

NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

Great Nicobar Project not about defence but aimed at benefitting one Businessman: Rahul

NEW DELHI, JUN 5: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday said the Modi government's argument that the Great Nicobar Island Project is about defence and a transshipment port is a "lie", and alleged that it is actually about benefitting one businessman so that he can build hotels and casinos on India's most irreplaceable ecological land.

Gandhi released an over 16-minute video based on his visit to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in late April and urged people to sign a petition to tell the Modi government – "we choose green over greed".

"This World Environment Day, I want to ask every young Indian one question: What kind of India do you want to inherit? One where rainforests have been bulldozed for casinos, coral reefs erased from maps, tribal communities pushed off their land, and the air we breathe turned into poison? Or one where India's natural heritage is protected, our tribal communities are safe, and progress works with nature not against it," Gandhi said on X.

He alleged that right now, the Modi government is destroying Great Nicobar Island. "More than 1.5 crore trees, ancient coral reefs, irreplaceable rainforests are being destroyed to profit one businessman," the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha claimed.

"This is your inheritance they are bulldozing. And only you can stop them. Sign the petition. Tell the Modi government 'we choose Green Over Greed'," Gandhi said, sharing the link to the petition.

In his post on X along with the video, Gandhi earlier said, "I visited the southernmost tip of India. I stood at Indira Point. I walked under trees that have stood for centuries. I dove into coral reefs



among the most vibrant on earth. And I sat with the people who live there. Tribal communities, whose land is being taken away by violating the Forest Rights Act. Settlers, many of them former soldiers, placed on these islands by the Indian government, who aren't getting fair compensation." "The Modi government and BJP tells you the Great Nicobar Project is about defence. It is not," the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said. "Expand INS Baaz - we will back the government fully. The Navy has been asking for expansion for five years – it has been ignored," Gandhi said. He said the government is telling the people that the project is about a transshipment port when it is not.

India is already building one in Kerala, which is on the mainland, Gandhi pointed out. "What it actually is: 1.5 crore trees felled. Coral reefs erased from official maps. Soldiers and tribals displaced so one businessman can build hotels and casinos on India's most irreplaceable ecological land," Gandhi alleged.

"Every young Indian I have spoken to understands this. You know that no amount of profit is worth destroying what can never be recovered," he said. Gandhi said he stands for ecologically balanced development, asserting that these islands can be the most extraordinary sustainable destination

the world has ever seen. "That is the India worth fighting for, he added. In the video titled "This is what Modi doesn't want you to see", Gandhi is seen diving deep into the waters, speaking with settlers, tribal representatives and talking about his experience from the visit. "What is the plan? The plan is that you cut these thousands and thousands of trees and you illegally ship them out and you make billions and billions of dollars. And you use that money to build your hotels, your casinos and your real estate. That is what is going on," Gandhi says in the video.

He points out that the area that is being talked of is about four times the size of New Delhi.

The government is building this project in the most pristine ecological environment this country has, he says.

"They are snatching away the land from people who were made to settle there, and they are snatching away the land from tribals," Gandhi alleges. He says that INS Baaz, which is the navy base that the Congress has built, for five years, has been asking for expansion.

"If you want to make a military argument then absolutely expand INS Baaz, make it as big as you want. by the way you don't need to cut rainforest because around INS Baaz, you have plenty of land that you can expand to," Gandhi says.

Tagging Gandhi's video, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said the Great Nicobar Island Project is an "ecological disaster".

"Fanciful strategic reasons are now being invented for it whereas other alternatives exist. The environment & forest approvals for the project have been given on bogus grounds," Ramesh said on X. (Agencies)

to breathe and see things clearly," Pandey said.

Blaming hospital authorities for the loss of lives, Ahotkar said, "The staff who should have helped with evacuation chose to run away. And the hapless patients, most of whom were not able to move on their own, got trapped".

She added that a fire audit of the hospital was carried out in November last year.

"We are examining whether the hospital has been complying with the recommendations made in the audit. If not, there will be stern action. We are also issuing fresh instructions to all such institutions across the state to give top priority to fire safety," the DG said.

According to Girivar Dyal Singh, the Commissioner of Tirhut Division headquartered in Muzaffarpur, the owners of the hospital were on the run and the police have been asked to lodge an FIR. Talking to reporters after inspecting the hospital, the Commissioner said, "It is strange that the owners of

the hospital, who should have been here after such a major incident, are nowhere to be seen."

Singh said that although the district administration has set up a five-member committee to look into the fire incident, he ordered that an FIR be lodged and stringent action be taken against those found guilty of lapses.

"I have learnt that the automatic fire safety system was not functional at the hospital despite being mandatory. There have also been inputs that the short circuit followed a blast in the ventilator machine, which raises serious concerns about the upkeep of the hospital, including the ICU," he said.

All these aspects will be thoroughly looked into and stern action will be taken over any laxity in following the rules, Singh said.

According to a statement issued by the district administration, two of the deceased were women.

While three of the dead patients were locals, others hailed from adjoining dis-

tricts of Sheohar and Sitamarhi.

Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary expressed grief over the tragedy and directed Muzaffarpur administration to pay an ex-gratia of Rs four lakh to the next of kin of each deceased.

Condolences were also offered by BJP president Nitin Nabin who hails from Bihar, and his JD(U) counterpart Nitish Kumar, who stepped down as Chief Minister of the state a couple of months ago after remaining in power for two decades.

The ex-CM's son Nishant is the state's health minister, and the opposition attacked him over the incident.

"Nishant Kumar has become a minister without even being elected to the state legislature. As the minister, the least that was expected from him was a visit to Muzaffarpur with the message that with him at the helm, the health sector in Bihar was in safe hands. But we learn that he chose to visit Delhi," alleged RJD spokesman Ejaz Ahmed.



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Woman Stabbed To Death By Spurned Partner In Mohali Office

CHANDIGARH, JUN 5: A 29-year-old woman was allegedly knifed to death by her colleague and spurned partner inside the office of a private company in Mohali, the horror unfolding in full view of others who tried to stop the attack but could not, police said on Friