai, Coimbatore, Hosur, Salem and Tiruchirappalli have been identified for TN Defence Industrial Corridor. The nodes have been selected based on the high potential for the creation of an end-to-end ecosystem for aerospace and defence sector development covering design, engineering and manufacturing.

Asked if any node has yet been identified in Assam, the Industry and Commerce department official said, "We have land in every district, but we are yet to zero in on the exact locations where the defence manufacturing units will be set up," adding that once the policy is prepared the nodes will also be identified.

On how the manufacturers will get raw materials in Assam, the official said that it will depend on what the manufacturers produce.

As for the need for involvement of an "expert country" in the process, the Defence source explained that India lacked expertise.

The source cited the instance of INSAS or Indian Small Arms System. INSAS is a family of infantry arms consisting of

an assault rifle and a light machine gun (LMG). It was designed by the Armament Research and Development Establishment and manufactured by the Ordnance Factories Board at its various factories. The INSAS assault rifle was the standard infantry weapon of the Indian armed forces for almost three decades.

"INSAS is a failure. Defence uses the weapon now only in peaceful areas," said the source adding that in the UP defence corridor, the arms that are being produced are in association with Russia. Therefore, expert countries are required, said the source.

The source stressed that Assam has all required infrastructure for a corridor. "The chief minister of the state is positive and I feel he wants the corridor," he said adding that if the bureaucrats work "efficiently" the corridor can be brought to Assam which will be beneficial for the state in many ways.

Recently, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, talking to media, said that he wanted to have defence manufacturing units in the state.

He tweeted, "Assam-made semiconductor chips will hit the global market within next year. I also want to bring defence manufacturing units, mobile phones assembling units, and other technology-based industries in our state."



Representative Image

A source in Dispur said that as the state will organise global investors' summit in November this year, many defence manufacturing players will be invited. The defence corridor policy also will be prepared before the summit.

Defence industrial corridors aim to catalyse indigenous production of defence and aerospace-related items, thereby

reducing reliance on imports and promoting export of these items to other countries which may create ample employment opportunities and growth of private domestic manufacturers, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and start-ups.

The UP government promulgated Uttar Pradesh Defence and Aerospace Unit and Em-

ployment Promotion Policy in 2018 and TN government promulgated Tamil Nadu Aerospace and Defence Industrial Policy in 2019, offering incentives to the companies in the matter of stamp duty, land cost, electricity tax exemption etc. Further, state governments provide basic infrastructure support such as internal roads, drainage systems, water and electricity, etc.

'Advantage Assam' returns to Guwahati

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Assam government is set to organise another Advantage Assam-like global investors summit in November this year. The event will offer lucrative opportunities for businesses to explore investment prospects in the state. The summit aims to showcase Assam's abundant pool of talented human resources, inviting major global and Indian industrial houses to capitalise on the state's potential for growth and development.

Advantage Assam - the Assam Global Investors' Summit held on February 3-4 in 2018 was the largest ever investment promotion and facilitation initiative by the Assam government.

The BJP-led government in Assam claimed in 2018 that Advantage Assam had managed to attract investment worth Rs. 8,020.21 crore. The government claimed that investments worth around Rs. 39,951.65 were in the pipeline. Altogether 207 Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) were signed during the

summit, but all did not translate into reality on the ground.

A senior official of the Industry and Commerce department talking to GPlus said, "Maybe all the MoUs inked during Advantage Assam were not successful, but a platform was created because of which people are still investing. Many investors invested after Advantage Assam without signing any MoU during the summit. How was it possible?" questioned the official adding that Advantage Assam built an investment environment in the state and such summits should be organised frequently.

In 2018, 4,500 delegates registered for participation, which included representatives from 16 countries.

On asked how many countries will be invited this year, the official said, "This year we will invite more countries in comparison to 2018 depending upon approval from the External Affairs ministry."

The estimated budget of the global investors summit is Rs 25 crore but the name of the event is yet to be decided. "It may not be named Advantage Assam," said another source in

Dispur. The dates of the summit are not yet decided but it will be in the third or fourth week of November this year, he said.

Apart from the prime minister who inaugurated Advantage Assam in 2018, several Union min-

isters, including Nitin Gadkari, Suresh Prabhu, Ravi Shankar Prasad, Smriti Irani, Dharmendra Pradhan, Jitendra Singh, and Kiren Rijiju participated in the summit. Even this year a huge range of dignitaries will be vis-

iting Guwahati for the summit, said the source.

Many defence equipment manufacturing companies will also be invited for the summit from across the globe, said the source.



Divorce graph in Guwahati rising

Infidelity, social media among causes of divorce in Guwahati while more women become financially independent and societal norms evolve

Tina Choudhury
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For generations, marriage in India has been viewed as a lifelong commitment, a sacred bond not just between two individuals but between two families. However, the rising complexities of modern life have begun to strain these traditional values. In Guwahati, the divorce rate has been steadily climbing, reflecting a broader trend that is changing the social fabric of the city.

Infidelity and the all-pervasive influence of social media are emerging as the main reasons behind the rising divorce rates in Guwahati. As modern lifestyles evolve, more couples find their marriages strained by infidelity and the pressures of maintaining an idealised online presence. This shift is leading to a significant increase in divorce cases in the city.

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“Platforms that were meant to connect people are also providing avenues for infidelity and unrealistic expectations, leading to marital discord.”

Baharun Saikia,
Advocate

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A primary barrier to divorce in India has long been the social stigma attached to it. Traditional values deeply rooted in society hold the sanctity of marriage in high regard. Individuals seeking to end their marriages often face ostracism, criticism, and shame from their communities. This stigma can be particularly burdensome for women, who might find themselves under intense social pressure to maintain an unhappy or even abusive marriage.

Speaking to GPlus, a 44-year-old woman seeking anonymity said, “Growing up, I was never taught to fight for my rights. I got married in 2002, and since then, I have been a victim of domestic violence.” She continued, “I feared my husband would never look after our children, so I couldn’t leave him. Another reason I never filed a complaint or divorce is the fear of being judged by my in-laws and society,” the mother of two explained.

The financial implications of divorce are another significant challenge. The division of assets and liabilities often leads to prolonged disputes, leaving both parties financially strained. Women, who may have limited financial independence, are frequently the hardest hit. The lack of robust financial support systems for divorced individuals exacerbates their difficulties, making the decision to seek a divorce even more daunting.

Speaking to GPlus, a 55-year-old man said, “I gave my wife property and money, thinking it would secure our future together. But months later, I discovered she was having an affair with another man.” He continued, “Despite everything, I don’t want to give up on our marriage. However, she is filing for divorce.”

Money and property disputes are also increasingly becoming a reason for broken marriages. Financial disagreements often lead to significant stress and mistrust between couples. In many cases, the strain of managing finances or disputes over assets can drive a wedge between partners, contributing to the decision to divorce.

Emotionally, divorce can be devastating. The process is fraught with stress, anxiety, and depression, affecting not only the couple but also their children. The end of a marriage brings upheaval to daily routines and casts uncertainty over the future, exacting a heavy emotional toll on all involved.

Speaking to GPlus, a 45-year-old divorcee not wishing to be named said, “I was in a relationship with my wife for many years, but infidelity tore us apart. The betrayal and subsequent divorce were incredibly painful, but living in an unhappy marriage was not an option either.”

Talkin to GPlus, Baharun Saikia, a senior advocate from Guwahati, pointed to adultery as one of the main grounds for divorce. “Infidelity is a major reason why marriages are falling apart,” Saikia explained. “People are finding it increasingly difficult to stay committed.”

Saikia also highlighted the impact of social media on marriages. “Another significant reason for the rise in divorce cases is social media,” he said. “Platforms that were meant to connect people are also providing avenues for infidelity and unrealistic expectations, leading to marital discord.”

“In 2023, we saw over 1000 divorce cases, covering both civil and criminal aspects,” Saikia noted. “This year, from Jan-



uary to April alone, more than 900 divorces have already been filed.”

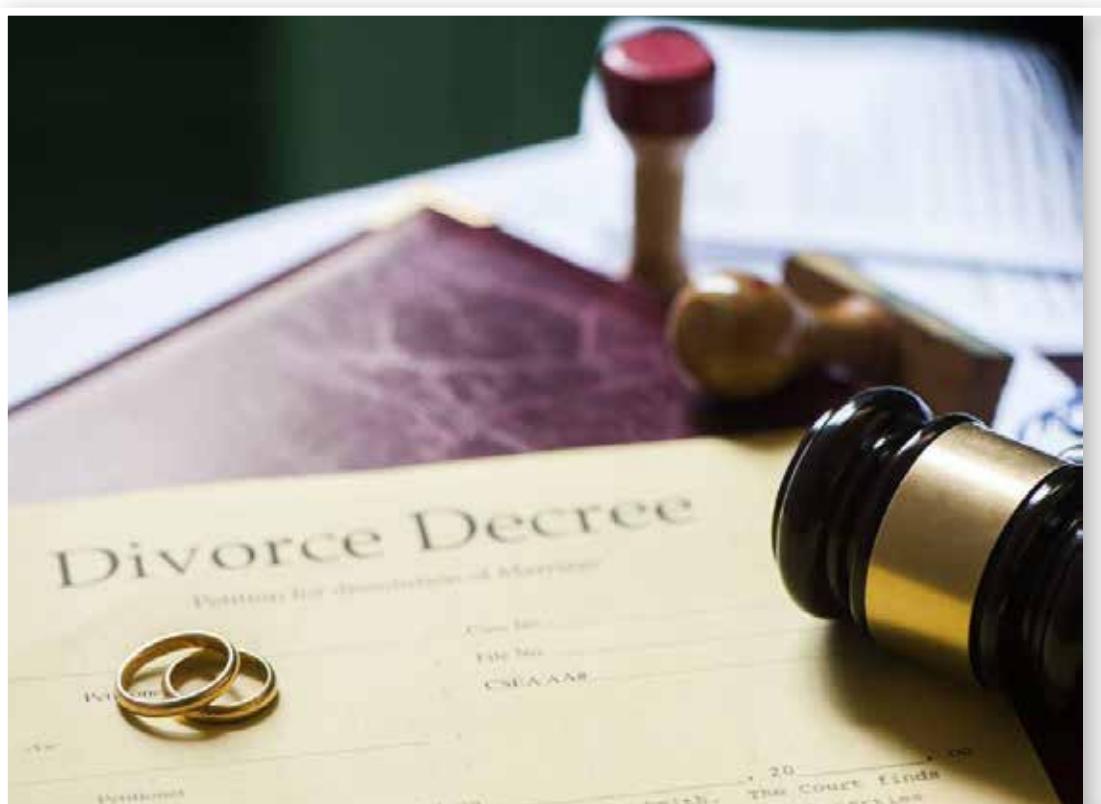
Domestic violence remains a critical issue contributing to the growing divorce rate. “Domestic violence is another major reason why people are seeking divorces,” Saikia said. “Women are no longer willing to endure abusive relationships.”

The advocate also pointed to changing attitudes towards marriage and adjustment is-

sues. “Nowadays, couples are less willing to compromise and adjust. When one cannot adjust with the other for a long time, divorce becomes the inevitable solution,” she observed.

Alcoholism is another factor that disrupts marital harmony. “Many husbands who are habitual drinkers neglect their responsibilities towards their wives and children,” Saikia explained. “This lack of responsibility and support often leads to the breakdown of the marriage.”

The rising divorce rate in Guwahati is a reflection of broader societal changes. As more women become financially independent and societal norms evolve, the willingness to stay in unsatisfying or harmful marriages diminishes. However, the challenges of social stigma, financial strain, and emotional distress remain significant barriers.



Gridlock, dust plague Satgaon Road

Guwahati's Patharquary-Satgaon Road grapples with severe congestion and dust pollution amid ongoing road-widening prompting urgent calls for relief measures

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The Patharquary-Satgaon Road near the Narengi area of Guwahati is facing severe traffic congestion, particularly between 1:30 to 2:30 pm when schools dismiss their students. The congestion is intensified by an ongoing road-widening project, creating a daily ordeal for residents, commuters, vendors, and parents.

The road serves as a crucial connection for three schools, causing significant traffic jams as school buses and parents' vehicles crowd the area. A school situated adjacent to the main road sees a large number of parents gathering to pick up their children, blocking the motorable road and causing long queues of vehicles.

"We face this chaos every day," said a local resident. "The traffic during school hours is unbearable, and with the road-widening project, it's only getting worse. The dust is everywhere, causing irritation in our eyes and even leading to respiratory issues."

Vendors who rely on daily business also feel the impact. "The traffic jams reduce the number of customers coming to my stall," explained a roadside vendor. "People are in a hurry to get through the congestion, and they don't stop to buy anything. Plus, the dust from the construction is affecting the quality of my produce."

Commuters who use this route regularly are frustrated with the delays. "I have to leave home an hour early just to ensure I get my work done on time," said a daily commuter. "The situation has become a nightmare, and the authorities need to take immediate action to manage the traffic better."

Parents picking up their chil-

dren from school find themselves in a difficult situation. "It's a struggle to navigate through the traffic with kids," noted a parent. "We understand the road-widening is necessary, but there should be a better traffic management system in place during peak hours."

Pedestrians are not spared from the ordeal either. "Walking on this road feels like walking through a battlefield," commented a pedestrian. "The dust and the constant honking of vehicles make it extremely stressful. It's unsafe and unhealthy."

The congestion on Patharquary-Satgaon Road stems from a combination of high vehicle volume due to the schools and the ongoing road-widening project. The construction work, while essential for long-term infrastructure improvement, adds to the current chaos by narrowing the usable road space and generating substantial dust.

The dust from the construction not only creates health issues but also contributes to reduced visibility, further complicating the traffic situation. Residents and commuters report eye irritation, allergies, and respiratory problems, highlighting the urgent need for dust control measures.

Local businesses suffer as potential customers avoid the area due to the traffic and dust. This has led to a drop in sales for vendors who rely on passing trade.

Additionally, the constant honking and stress of navigating through the gridlock take a toll on the mental well-being of everyone involved.

Despite the challenges, the authorities have acknowledged the problem and are working on solutions. "Traffic police are deployed to manage the congestion during peak hours, but their efforts often fall short given the



Stagnant Road in Patharquary-Satgaon Road | GPlus Photo

sheer volume of vehicles and the ongoing construction," said an official from Satgaon police station.

"Managing the traffic during school hours is a priority. We are coordinating with the school authorities to streamline the dispersal of students and reduce the congestion," he further added.

One proposed solution by a concerned citizen is to stagger the dismissal times of the schools to ease the traffic flow. Additionally, creating designated pick-up and drop-off zones away from the main road could alleviate the pressure on the motorable road.

The ongoing road-widening project is expected to provide long-term relief by increasing the road capacity. However, in the interim, better dust control

measures, such as regular watering of the road and installing dust barriers, could mitigate the health issues caused by the construction.

The present weather scenario also takes a toll for those motorists who do not have a provision for air conditioners.

Community members are calling for immediate and effective action to manage the traffic and dust. Enhanced coordination between school administrations, traffic authorities, and construction teams is crucial to finding a balance between development and daily life.

"We need immediate solutions to this problem," urged a resident. "The authorities must take the health and safety of residents into consideration. Proper traffic management and dust

control can go a long way in improving the current situation."

Residents also suggest implementing temporary traffic signals or diverting traffic during peak hours to ease the congestion. "Providing real-time traffic updates through digital signboards or mobile apps could help commuters plan their routes better," added another concerned citizen.

Patharquary-Satgaon Road's daily gridlock is a multifaceted issue that requires a comprehensive approach to resolve. While the road-widening project promises future relief, immediate measures are needed to manage the current traffic congestion and dust pollution. Until proper measures are taken, citizens hope that their troubles are alleviated.

Gopal Boro Govt School in shambles

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Gopal Boro Government High School, established in 1959 and located in Dispur, Guwahati, is facing severe infrastructural issues. The school, which serves students from grades 6 to 12, has no pre-primary section and is co-educational. Over the decades, it has been a nurturing ground for countless students of Guwahati and outside. Despite its rich history, the school faces a critical challenge in its infrastructure, which threatens the continuity of quality education for its students. A parent, speaking to GPlus on



the condition of anonymity said, "Whenever it rains, the school has to close because the classrooms get flooded. This severely disrupts not just the children's education but also raises safety concerns."

Another parent seeking anonymity talking to GPlus said, "We have been told improvements are coming, but nothing has changed for a very long time now. The classrooms are in a terrible state."

In 2022, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma tweeted about the school, saying, "Visited Gopal Boro Govt Higher Secondary School as part of our plan to replace old buildings with new ones. Reviewed its current condition and directed PWD to prepare

the design for a new building with adequate open space for sports."

However, talking to GPlus, a senior school official said, "The new building is under construction and should be completed by the end of this year. The project, costing around 10 crore, will result in a new two-storey facility."

As the construction progresses and the vision outlined by Chief Minister Sarma begins to materialise, there is a sense of anticipation and hope that the new infrastructure will not only address the immediate challenges but also serve as a catalyst for transformative change, ushering in an era of enhanced educational opportunities for generations to come.

Guwahati still likes reading books

Guwahati defies digital trends as physical book sales soar, with diverse age groups embracing reading culture, cultivating a vibrant literary community

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In an era where digital content is rapidly taking over, Guwahati stands out as a city that still cherishes the joy of reading physical books. This love for printed words is evident from the impressive sales figures recorded at recent book fairs and the enthusiasm shared by local bookstores and readers alike.

In 2023, the Guwahati Book Fair witnessed sales exceeding Rs 6 crore. This followed an equally impressive performance in 2022, where the first edition of the fair recorded sales of over Rs 5 crore. These numbers highlight the city's continued passion for reading, despite the growing prevalence of e-books and digital reading platforms.

Panbazar, a well-known hub for book lovers in Guwahati, continues to see a steady flow of customers across all age groups. Bookstores in this area have managed to maintain their charm and relevance in the digital age.

Talking to GPlus, an official from Barna bookstore in Panbazar shared insights with GPlus about the ongoing popularity of physical books.

"These days, we are seeing more books being sold because people are reading more," he said. "It's not just older readers anymore; young people are also picking up books. We have noticed a significant increase in readers between the ages of 20 and 30. They tend to gravitate towards romantic fiction. On the other hand, our senior customers still enjoy a lot of Assamese novels."

This observation highlights a vibrant and diverse reading culture in Guwahati, where both young and old find joy in different genres. "It is interesting to see how tastes vary across age groups. The younger generation is bringing new energy to the reading community, while the seniors continue to cherish traditional literature," the official added.

Talking to GPlus, an official from Barnalata bookstore in Pan Bazar shared similar observations with GPlus. "It is not just about reading books online anymore.

These days, a lot of people prefer buying books from stores," he explained. "We do sell books online, but there's a noticeable trend of young readers coming in to buy physical copies. It is encouraging to see so many youths eagerly reading books."

He further elaborated on the bookstore's approach. "By offering both online and offline sales, we can reach a wider audience. This way, we ensure that the love for physical books remains strong, catering to both those who enjoy the convenience of online shopping and those who cherish the experience of browsing in a bookstore."

Another book vendor in Pan Bazaar said, "Even with the rise

of English medium education, there's still a strong market for Assamese novels and historical books," she explained. "Parents often encourage their children to read in Assamese to stay connected with their roots. Despite the digital age, people still love to buy and read physical books in their native language, which keeps our sales steady."

"In recent years, I have noticed a lot more young people coming in to buy books," he said. "Teenagers and young

adults, especially those in their twenties, are really into novels and romantic fiction. It's heartening to see this younger generation developing a strong reading habit. They are not just browsing; they are buying books regularly," a book vendor in Ganeshguri seeking anonymity told GPlus.

Talking to GPlus, a senior official from Publishing Board of Assam said, "These days, we see a growing interest in customized books in Assam," he said. "People are particularly drawn to history-based and evidence-based books, and there's also been a rise in fiction readers. However, we have noticed a decline in short story readers

in Guwahati."

He continued, "There are two main categories of readers: those who prefer books in English and those who prefer Assamese. Many children and students attend English medium schools, so they tend to choose fiction in English. On the other hand, with fewer Assamese medium schools, parents of these students often guide them towards reading books in Assamese."

While questioning about book sales trends, he further said, "It's hard to pinpoint whether book sales have increased or decreased overall. The market is quite diverse, with different preferences and reading habits."



Passenger sues airlines, seeks justice

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Divy Pareek, a resident of Rajgarh lodged a harassment complaint against Air India Express, alleging mistreatment and misinformation by the airline's staff. She has taken her case to the consumer court.

On May 13, 2024, Pareek booked a flight from Guwahati to Jaipur via a third party booking app, paying 8120. The flight, scheduled for May 21, 2024, was to depart Guwahati at 7:30 am, have a 45-minute technical layover in Delhi, and arrive in Jaipur by 11:45 am. However, on the evening of May 20, she received a message from Air India Express stating that the Delhi to Jaipur leg of her flight

was cancelled, with an offer for a partial refund.

In an attempt to resolve the issue, Pareek called the provided number, only to be informed that the airline could do nothing to assist her. Despite her inquiries, the staff member claimed that almost all flights to Jaipur were being cancelled, without offering a clear explanation. After checking online and finding available flights to Jaipur, Pareek tried to call back, but the number was switched off.

Forced to make alternative arrangements, Pareek booked a new flight from Delhi to Jaipur with Indigo Airlines, costing 4188. The next morning, she arrived at Guwahati airport at 6:30 am, hoping to board the Air India Express flight to Delhi. However, the airline staff denied her boarding, citing their system's

inability to issue a partial boarding pass to Delhi, despite her situation and the prior communication she received.

Stranded and distressed, Pareek managed to book another flight from Guwahati to Jaipur directly with Indigo Airlines for 8839, with the help of a friend who transferred funds to her. She approached the Air India Express counter for a full refund, which was acknowledged with a seal and sign on her ticket, promising a refund within 10 to 15 days. However, the airline refused to compensate for the Indigo flight from Delhi to Jaipur, which she had to cancel.

Speaking to GPlus, Pareek said, "The officials were not professional at all, they wasted my entire time and energy with bogus questions. One official even pointed out the photo in my Pan card is not

clear. It was an emergency for me so it was like a shock to me."

Pareek described the experience as highly distressing and unacceptable, citing that the airline's false information and lack of support left her financially and emotionally shaken. She is now seeking compensation and stringent action against Air India Express to prevent similar

incidents from occurring in the future.

GPlus tried to contact the airlines but they were unavailable for any comment.

Meanwhile, as Pareek seeks for justice, including potential penalties against the airline and its staff. It is up to the consumer court to review the case and take adequate measures.



Internet Image

In the hills, a death trap lurks

The shortcut road linking Kahilipara to Bhangagarh via Narakasur Hill has deteriorated, posing grave risks, sparking widespread concern

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The shortcut road connecting Kahilipara to Bhangagarh via Narakasur Hill, adjacent to the Gauhati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH), has once again become a focal point of public concern. This route, known for its frequent use by commuters, patients, and students, has deteriorated to a perilous state, especially endangering two-wheeler riders during night hours. Even during daylight, a few mishaps are quite obvious.

"It's a nightmare to travel after dark. Potholes and lack of proper lighting make it a death trap," lamented a daily commuter. The road, which had seen temporary improvements, has rapidly declined, posing severe risks to its users.

Parents of GMCH students echo similar fears. "My son takes this route daily to college. I worry every day until he gets home," said a concerned mother. The road's condition intensifies anxiety among parents, particularly given the frequent sight of riders without helmets and the lack of enforcement of traffic rules.

Residents of the area also express frustration. "The road is practically unusable, yet it remains an essential route for

many. The authorities seem indifferent to our plight," commented a local resident.

Despite being marked with travel restrictions such as one-way traffic and speed limits, violations are rampant due to minimal vigilance. The route is not monitored for public transport vehicles, further contributing to the chaos and frequent accidents.

Daily users, such as a healthcare worker, highlight the pressing need for intervention. "Every day, I see at least one accident. It's high time the authorities stepped in with a permanent solution."

The road's condition has implications beyond just the safety of daily commuters. For patients needing urgent medical attention at GMCH, the delay caused by navigating the treacherous path could have serious consequences. "During emergencies, every second counts. The current state of the road is unacceptable for a route leading to a major hospital," said a concerned citizen.

Furthermore, students from GMCH and nearby institutions rely heavily on this route. "We're often late for classes or exams because we have to take detours or drive extremely slowly to avoid accidents. It's very stressful," shared a medical student. The road's poor state is not just an inconvenience but also a potential barrier to their education.

Local shopkeepers and businesses along the route have also felt the impact. "The poor condition of the road has significantly reduced foot traffic. Customers avoid coming here because they don't want to risk their vehicles," explained Raghu, who owns a small food stall in the area. This decline in business adds to the economic strain on local businesses already struggling to recover post-pandemic.

The lack of infrastructure and maintenance also leads to puddles during the monsoon season, further aggravating the situation. "When it rains, the potholes fill up with water, making them invisible and even more dangerous," said a resident. This seasonal challenge adds another layer of risk, especially for those unfamiliar with the road.

While the public's outcry grows louder, authorities have yet to take substantial action. Occasional patchwork and temporary repairs are not enough to address the underlying issues. Comprehensive planning and sustained efforts are necessary to bring about lasting improvements.

"The authorities must prioritise this issue. Proper lighting, regular maintenance, and strict enforcement of traffic rules are essential," added another citizen. The public suggest that implementing these measures



Potholes on the GMCH road | GPlus Photo

could significantly enhance road safety and reduce accidents.

In the absence of immediate intervention, the condition of the road is expected to worsen, leading to potentially more severe accidents and possibly fatalities. The local government's failure to act promptly and effectively raises serious concerns about public safety and accountability.

While speaking to GPlus, an official from the Public Works Department said, "We were unaware of the situation as several projects were ongoing in that

area. To further improve the conditions we will plan some effective measures."

Earlier, major accidents were also reported near the descend towards Kahilipara. Due to the extreme geographical factor, the portion turns out to be a potential threat.

As the rainy season approaches, the urgency for repairs and improvements becomes even more critical. Commuters and residents continue to hope for swift and decisive action to transform this death trap into a safe passage for all.

Helmet-less children a safety concern

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Despite stringent road safety regulations, children in Guwahati are frequently seen riding on motorcycles without helmets, posing a significant risk of accidents and fatalities. The Central Motor Vehicles (Second Amendment) Rules, 2022 mandate safety harnesses and helmets for children below four years of age on motorcycles and limit the speed of motorcycles carrying young children to 40 kmph. However, compliance in Guwahati is alarmingly low.

The situation on Guwahati's roads is dangerous, with rampant violations of road safety norms.

Talking to GPlus, a senior official from DTO said, "Kamrup Metro reported 253 accidents in 2024 Jan to March", a sharp increase from the 158 accidents recorded in 2023, representing a 60.13% rise. Fatalities have also surged, with 76 deaths recorded



so far in 2024, compared to 53 in the previous year.

GPlus conducted an investigation to understand why children in Guwahati are not wearing helmets. Speaking with various stakeholders, it became evident that multiple factors contribute to this negligence.

One parent, whose eight-



year-old son refuses to wear a helmet, talking to GPlus said, "Due to the scorching heat, my son doesn't want to wear a helmet. So, we do not force him to wear one now."

Talking to GPlus, a school

principal near Dispur highlighted the role of parents in ensuring safety: "We have conducted many awareness programs in our school. But it's the parents' responsibility to educate their children as well. Many parents wear helmets themselves but do not make their children wear them."

The Kamrup Metro District Transport Office (DTO) has been proactive in promoting road safety.

Talking to GPlus, a senior official from the DTO said, "Many awareness programs are held in schools to ensure that students follow road safety rules. In the last financial year, 101,231 cases were registered for not wearing helmets."

This year alone, 1,341 cases of not wearing helmets have already been registered. The DTO's

efforts include regular checks and educational campaigns, yet the compliance among motorcyclists, particularly those carrying children, remains low.

The Guwahati Traffic Police have also been active in promoting road safety.

Talking to GPlus, a senior official said, "We hold many awareness programs for road safety in schools, ensuring that students learn the importance of these rules. At least three days a week, traffic awareness sessions are conducted. The Integrated Traffic Management System (ITMS) captures violations such as pillion riders not wearing helmets. When we see such cases physically, we urge them to wear helmets."

The lack of helmet use among children is particularly alarming given the chaotic nature of Guwahati's traffic. Riding motorcycles without proper safety gear is dangerous, especially on roads where driving etiquette is often ignored. The use of helmets and safety harnesses can significantly reduce the risk of injury or death in the event of an accident.

Satgaon's crush hour: A jumbo issue

Forest department official blames incursion by elephants in the area on deforestation and habitat loss

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In recent years, the city of Guwahati has been experiencing a growing crisis as wild elephants continue to wreak havoc in various residential and commercial areas. The problem is particularly acute in the Satgaon area, just outside the army cantonment, where residents and business owners are feeling the brunt of these uninvited guests. The elephants not only cause significant property damage but also pose a serious threat to human safety, creating a climate of fear and uncertainty.

The frequent incursions of wild elephants have had a devastating impact on local businesses. Ajit Kumar, a vegetable vendor in the area, described the economic toll, "We've had to shut down our shop multiple times in the past month. The elephants come in the evening, and we have to close early to avoid any mishaps. Our sales have dropped significantly."

Similarly, another seller, who runs a grocery store near the cantonment, expressed her frustration, "Last week, an elephant knocked over the front part of my shop. The damage is extensive, and the repair costs are overwhelming. We lose business every time this happens."

The residents of Satgaon are living in constant fear. A local resident, shared her concerns, "It's terrifying. We hear the elephants at night, and it's a constant worry that they might come closer to our homes. The children are scared to go outside in the evenings." For the elderly, the situation is even more distressing. Ram Prasad, a 70-year-old resident of Satgaon,

said, "Lately, the problem has surged. The elephants are coming closer and closer to our homes. It's not safe for anyone, especially for the elderly like me. We are living in fear every day."

The daily commute has become a daunting task for many. A daily commuter recounted his recent experience thus, "Travelling to and from work has become a nightmare. You never know when an elephant might appear on the road. Last week, I had to take a long detour to avoid one."

Pedestrians, too, are facing unprecedented dangers. Another pedestrian, highlighted the risks, "Walking in this area has become hazardous. You can't predict the elephants' movements, and it's scary to think what could happen if you encounter one suddenly. The authorities need to take action soon."

An official from the forest department attributes the increasing incidents of elephant incursions to deforestation and habitat loss. As natural habitats shrink, elephants are forced to venture into human settlements in search of food and water.

While the authority stresses the importance of co-existence, they also acknowledge the urgent need to address the immediate threats posed by these encounters. "We need a balanced approach that ensures the safety of both humans and elephants," he further added. "Creating buffer zones and corridors for elephants can help reduce



these conflicts." Local authorities are under pressure to devise and implement effective strategies to mitigate the conflict. Possible solutions include constructing barriers to prevent elephants from entering populated areas, installing early warning systems, and enhancing forest management practices to improve the availability of natural resources for wildlife. Additionally, community awareness programmes can educate residents on how to stay safe and avoid provoking elephants.

The government has acknowledged the severity of the situation. An official from the Kamrup East Forest Department stated, "We are aware of the challenges faced by the residents of that area due to the frequent elephant incursions. Efforts are being made to develop long-term solutions, including habitat restoration and creating safe passages for elephants. In the meantime, we are working closely with local communities to provide immediate relief and support. The area has been an original habitat for elephants since ages, so it is impossible to act immediately and stop their movement."

The official further added that a 24-hour shift has been allotted to the three ranges in Kamrup

East- Khanapara, Bonda and Guwahati. Guwahati has two beats, Narengi and Panjabari. For 8 hours officials from these two beats are deployed, the remaining 16 hours a team from the wildlife division of the respective beats looks after it.

"There are several issues regarding setting up an outpost in that particular area. Primarily, limited resource is a major concern. Other issues include the lack of walls which were previously intact inside the cantonment has become a passage. As of now no specific instructions have been forwarded to us regarding this matter. Moreover, it's a tedious process and the tuskers are spread all over that area."

In a recent mishap, a resident lost his life due to the wrath and another resident was severely injured. While speaking to GPlus, the official further stated that a significant amount of compensation is usually given to the family.

"Understanding why elephants behave the way they do can help reduce fear and promote co-existence," said a retired forest officer.

As Satgaon grapples with this escalating crisis, the resilience and cooperation of its residents will be crucial. The hope is that through concerted efforts by the government and the authority concerned a sustainable solution can be found to ensure the safety and well-being of both humans and elephants. The residents of Satgaon, Amching Jorabat, and Batahugli remain hopeful that peace and normalcy will soon be restored in their neighbourhoods.

Workshop on sustainable lifestyle held in city

A workshop on Traditional Knowledge for a Sustainable Lifestyle was held in Guwahati on May 20, organised by TERI-NERC, Guwahati.

The event focused on promoting sustainable living through the application of traditional knowledge, drawing attention to the rich cultural heritage and biodiversity of Assam.

The workshop is a part of the broader 'Mission LiFE' (Lifestyle for Environment) initiative, launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres at COP26 in Glasgow on November 1, 2021. Mission

LiFE aims to foster sustainable and healthy lifestyles by leveraging India's ancient wisdom and living traditions.

Dr. Naba Kumar Goswami, Senior Fellow & Regional Coordinator at TERI-NERC, spoke about the Mission LiFE and the Traditional Knowledge Project. Dr. Dipankar Saharia, Senior Director at TERI, highlighted TERI's activities in Northeast India and its collaboration with the Government of India, emphasising the importance of indigenous knowledge practices.

Dr. Jaideep Baruah, Director of the Assam Science & Technology and Environment Council (ASTEC), discussed the EIACP-CP & Climate Resil-

ient Villages initiative and the Council's collaboration with TERI. Pankaj Chakravarty, Joint Secretary of the Indigenous and Tribal Faith and Culture Department, and Director of the Directorate of Indigenous and Tribal Faith and Culture, Government of Assam, delivered the keynote address, outlining his department's mission and its partnership with TERI.

The workshop saw participation from various government departments, research and educational institutes, and non-governmental organizations, all coming together to discuss and promote integrating traditional knowledge into sustainable living practices.

Calligraphy training held in Guwahati

A 3 -Day Training on Handwriting and Calligraphy (English) was held at Sonaram Higher Secondary School from 20 to 22 May by NE Unique Calligraphy in collaboration with Samagra Shiksha, Assam, under the initiative of Hon'ble Education Minister, Dr Ranjan Pegu and Mission Director, Dr Om Prakash.

Earlier the training was piloted in 2022 through the guidance of Hon'ble Education Minister for 100 schools in the Kamrup Metro district for both Assamese and English.

The first batch of the Training for Kamrup Metro concluded today whereas training for second

Batch 2 (Assamese) will be held from 27th to 29th May. I/S, DEEO cum DMC of Kamrup Metro, Dipika Choudhury visited the venue and motivated the participants/ Teachers participating from 200 schools of the District.

The teachers too have taken this step in a very positive way as they know how good handwriting also plays a pivotal role in shaping the personality of young learners who later on will be holding significant positions in various fields and domains. This step is also a march ahead under the NIPUN AXOM mission and thereby involved the co-operation of DPO TT and FLN team for the successful completion of Batch 1 training.

Advantage lost: Brakes on river taxis

Rahul Chanda
@RahulChanda1405

The river taxi project, which was promised during Advantage Assam, is shelved forever. Assam Global Investors' Summit or Advantage Assam was organised in February of 2018 by the government of Assam, where it was claimed that it would bring in investments worth hundreds of crores of rupees.

During the same event, it was also claimed that river taxis like Ola Boats may soon be a reality in Guwahati. Bengaluru-based cab aggregator Ola had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Assam government to pilot an app-based river taxi service in Guwahati.

The claim remains as an understanding till now as there has been no agreement and now it has come to light that the project is "dropped".

A source in Dispur talking to *G Plus* on condition of anonymity said, "The river taxi project as planned during Advantage Assam is dropped as the investors were not persuaded enough to make it a reality in Guwahati."

He added that initially the company tried to crack a deal, but for various technical requirements the Assam government did not give a go-ahead.

A senior former IWT official, who was involved in the planning of the river taxi project, revealed that Ola was "pressurising" the state government for sailing permission to operate the river taxis in the Brahmaputra "without" Indian Register for Shipping (IRS) certification.

The official added that Ola was asked to provide all the

safety certificates for sailing permission in Guwahati. IRS is the recognised agency that provides safety certificates to vessels after thorough investigation. To ply in the River Brahmaputra, a special certificate has to be availed mentioning that the vessels can ply during monsoon and floods in the Brahmaputra.

The former IWT official said, "Ola had submitted a proposal and we were examining it." He added that Ola could have provided their services in the Brahmaputra only after proper certification and observance of all safety regulations.

A source in the Assam Inland Water Transport Development Society, who was previously in Inland Water Transport department, told *GPlus*, "The app-based taxi aggregators actually required parties to come forward with vessels, but parties did not show interest," adding that one boat even came for testing but later it was taken back. The project did not start and now it is dropped.

Soon after the global investors' summit, Advantage Assam, Ola had surveyed the navigation route in river Brahmaputra and identified three routes, including Lachit Ghat to North Guwahati Ghat, Lachit Ghat to Umananda, and Lachit Ghat to Palashbari. Ola brought a vessel from Kolkata for a trial run and survey and according to the former IWT official, the vessel was not certified to ply in the Brahmaputra. After the survey, Ola submitted a proposal, and according to the proposal, four fibre retrofitted plastic (FRP) boats would have been introduced in Guwahati initially. The estimated cost of one vessel was Rs 1.2 crore in 2018.



A River Taxi | GPlus Photo

The cost may have swelled if air conditioners and other facilities were added. The vessel, which was brought after Advantage Assam, was also an FRP boat but smaller in size.

After the signing of the MoU in 2018 February, the state government flaunted a river taxi in the Brahmaputra wooing the public claiming that Guwahati citizens would soon get river taxis in the Brahmaputra. In the proposal, Ola had also submitted a rate cost analysis, according to which the fares would have been between Rs 70 and Rs 150. The state government was examining the proposal, and after all required approvals, the agreement might have been signed, said the former IWT official. It did not happen and the government's claim in 2018 again looked like a gimmick as there are many such MoUs signed during Advantage Assam

that appear to be just on paper. RELIGIOUS TOURISM CIRCUIT

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed in Guwahati in May 2023, for the development of 'Riverine Based Religious Tourism Circuit' among Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI), Sagarmala Development Corporation Limited (SDCL), Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) and Department of Inland Waterways Transport (DIWT), Government of Assam.

The MoU will facilitate modern ferry service on a 'Hop On Hop Off' among seven historic religious sites around Guwahati. These are Kamakhya, Pandunath, Ashwaknata, Doul Govinda, Umananda, Chakreshwar and Auniati Satra.

The waiting lounge at the ferry terminal will be a modern facility providing comfort-

able ambience for the passengers. The project, executed via a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV), is likely to be completed with an investment of Rs 45 crore and will be completed within 12 months. The circuit will sail from Hanuman Ghat, Uzan Bazar and the ferry service is expected to reduce the overall travel time to less than 2 hours for completing one complete circuit. SDCL and IWAI will jointly contribute 55 per cent of the project cost while the remaining will be provided by ATDC. DIWT has consented to provide the usage of ghats near the temples free of cost for the project.

The Assam Inland Water Transport Development Society source said that the state government and the Centre are working on the Riverine Based Religious Tourism Circuit which will have river taxis.

AIM launches 4-year integrated BBA/MBA Programme

The Assam Institute of Management (AIM) has launched its 4-year Integrated BBA/MBA programme on May 24, 2024, thus becoming the first Institute in the entire Northeastern region to introduce it.

This new programme is affiliated to Assam Science and Technology University (ASTU) and is approved by the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and as per NEP 2020.

Established by the Government of Assam in 1988 as an autonomous institute, AIM operates under the Department

of Higher Education. This new programme aligns with the National Education Policy 2020 and offers multiple entry and exit options, making it flexible and accessible for students.

The Integrated Programme incorporates job-oriented subjects alongside fundamental management topics, ensuring a well-rounded education. To be eligible, candidates must have passed their Class XII exams from any stream. Prospective students must register on the SAMARTH PORTAL at <https://assamadmission.samarth.ac.in>.

Talking to media, Sanjib Raj,

the Director of Assam Institute of Management said, "The programme has a capacity of 60 students and promises 100% placement assistance."

This programme at AIM is one of the most unique and innovative in the country and is focused at being wholly job-oriented.

AIM now flourishes on its spacious campus at Bigyan Path, West Boragaon. The institute boasts dedicated faculty members, state-of-the-art infrastructure including smart classrooms, a digital conference hall, a well-furnished hostel,

an extensive library with over 11,500 volumes, and a modern computer lab. The campus is Wi-Fi enabled with high-speed internet supported by the National Knowledge Network (NKN).

Additionally, AIM functions as a distinguished research center affiliated with ASTU, offering a Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD) programme. The infrastructure is funded by the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DONER) and the Government of Assam.



Illegal hoardings in city pose threat

Guwahati Municipal Corporation working on a new outdoor advertising policy to combat the illegal hoarding menace

Rahul Chanda
@RahulChanda1405

The Mumbai and Pune hoarding mishaps, which killed around 17 people and injured many, have sent shockwaves across the country with many city authorities planning a crackdown against illegal and unsafe hoardings, unipoles and other outdoor advertising mediums. Cities like Hyderabad and Bangalore have floated tenders requesting proposals from eligible bidders for removal of unauthorised hoardings, unipoles or any type of unauthorised or illegal displays and advertisements from the city limits. Other cities are also planning crackdowns against unauthorised outdoor advertisements. But Guwahati seems to be moving lahe lahe as illegal hoardings and unipoles are mushrooming across the city while the authorities are yet to take any significant action.

Is there no Mumbai or Pune-like hoarding mishap threat in Guwahati?

A city-based architect and member of Architect Association, Assam, Ranel Das talking to GPlus said, "All hoardings atop the buildings in Guwahati are 100 per cent risky," adding that the Mumbai hoarding mishap happened because the hoarding was not well designed and also because of overloading.

"In Guwahati, the hoarding frames on top of the buildings are not connected with the frame or concrete construction of the building," said Das adding that the advertising agencies somehow erect four posts

and make a frame on which the advertisements are displayed. What is the load capacity of the hoarding frames, Das questioned saying that he wonders how the agencies get permission. He said that Guwahati falls in the highest seismic risk zone (Zone V) in India, making it prone to earthquakes - some severe earthquakes have occurred in this region in the past (notably in 1897 and 1950). The hoardings in Guwahati are risky during earthquakes and storms.

City-based social activist, Padmashree awardee and former legislator Ajoy Kumar Dutta talking to GPlus said, "The hoarding

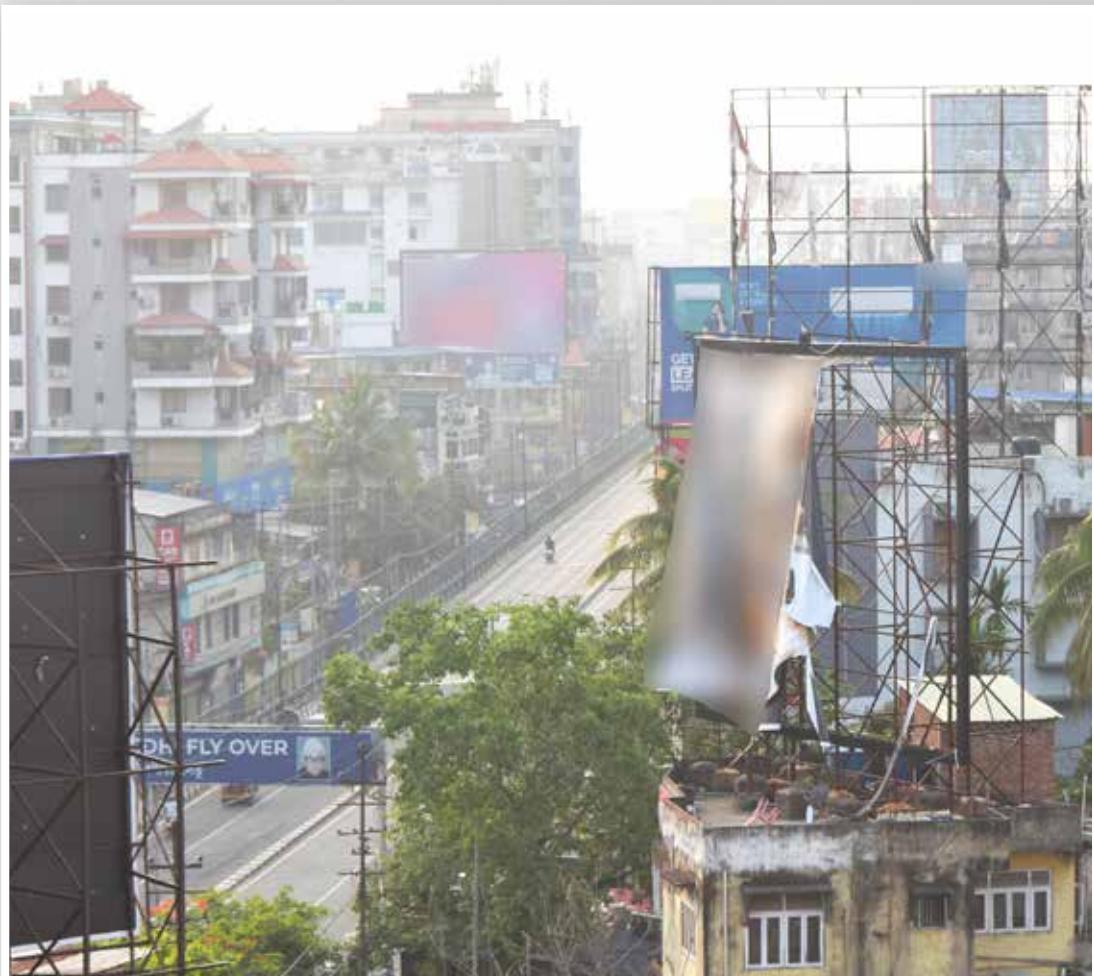
“

In Guwahati, the hoarding frames on top of the buildings are not connected with the frame or concrete construction of the building.

Ranel Das,
Member of Architect Association,
Assam

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business in Guwahati revolves around corruption. Anyone and everyone are putting up hoardings and other advertising mediums everywhere in the city, like on top of buildings, near the drains, in the middle of the road, trees and so on." He said like the city is getting dirty because



people are spitting everywhere, similarly, it is also getting dirty because hoardings are coming up anywhere and everywhere. "I urge the authorities, especially the Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC), to make public a list showing how many hoardings or unipoles are authorised and how many are illegal," said Dutta adding that it should also be informed how many advertising agencies were penalised because of violating advertising norms and for installing illegal hoardings and unipoles.

It needs to be mentioned that Bhavesh Bhinde, the prime accused for causing the death of 17 people after an illegal hoarding installed by his company beside a petrol pump in Mumbai collapsed on May 13, has a number of notices and penalties issued against him; more than 100 notices and penalties were issued against the Mumbai businessman. Bhinde's company illegally installed a 14,400 sq ft hoarding in Ghatkopar that fell on the fateful day due to an unexpected bout of heavy rain and strong winds, causing injuries to as many as 74 people besides killing 17.

Are agencies being penalised in Guwahati? Are there

illegal hoardings in Guwahati?

Most citizens of the city may have observed the sudden installation of many unipole hoardings in the city. A unipole hoarding is a kind of unique structure that stands on one pole with a display structure on the top. These are typically installed on the dividers or medians of the main roads to gain visibility and offer lucrative advertising spaces to brands and organizations. An RTI reply from GMC in the month of March 2024 revealed that there are only 40 authorised unipoles in Guwahati, but physically there are over 100 unipoles in the city.

Similarly, the number of authorised hoardings is far less than what is installed in the city.

So are the hoardings legal? Are they safe?

A source in GMC, the regulating body of outdoor advertising in the city, talking to GPlus on condition of anonymity said, "There are illegal hoardings and unipoles in Guwahati and from time to time the GMC also carries out drives against these." Talking about safety, the source said that the authorised hoardings and unipoles are safe as they are installed after producing structur

al safety certificates to the GMC but the illegal ones may be unsafe. He said that the authorised ones are also renewed every year and accordingly safety certificate is also renewed. The source also said that in Guwahati there are not such huge hoardings like the one that fell in Mumbai.

GMC commissioner MN Dahal talking to GPlus said, "We have identified some illegal unipoles and the work has started to demolish them," adding that there are also illegal hoardings and as and when the GMC identifies these the agencies are penalised and the hoardings are removed. He stressed on working on a new and improved outdoor advertising policy. He said that it is difficult to identify all the illegal hoardings in the city with the inadequate enforcement manpower that the GMC has. He said there should be a unique symbol looking at which anyone can know that the hoarding is legal or illegal. He said that the urban local body is working on a new policy which will completely resolve the issue.

The GMC may be working on a new policy, but the fact remains that there are illegal hoardings and unipoles in Guwahati which may spell disaster for its citizens.



Slow-footed EC

It has been over a month now, but the Election Commission of India still appears to be in no haste to act on complaints against Prime Minister Narendra Modi for alleged violation of the model code of conduct. Truth be told though, it, of course, did send a notice – again, inexplicably – to the BJP president seeking response on the complaints; inexplicably because normally, notices are sent to the individuals accused of having committed any wrong, but for reasons best known to it the Election Commission this time thought it prudent to send the notice to the party president.

The party president has already replied, defending Modi's actions, but the Election Commission is yet to make its views known. This, however, is not to say that the Election Commission does not act at all. It does, and very promptly at that, when it concerns lesser mortals while taking its time when it comes to the big fish. Such seeming reluctance to act against highly-placed persons is a matter of worry, particularly when the alleged offence involves hate and statements that have the potential to drive the wedge deeper between religious or social groups and even regions as Modi's speech of April 21 in Rajasthan is alleged to have done; in fact, that was the beginning, and he has been relentless since in his speeches and statements that were in similar vein. The Election Commission has been found grossly wanting in this regard, and unfortunately giving the impression that it really doesn't want to act against the Modis or highly-placed persons.

But this is not the only instance when the Election Commission has failed to act on time on complaints about violations of the model code

during the ongoing elections to the Lok Sabha. So much so that even the courts have had to step in to set matters right when the Election Commission chose to look the other way. Recently, the Calcutta High Court had to pass orders withholding the BJP from publishing some advertisements which it had found to be in violation of the model code of conduct. Not only were these just violative of the model code, but the contents were allegedly slanderous and derogatory. Yet the Election Commission had not acted attracting the court's rap on the knuckle. Having not done anything on its own, the Election Commission, however, took offence at the court for having stepped in! The Election Commission issued relevant notices only after a petition was filed drawing the attention of the court to the alleged violation of the model code of conduct by the BJP through its advertisements. The court was obviously within its rights to ask whether the Election Commission would be ready to take action only after the elections are over. Irrespective of which party is crossing the line – all have in their own ways, and to varying degrees – when it comes to complying with the model code of conduct, the Election Commission has left much to be desired by sitting on complaints and thus also not allowing a level field for the contenders, which it is mandated to do. By its inaction, the Election Commission is harming the very institution and eroding the faith of the people in it.

There are two more phases of polling left before the counting and the Election Commission may still have some time to redeem itself or irrevocably lose its standing in the esteem of the people.

Whither professionalism?

Guwahati city is growing and along with it the service sector, too. With new corporate offices, restaurants, hotels, malls and various other opportunities, the service sector of the city is booming. But one issue the sector is facing is its quest for professional human resources. The workplace is where people's personalities shine through. How one handles work pressure or deals with a work situation tells a lot about them. And when an employee reacts badly, they tend to be really unprofessional with their attitude; resorting to various unprofessional habits can portray the person in a very negative light. This is what is happening; as employers are facing a tough time getting the appropriate workforce the employees too are not getting the perfect management. There are aggressive bosses, untimely payment of

salary, bias towards employees, unfriendly organisational rules and so on. Many organisations call for interviews several times, but do not even bother to send a rejection mail. Human resource managers in many organisations fail to motivate the employees to work efficiently and even fail to reduce the attrition rate. There is an urgent need for training for both the employees and also the employers. There might be freshers who are not team players, but grooming a newbie and making him or her efficient for the organisation is also the professional responsibility of employers. The employees too lack a value system and are cool about the employers not being happy with their (employees) conduct. People are not worried about losing their jobs anymore. Similarly, organisations are not worried about letting an asset go, thus flagging the issue of professionalism in the city.

Battling Assam's climate demons

Assam, the land of lush tea gardens, mighty rivers, and vibrant cultures, is caught in the crosshairs of a relentless adversary – Climate Change! Assam is more vulnerable to climate change than any other in the country, thanks to a deadly cocktail of geographic and socio-economic factors.

Let's dive into the chaotic world of Assam's climate woes and explore why the state seems cursed by the rain gods and roasted by the sun.

Assam's climate crisis is a tragic tale of extremes. The state is no stranger to floods, with nearly 40% of its area prone to inundation. But in recent years, these floods have turned more devastating, courtesy of erratic and intense rainfall. Picture this: in June 2022, Assam received double its average rainfall in just three weeks. The result? Catastrophic floods that displace thousands, wash away homes, and wreak havoc on agriculture.

There's more! Alongside these deluges, Assam also faces frequent droughts. The state's rainfall pattern is so unpredictable that what should be a season of gentle, life-sustaining showers often transforms into either a torrent or a trickle. This twin threat of floods and droughts has left Assam's farmers in a perpetual state of anxiety, juggling between saving their crops from drowning and praying for rain to save their parched fields.

The plight of Majuli, the world's largest riverine island, is a glaring example of climate change's impact on Assam. Over the years, Majuli has lost large parts of itself to land erosion, shrinking drastically. With high poverty rates and a predominantly agriculture-dependent population, the island's residents are watching their livelihoods literally wash away.

Frequent floods and siltation have reduced farm productivity, forcing many to migrate to urban areas in search of work.

It's a sad irony that while Majuli's landmass is disappearing, its people are becoming climate refugees.

If the floods and droughts weren't enough, Assam is now grappling with rising temperatures. The state's annual mean temperature has increased by 0.59 degrees Celsius over the past 60 years, and it's expected to climb by another 1.7-2.2 degrees Celsius by 2050. This year, some parts of Assam hit a scorching 40 degrees Celsius—and it's only May!

That's hotter than a freshly brewed cup of Assam tea. This spike in temperature is not just uncomfortable; it's a serious health risk, leading to heat strokes and exacerbating the spread of diseases.

Meanwhile, the economic costs of Assam's climate woes are staggering. Agriculture, the backbone of Assam's economy, is under constant threat from extreme weather events. Frequent floods and droughts have not only lowered crop yields but also pushed up the prices of agricultural commodities.

Tea plantations, synonymous with Assam, are also feeling the heat. Climate models predict decreasing tea yields due to rising temperatures and erratic rainfall. Imagine Assam without its world-famous tea—unthinkable, right? Yet, this could become a reality if climate change continues unabated.

Beyond the economic impact, the human cost of Assam's climate crisis is immense. The loss of livelihoods has forced many to migrate, disrupting communities and family structures. Health issues are on the rise, with heat strokes becoming more common and the potential for a surge in climate-related diseases. The mental stress of dealing with constant natural disasters is taking a toll on the population's well-being.

Despite these challenges, Assam's response to climate change has been largely reactive.

OPINION

Parthasarathi Mahanta



tive. The focus has been more on recovery from disasters rather than building adaptive capacity. This needs to change.

Assam's State Action Plan for Climate Change outlines some key measures, such as improving flood forecasting, building resilient infrastructure, and promoting sustainable agricultural practices.

Additionally, raising awareness about climate change and its impacts is crucial. The people of Assam need to be informed and involved in decision-making processes. Community-based adaptation strategies, such as diversifying crops and adopting water-efficient farming techniques, can help mitigate some of the risks.

But Assam's climate challenge is indeed formidable. With strategic planning, community involvement, and a shift towards sustainable practices, the state can navigate this crisis.

After all, Assam's spirit is as strong as its tea, and with the right blend of action and adaptation, the state can weather even the fiercest of storms.

Let's hope that Assam's future is not just about surviving the climate onslaught but thriving despite it.

(The author is the IGP (Admn & STF), Assam. All views and opinions expressed in the article are the author's own)

- Need for water dispensers at Guwahati bus stops

Sir,

As the scorching summer sun beats down upon Guwahati, it becomes increasingly evident that our city is in dire need of a solution to combat the sweltering heat and humidity. While public transportation serves as a lifeline for many residents, the lack of access to clean drinking water poses a significant challenge, especially during these unforgiving weather conditions.

It's disheartening to witness commuters, particularly the elderly, children, and individuals with health concerns, endure dehydration while waiting at bus stops. Installing water dispensers at the city's bus stops could ensure that everyone has access to safe and refreshing drinking water.

I urge the relevant authorities to consider this proposal seriously and take prompt action to install water dispensers at Guwahati's bus stops. Together, let's make hydration a priority and ensure that no one suffers unnecessarily due to the scorching summer heat.

Mainak Sikhar Ghosh,
Chenikuthi, Guwahati

Letter to the Editor

Gorkha: An umbrella community in the jaws of death

Shristi Acharya

As per a UN report, approximately 95 percent of the world's indigenous languages are predicted to become extinct within the next century. Fast forward 10,000 years, and humanity will likely see the amalgamation of races into a singular identity, transcending categories of Black, White, and Brown. However, it would be overly optimistic to assume that this future integration will occur without obstacles. Numerous ethnic, cultural, and racial groups may disappear due to the oppression imposed by a dominant and distinct community, ultimately erasing their presence from the fabric of our planet. One such cultural group is the Gorkha/Nepalese community.

The violence and discrimination against Gorkhas in India have always been related to issues of the challenges in asserting their

Indian identity. Within the diverse mosaic of the Indian diaspora, the Gorkha community has often felt like the overlooked member, lacking the same embrace and acceptance.

The Gorkhas are a diverse yet inclusive community, mostly settled in Nepal, making a very small fraction in India. They are formed by the amalgamation of various customs and traditions of different ethnicities, such as the Khas, Magar, Newar, etc. Although these ethnic groups have few differences among themselves, they maintain unity by embracing a common language and identity. The history and origin of the Gorkha amalgamation is a path unexplored with minimal to no research, which makes it rather difficult to gather information about the segmented ancestry and genetics. But, it is highly believed that the common language (Nepali) that unifies this community is the by-product of the Khas Language.

Identifying myself as a member



of the Indian Gorkha community, my cultural identity has always been questioned regardless of the distinct places and people I have come across. At the age of 10, I encountered my first experience of discrimination, when a school bully labelled me as an immigrant, instructing me to return to Nepal.

The lack of representation in administrative, political, and public sectors have hindered our ability to voice concerns and advocate

for our rights. The intentional ignorance and misrepresentation by the mainstream media and the stereotypical portrayals in the Indian Cinema has further marginalised us.

It is disheartening to observe that the contemporary generation of Gorkhas in India have resorted to adopting defensive strategies for assimilation into the broader Indian society. My cousins in Dehradun refrain from disclosing

their Gorkha heritage or conversing in Nepali, driven by the apprehension of being unfairly judged as outsiders. This reluctance stems from the lingering historical instances of experiencing bias and discrimination.

A fear cripples inside of me, that our history, language, and culture will soon extinct, as it will be subjugated by some other dominant community. Our culture is a mosaic of stories, languages, and a celebration of unity in diversity, but if we do not begin to preserve it now, then after 100 years, even the museums will not remember us.

Human evolution is always connected to the past, and the future of our evolution depends on our present actions. Historically separated human races will gradually blur and merge into a more unified global population. The process of unification has already begun, but is it a voluntary process?

(The thoughts and views expressed are the author's own.)

Chai break capitalism: India's freelancing revolution

Ishan Das

The traditional Indian work culture, once synonymous with the stability and predictability of a "sarkari naukri" is undergoing a seismic shift. Equipped with laptops and driven by ambition, a new wave of young professionals are ditching the security of a fixed pay check for the exhilarating, and often uncertain, world of freelancing – a phenomenon christened the Great Indian Hustle.

A powerful concoction of reasons, including the need for flexibility, the attraction of geographical freedom, and the possibility of an unlimited revenue stream, are responsible for the huge exodus from corporate cubicles. This mass exodus from corporate cubicles is driven by a potent cocktail of factors: the yearning for flexibility, the allure of location independence, and the potential

for an uncapped income stream. But is freelancing truly a path to freedom or a precarious gamble with financial security?

A powerful blend of reasons, including the desire for flexibility, the attraction of location independence, and the possibility of an endless income stream, is behind this flight from corporate cubicles. According to a 2023 FICCI survey, 78% of freelancers cited work-life balance as a key consideration, with the ability to plan their days around personal obligations. Furthermore, as evidenced by a report analysis, 42%

of independent freelancers value having the freedom over their work. As because, freelancing offers liberating control over time, opening doors to travel and remote workations.

The feasibility of having limitless earning potential is arguably the biggest incentive. A freelancer's income is directly correlated with their work ethic and the

value they produce, as opposed to a fixed salary. An average freelancer can command rates 15-20% higher than their traditionally employed counterparts, according to a study by the International Labour Organization.

But being a freelancer is not without its hurdles. One major issue is inconsistent income. Freelance work can have irregularities, unlike a regular pay check, which can lead to unpredictable cash flow. Nearly 60% of freelancers report experiencing this, which can be stressful, particularly for those who have dependents on their income, according to a McKinsey Global Institute report. This cycle of abundance and scarcity can pose a significant challenge to individuals seeking stable finances. The dearth of employee benefits is another problem. The social security system that comes with a regular job is usually foregone by freelancers; instead, they are

responsible for their own health insurance, paid time off, and provident funds.

For those who can navigate its complexity, freelancing can be a lucrative career path despite these obstacles. Careful planning and a proactive attitude are essential. A 2024 Upwork study claims that in today's cutthroat market, specialisation is essential. There is a great need for independent contractors with experience in UX design, cybersecurity, and data analysis. Freelancers can position themselves as valuable assets and demand higher pay by honing these skills.

Developing connections and networking are also necessary for a successful freelance career. The government recognises this potential, with initiatives like Startup India creating a supportive infrastructure. This includes streamlining the process of registering a business, providing access to credit, and simplifying

tax regulations – all essential for a thriving freelance ecosystem.

The Great Indian Hustle is a real phenomenon, driven by a changing workforce and the allure of flexibility and potentially higher earnings. But before taking the plunge, young professionals must weigh the freedom freelancing offers against the challenges of income inconsistency and a lack of traditional employee benefits. The future of work in India will likely be a hybrid landscape, with both traditional jobs and freelancing coexisting. Perhaps the answer lies in a system that empowers both – a social safety net for freelancers and skilling initiatives to make them competitive in the global marketplace. By embracing this hybrid approach, India can cultivate a thriving workforce that is both adaptable and secure.

(All views and opinions expressed are the author's own.)

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The indestructible soul: Reflections on life and death

Bibek Saikia

Life and death are inevitable aspects of human existence. Despite the grief and repentance that follow the passing of a loved one, they serve as poignant reminders of the eternal truth that death is an inherent part of life. In the face of death, even the most powerful beings, including God himself, are powerless to intervene. It is the karma of living beings that dictates the ebbs and flows of life, leading to the eventual demise of the physical body.

However, the soul, eternal and indestructible, transcends the limitations of the mortal coil, continuing its journey through the cycles of birth and rebirth.

The Essence of Life and Death:

Within the human experience, the body is subjected to various afflictions and sufferings, both physical and spiritual. The pursuit of exclusive devotion to the divine offers solace and liberation from the burdens of earthly existence. As Lord Krishna counselled Arjuna amidst the battlefield of Kurukshetra, 'the body may perish, but the soul and the supreme soul are

eternal and immutable.'

An Enlightening Encounter:

The story of Krishagautami, who sought to resurrect her deceased son through the intervention of Gautama Buddha, illustrates the futility of resisting the natural order of life and death. Despite her earnest plea, Buddha reminded her of the inevitability of death and instructed her to discern the truth through a simple test. By inquiring about births and deaths in each household, Krishagautami came to understand the universal truth that birth and death are immutable facets of existence, beyond even the

reach of divine intervention.

The Transient Nature of the Physical Body:

The Bhagavad Gita further elucidates the transient nature of the physical body. Just as one discards old clothes for new ones, the soul sheds one body to inhabit another. Death is merely a transition, determined by divine timing, with the soul continuing its journey beyond the confines of mortality.

Striving Towards Spiritual Growth:

Ultimately, the essence of life lies in striving towards spiritual growth and enlighten-

ment. By embracing the divine and recognizing its significance in our existence, we pave the way for a meaningful journey through life and beyond.

In conclusion, while death may seem like an end, it is but a transition in the eternal journey of the soul. Through acceptance and spiritual awakening, we can find solace in the understanding that life is a continuum, guided by the divine providence of the Supreme Soul.

(The author is a resident of Mayong, Morigaon. All thoughts and views expressed are the author's own.)

Manipur riots- A year of unrest



Shahruk Ahmed Mazumdar

One year ago, on May 3, 2023, ethnic violence erupted in Manipur between the Meitei people and the Kuki-Zo tribal community. According to government figures, as of February 28 this year, 219 people have been killed in the violence, and 60,000 people have been displaced. The cause of the violence erupted after the Manipur High Court ordered the state government to send a recommendation to the central government on the demand for Scheduled Tribe status by the valley-based Meitei community on April 14, 2023, a decision later criticised by the Supreme Court.

Last year, on May 3, the All Tribal Students' Union Manipur conducted a peaceful protest 'Tribal Solidarity March' marches against the Meitei demands for the scheduled tribe status. The protest turned violent in an area

bordering Bishnupur and Churachandpur districts. On May 4, the Manipur government issued a shoot-at-sight order in 'extreme cases' for escalating ethnic violence following a tribal solidarity march that displaced more than 9,000 people in the state.

According to a new report, conflict and violence triggered 69,000 displacements in South Asia in 2023, with Manipur violence alone accounting for 67,000, which comprises 97% of displacements in South Asia in 2023. The Assam Rifles and the Indian Army were deployed in the region. The vigilante groups continue to take the law into their own hands.

But great harm has also been done by the state government's lack of will to initiate a meaningful dialogue between the warring communities. One person lost his life and two others were injured after residents of two adjoining villages waged a gun battle in the early hours of Sunday. A day earlier, two CRPF personnel were killed and two others sustained injuries following a blast at the paramilitary force's outpost in Bishnupur district—one of the most brazen attacks on security forces in the past year.

On May 3, last year, Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced the formation of a committee with representatives from different ethnicities, political parties, and civil society to begin the healing process. The fact that the

committee ran into internal differences soon after has much to do with the complexities of Manipur's society.

The curfew was imposed in eight districts of Manipur, and mobile internet services were suspended in the entire region. On May 15, this year, a report that was released stated the highest number of Internet shutdowns in the world was carried out in India last year. The impacts of the Internet shutdown in Manipur were severe, particularly for women, as the shutdowns made it more difficult to document rampant atrocities, including murder, arson, and other gender-based violence, and thereby hold perpetrators accountable, the report said.

At its core, the current conflict revolves around a territorial dispute, with land being a central factor. The Meiteis are primarily confined to a landmass encompassing the Imphal Valley and its surrounding areas. Despite constituting nearly the majority of the state's population, they occupy only about 20% of the land, with the remaining territory located in the hills. The ongoing communal conflict in Manipur has significantly disrupted the state's political landscape, leading to heightened tensions, mistrust, and division among communities.

Despite the Lok Sabha elections, Manipur has witnessed a lack of enthusiasm among voters. The



ethnic violence has overshadowed the current polls, with civil society groups and affected individuals questioning the relevance of elections amid the turmoil. In the first phase of polls, Manipur experienced a relatively low turnout of 68 percent, accompanied by incidents of firing, intimidation, destruction of EVMs, and allegations of booth capturing.

Furthermore, the Election Commission of India has ordered repolling in the six booths of the outer Manipur constituency. The Manipur government has cracked down on drug smugglers. However, it flutters over political and administrative failures by blaming the

problem of illegal migrants from Myanmar, with whom the Kuki-Zomis share a common ethnicity.

On September 4, last year, UN experts urged the government to step up relief efforts and provide timely action to investigate acts of violence, hold perpetrators accountable, and foster a process of reconciliation between the Meitei, Kuki, and other impacted communities. There were significant human rights abuses in Manipur after the outbreak of ethnic conflict, the US State Department said in its Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.

(All thoughts and opinions expressed are the author's own.)

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A trip down memory lane

It was a cold and dreary December day with the sun hidden behind grey clouds and around 4pm it was already becoming dark in the hilly ride to Mokokchung. My cousin Devi and I had taken up an offer to visit our friend Athiku Sangtham who had joined politics after serving a stint with the state government and became an MP in Delhi for two terms. In his stay at Delhi Devi had helped him with logistic and finding accommodation of people from Nagaland who came to the capital city on various matters like education, medical and even marketing for specific products as well as selling quality timber furniture. Athiku used to pass on some of these people to Devi who after living in the city for over twenty five years had a good knowledge on these matters. In fact on a few occasions when I was also there in Delhi for my own work I too assisted him as I had studied there in college and knew the old Delhi areas well. I took many of them to buy motor car parts of old model vehicles used in Nagaland from the motor spares market in Kashmiri gate. They also loved to try out meals available in the old Daryaganj lanes which were known to the locals only serving excellent dishes prepared from meats of all varieties. One problem was that Athiku was a committed teetotaller and he often chided us for drinking but some of his cousins whom we met before were no fans of prohibition who enjoyed their local brew and were quite excited to host us. They knew that we would be carrying some bottles with us and were looking forward to our visit. Athiku was a perfect host and as Christmas was still a week away he welcomed us with open arms and put us up with some of his relations in a beautiful house built on a hilltop with a nice view of the town. Mokokchung is a major urban town with a lot of history due to its proximity to Jorhat in Assam. The Ao tribe is prominent there considering it their home after arriving there from their ancestral place called Chungliyimti and the Sangtham Nagas are one of the six clans of the Ao's. In the year 1992 when we visited Mokokchung there were a lot of forests extending to the Doyang river full of wildlife and I was keen to meet a person from the Unger village called Merengazumba Longkumer. I had met him in the Tezpur club with some tea planters and got introduced to him when the first thing he told me was to just call him Zumba. He had joined as an Assistant manager in a tea garden near Biswanath Charali but after eight years of working in the company he had resigned to open his own tea garden in the vast lands that he and his family owned in that village. He used

to love hunting and in the winter months he had joined me on a few occasions for some duck shoots and he had always called me to visit him and do some wild fowl and Imperial Pigeon hunting in the forests he owned. As we were visiting Athiku I had informed him about our visit and he insisted that I must spend some time with him also. So after two days of roaming around Mokokchung Devi and I went to stay in Zumba's house at Unger which was just a short drive away.

In the crisp morning air, our plan was set: breakfast with Zumba followed by a tour of his tea plantations, then an afternoon stroll through his cherished forests. Zumba's estate boasted a grand twenty-five-room mansion nestled amid wooded splendor, complete with a babbling brook on one side. Crafted in the traditional style of affluent Naga homes, it exuded timeless charm with its abundant use of seasoned timber.

As we wandered among his tea fields, I admired the meticulous care Zumba had put into cultivating them. His selection of superior clones promised both bountiful yields and exceptional quality.

Though cur-

meadows. Our destination lay beyond a distant range of hills adorned with bamboo groves, where we awaited the majestic Imperial Pigeons returning to roost. Amidst the bamboo thickets, we also sought out wild fowl, guided by the hunter's intimate knowledge of the terrain.

Pausing occasionally to check his traps, the hunter demonstrated his skill by uncovering a bounty of forest rodents and rabbits, a testament to his expertise in harvesting the forest's resources. Zumba reminisced about his father's hunts decades prior, recalling expeditions that pursued deer, bears, and even the elusive wild mithuns. Unlike the lethal traps set by other tribes, the Nagas employed intricate mechanisms designed to capture game without endangering humans.

Though unaccustomed to the rigors of forest trekking, Devi persevered until we reached our vantage

point within the bamboo groves. As dusk descended, the sky became a canvas for the returning flocks of pigeons, their graceful descent punctuated by the crack of our shots. Zumba coached me to aim carefully, resulting in a successful harvest of seven birds with two well-placed shots. Passing the shotgun to Zumba, I watched as he expertly felled five more, securing enough game for our evening meal.

Suddenly, our tranquility was shattered by a piercing cry from the hunter, his gaze fixed on something stirring amidst the bamboo thickets ahead. These bamboos had some orange/purplish coloured flowers and Zumba too turned very serious when he saw these bamboo clumps. It

appeared that those bamboos were flowering which was a very bad omen for the tribal people who lived off these forests. This bamboo flowering occurred after decades as much as 40 years and was associated with a huge increase in the forest rodent population which multiplied very fast after eating these fallen bamboo flowers and seeds. It led to the rats eating up all the rice, sorghum and corns crops the Nagas planted out in Jhum cultivation all over the forests causing famine. Zumba called off the hunt and we walked back to our vehicle leaving quite a few wild fowl surprised at not hunting them and flying off to safety. Looking back I could see that the tops of the trees and bamboos was getting filled with the numerous Pigeon flocks that had all returned for roosting. As we had walked back faster we could make it to the jeep



Ranjan Kumar Choudhury

The next morning, we bid farewell to Mokokchung, Zumba graciously sending four pigeons for Athiku.

Arriving at Athiku's amidst a family dispute, we were welcomed warmly, diffusing the tension. As an MP and elder son, Athiku juggled familial responsibilities, including mediating marital discord between his niece and her husband from a different tribe. Despite the festive pre-Christmas lunch

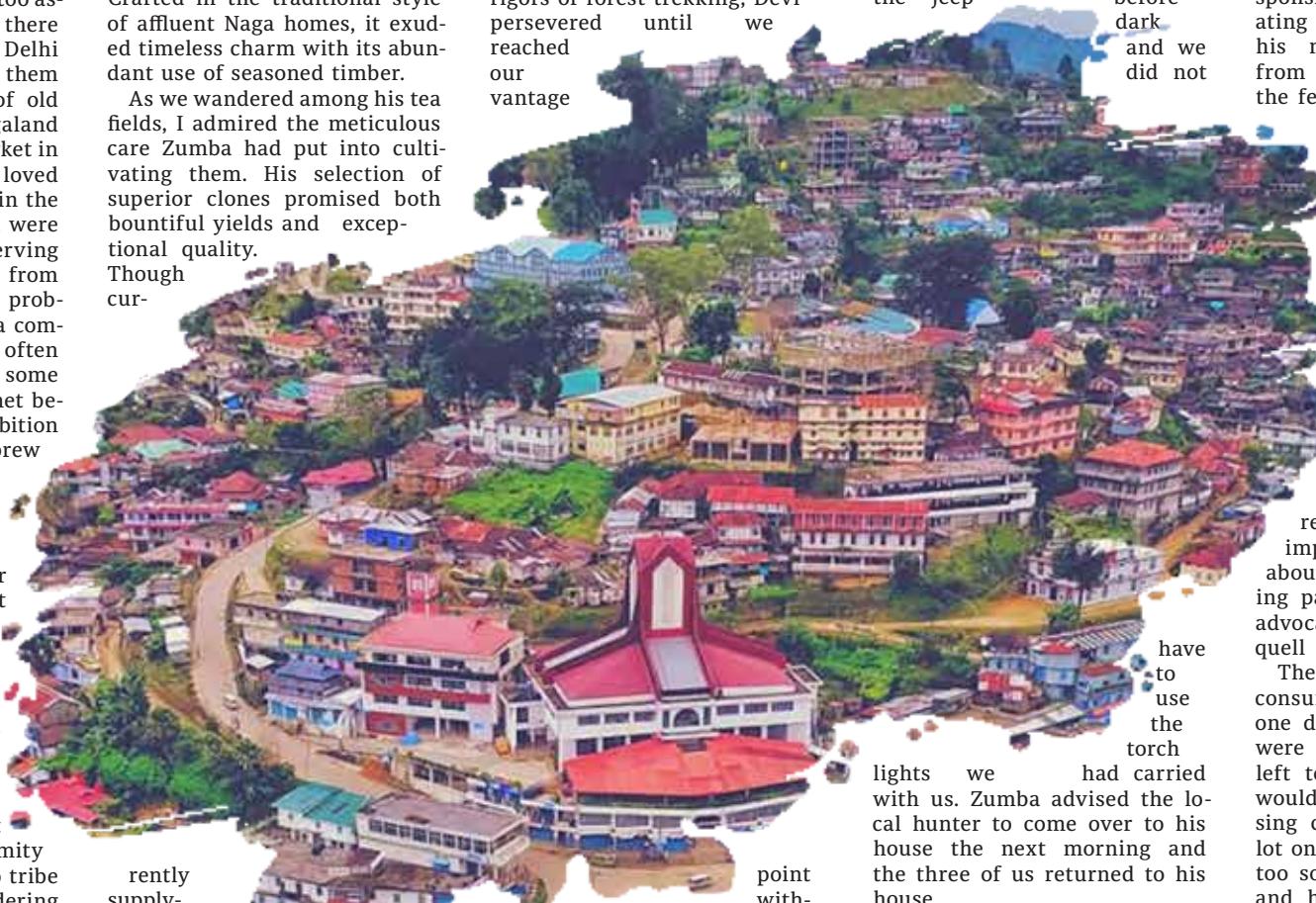
awaiting, we stole a moment to visit a relative's house nearby, indulging in a drink before rejoining the festivities.

The lavish lunch, comprising over twenty courses, unfolded slowly, each dish savored amid laughter and camaraderie. Dessert was a grand cake, marking the conclusion of a leisurely two-hour meal. Observing the reconciled couple, Athiku imparted timeless wisdom about marital harmony, likening partners to fire and water, advocating for soft words to quell fiery disputes.

The heavy lunch that was consumed was making everyone drowsy so the guests who were not staying in the house left to rest elsewhere as they would gather at night again to sing carols. We had enjoyed a lot on this trip and with Zumba too so we took leave of Athiku and his family to rest in our allotted house. We planned to leave early the next morning and we excused ourselves from the evening's function. Athiku had also given us two gift hampers of home grown vegetables, fruits and cakes baked by the family and of course a lovely heavy Naga shawl each of the Ao tribe as a memento. Going to places in the mountains is always fun and I have a lot of memorable experiences but this one was special for going with my cousin Devi, who was also a very dear friend from my childhood days.

I remember the adage from Athiku about fire and water whenever discourses around marital harmony come up in today's world. For dinner, Zumba treated us to a delectable dish of slowly roasted Imperial Pigeons, seasoned with herbs, garlic chili paste, and a dash of lime. It was a culinary delight, leaving little room for other dishes.

(All thoughts and views expressed are the author's own.)



rently supplying green leaves to an Assam factory, Zumba harbored aspirations of establishing his own tea processing facility. Additionally, he dedicated a secluded area to crafting artisanal organic teas, catering to discerning clients in Kolkata and abroad. I commended his dedication and foresight over a light lunch of sandwiches before we embarked on our woodland adventure.

Armed with a shotgun and bird shot cartridges, I followed Zumba into the forest, where we were joined by a local hunter. Parking his jeep at the village outskirts, we delved deeper into the wilderness, navigating winding trails that led through dense foliage and picturesque

Is Protestantism in India on the brink of reformation?

Phowltha Seltun

The annals of history are replete with episodes of profound transformation, where societal havoc converges with the faithful's desire for reformation. From epochal ministry of Jesus Christ's to Martin Luther's renaissance movements, these epochs have left an unambiguous impact on the fabric of Christian history. Travelling through the ages to examine the forms of reformation, we come at a point in time when the Protestant churches of Northeast India are poised to immortalise their chapter in the history of religious reformation.

"The First Reformation: The Ministry of Jesus Christ (c. 4 BCE-30 CE)". Christianity began with the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, whose impact continues to resonate for millennia. Jesus preached an uncompromising message of love, compassion, and justice in the humble town of Galilee and the teeming streets of Jerusalem. His ministry gave the downtrodden hope for atonement and emancipation by upending

the deeply ingrained hierarchies of temple and synagogue authority and social norms. The ability of faith to change is central here, allowing common men and women the strength to reject the status quo in preference for a new covenant established on grace.

"The Second Reformation (11th - 13th centuries): The Crusades and Their Aftermath".

The Crusades, a chain of military campaign ostensibly or supposedly meant to regain holy sites from Islamic dominance, began in the medieval era. Nevertheless, the initiatives were weighed down and burdened with inconceivable brutality, religious fanaticism, and geopolitical ambitions. The Christian world had a crisis of faith in the context of the Crusades as the Church contended with moral implications of its actions. The era of introspection prepared space for a reinvigorated focus on ethical conduct, spiritual piety, and ecclesiastical reform—a harbinger to the impending reformation.

"The Third Reformation (16th century): Martin Luther and the Protestant Movement". Martin Luther, a German monk of the 16th century, echoed his dissident

voice throughout Europe and beyond. Luther's publication of the Ninety-Five Theses in 1517 set up a flurry of challenges that questioned the Catholic Church's authority and spawned a theological reform movement. Sola scriptura, which demands a restoration of Scripture's precedence—a return to the primacy of scripture—was a central tenet of Luther's theology. Amidst instability and theological conflict, the Protestant Reformation emerged, heralding in a new age of plurality in religion and individual conscience.

"The Call for Reformation Today: A Northeast Indian Perspective". In Northeast India, a region teeming with cultural diversity and socio-political complexities, the conditions are ripe for a reformation within Protestant churches. Contrary to the prevailing notion that reformation is solely a Western phenomenon, Northeast India offers a unique crucible for transformative change. Here, amidst the backdrop of chaos, unrest, and the sharing of power among various ethnic and religious groups, the imperative for reformation resonates with heightened urgency.

The Protestant churches, often regarded as bastions of tradition and authority, find themselves at a pivotal juncture. While they have long served as centers of spiritual guidance and communal fellowship, their role as institutions extends far beyond the confines of religious practice. Certainly, churches have been an oasis of education, guidance on ethics, and social cohesiveness for generations of individuals, perhaps from their youngest youth.

However, in context with today's challenges, many churches' static character contrasts sharply with the expanding demands of their congregants. The potential of churches as catalysts for social and economic growth is largely untapped in a region where unemployment rates are soaring and economic prospects are few. These institutions must actively pursue sustainable lives for their people and broaden their scope beyond the spiritual sphere.

There is a substantial disparity in the monetary operations of churches particularly in the continued reliance on tithing while currently members enjoying the state tax exemption. It is crucial to realise, nevertheless, that these tax breaks might alter in other words they are subject to change. As a result, there is uncertainty about the viability of the financial system, particularly in light of the economic challenges. In fact, to uphold and preserve institutional integrity, churches need to be proactive in diversifying their sources of income and creating creative financial plans, mindful of the potential impacts of future state policy shifts.

Furthermore, the transformation of Protestant churches in Northeast India should not only focus on structural changes but also involve a profound re-evaluation of biblical teachings in the context of present-day circumstances. For instance, the passage from 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, which states that women should be silent in churches and submissive, has traditionally been used to restrict women from leadership positions within the church based on patriarchal beliefs. However, in today's society that values equality and women's rights, this passage can be reinterpreted to emphasise the importance of respectful behaviour.

and orderliness during worship, regardless of gender. This new interpretation encourages churches to promote gender equality, empower women in leadership roles, and eliminate discriminatory practices that are based on outdated understandings of scripture. Therefore, the reformation of Protestant churches in Northeast India requires a critical examination of biblical verses, challenging conventional interpretations that fit modernity and advocating for justice, equality, inclusivity, and development.

The central theme revolves around the idea that reformed churches ought to engage in business ventures that are in line with their principles and purpose. Through the establishment of self-sustaining enterprises, they can generate income to support their social projects and offer job opportunities to those who are marginalised and disadvantaged. Furthermore, they may aspire to attain autonomy akin to secular institutions, with the establishment of analogous departments. This holistic comprehensive approach not only fosters economic empowerment but also embodies the fundamental values of Christianity, which include a dedication to empathy, fairness, and the reduction of human suffering.

Moreover, it is crucial to acknowledge that relying on employment opportunities offered by external organisations, be it private or governmental, diminishes the independence and self-reliance of the church. We should embrace the inherent nature of the church as an establishment—one that not only provides spiritual nourishment but also brings about social and economic transformation. Through utilising its assets and adopting an entrepreneurial mindset, the church has the potential to serve as a symbol of optimism and prosperity in Northeast India, fostering sustainable progress and improving the lives of all those who seek solace within its walls.

Once more, it is imperative to acknowledge that reformation transcends geographical boundaries. Is it prudent for us to strive towards a more promising future by embracing Reformation?

(The author is a Ph.D scholar from RGU. All thoughts and views expressed are the author's own.)



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Salman Khan recalls shooting for *Kabootar Ja Ja* song brought him to tears



Salman Khan recently recalled the shooting from the iconic 'Kabootar Ja Ja' song from his film 'Maine Pyar Kiya' saying it brought tears to his eyes.

"I was about 18 years old, and there was a truly memorable moment during the shoot for the song 'Kabootar Ja Ja Ja' when I suddenly knew that this was the role for me", Salman said in a recent interview.

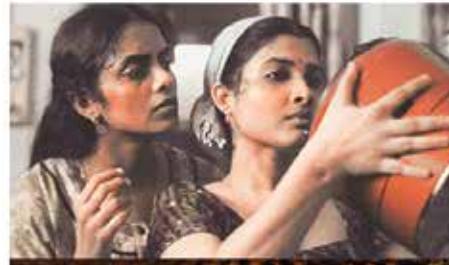
"During several narrations, I'd imagine Jackie Shroff or Anil Kapoor in those roles, but I could never actually see myself doing big films. That moment was the first time I really felt, 'Yes, I can do this'. I had tears in my eyes." he added.

Alia Bhatt's *Kalank* song *Ghar More Pardesiya* gets a shoutout from The Academy

Abhishek Varman's 2019 period romance *Kalank* may not have gotten its due then, but it got a shoutout from The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences five years later. They recently shared a song clip of 'Ghar More Pardesiya' featuring Alia Bhatt, on their official Instagram account with the caption, "Alia Bhatt performing 'Ghar More Pardesiya' (vocals by Shreya Ghoshal with Vaishali Mhade) from the film 'Kalank'". Many commented on her performance and applauded Shreya Ghoshal's vocals.



INDIAN MOVIES SCREENED AT THE 77TH CANNES FILM FESTIVAL



FESTIVAL DE CANNES



Kooki

Directed by Pranab J. Deka, *Kooki* is a Hindi film from Assam that revolves around the grief of a rape survivor who feels let down by the judicial system. It explores the multiple stages the victim endures.

Santosh

Santosh, Sandhya Suri's debut feature film, is a thrilling tale that revolves around the struggles of a recent widow who inherits her husband's job as a police constable. It is to be screened at the UN Certain Regard category at Cannes.

Sister Midnight

Sister Midnight is a black comedy directed by Karan Kandhari, about an arranged marriage couple navigating different aspects of marriage amidst societal expectations.

All We Imagine As Light

Indian cinema has always made its presence felt at the Cannes Film Festival every year, through the films being screened at the event over the years. This year's edition of the festival marked an unprecedented number of Indian films premiering at the event, with many being in the running for coveted awards.

In Retreat

In Retreat by Maisam Ali is a film that tells the journey of a man as he returns to Ladakh and tries to belong to a place at was once his home. Ali is the first Indian director to screen a film at the Association for the Diffusion of Independent Cinema (ACID) category.

The Shameless

Directed by Bulgarian director, Konstantin Bojanov, 'The Shameless' is an Indian story of two women entangled in a forbidden romance. They navigate their struggles and attempt to pave a path for their freedom in this romance-thriller.

Sunflowers Were The First To Know

Sunflowers Were The First To Know is directed by Chidanand S Naik and will be competing in the La Cinef category at Cannes. The story is about an elderly woman who steals the village's rooster, causing chaos in the community and condemning her family to exile.

Kiran Rao and Aamir Khan got married because of parental pressure, reveals Kiran

Laapata Ladies director Kiran Rao revealed that Aamir Khan and she got married because of parental pressure, in an interview with *She The People*.

She said, "I've always felt that (marriage as an institution is up for a rethink). Aamir and I lived together for a year before we got married and honestly, we did it more because parents and you know... all the rest of it". She also talks about how marriage tends to stifle, especially women, and how you could perhaps find a way to be yourself in the institution of marriage, encouraging debates and discussions on this topic.



Jennifer Lopez wore Manish Malhotra's jewellery at her 'Atlas' premiere



Hollywood actor Jennifer Lopez wore Manish Malhotra's designer jewellery to the premiere of *Atlas*, her upcoming movie on Netflix. The actress made a notable appearance with the emerald and diamond necklace designed by Bollywood's famous couture designer.

Malhotra took to Instagram with the caption, "The iconic @JLo stuns in our exquisite ILENA Necklace set, featuring special cut 165 ct emeralds and an array of trillion-cut diamonds, exuding Indian

Paltan bazar mosque: A spiritual oasis dating back to 1934

As you drive past Paltan Bazar, no one can miss the tall minaret that stands out as a landmark on the busy AT Road. The Paltan Bazar Masjid was established in 1934 under the patronage of Haji Muhammad Shah, the founder of Shah family, one of the oldest families in Guwahati.

This heritage masjid is widely recognized as one of the well-known landmarks of the city. Nestled in the heart of Paltan Bazar, this masjid has been a witness to the history of both pre and post-independent India in Assam.

The establishment of this Masjid can be traced back to when Md. Shah donated the land for the Masjid with the sole purpose of making it convenient for travellers and nearby commuters, to offer prayers (Salah).

According to Muslim rules, setting up something (like wells or mosques) for the public is considered 'Sadaqah Jariyah' (sadaqah means charity, jariyah means continuous), i.e. continuous charity. It means that when-

ever someone decides to build a mosque as an act of Sadaqah Jariyah, they are rewarded for the act. Therefore, every time someone uses the water in the mosque for wudu (a cleansing ritual in Islam before performing worship) or prays in that mosque, the person who built it is also showered with blessings.

As the congregation grew, more responsible citizens took up responsibilities as committee members and helped with the functioning of the Masjid. Currently, the Secretary and Treasurer of the masjid is Shah Nasim, and the Assistant Secretary and Treasurer is Shah Md. Farid. The Imam (man who leads the prayers) is a member of the committee and keeps changing over time.

The 90-year-old Masjid is one of the many masjids in Guwahati that provide Eid prayers every year. The Masjid is always filled with people from Pan Bazar, Lakhtokia, and Paltan Bazar, as well as travelers from all parts of Assam and other states that stop and pray there.

From its humble beginnings

Raseen Mohsina Shah

as a small masjid built on donated land, the masjid now hosts two floors for prayers and has air-conditioned facilities for the benefit of the devout. It also has a 'Musafir Khana' or Travellers' Inn that has been providing a temporary, affordable, and safe shelter for pilgrims and travelers alike for the last 90 years.

Muhammad Shah, the benefactor of the Masjid was also known for his social service work and his service to the people of Guwahati. The Md. Shah Road and the Md. Shah Memorial School, Bamunimaidan were made in his honour. He also gave gold medals to students who passed high school examination with distinction in the 1930s and 40s.

The masjid, among others stands strong as a testimony to the deeds done by Md. Shah. It allows people to take a break from the hustle and bustle of life and find a moment of solidarity within the walls of the Paltan Bazar Masjid.



Paltan Bazar Masjid

**PIC
OF THE
WEEK**



Escaping the heat | Photo: Ranjanjyoti Sarma

KAMUR OF THE WEEK

Roasting in the Sun

Oh, how utterly delightful it is to feel like I'm being slow-roasted in a sauna every time I step outside during the day in Guwahati. The rising temperatures and suffocating humidity are just what I needed to complete my transformation into a wilted lettuce leaf. Thank you, weather gods, for your impeccable sense of humor.



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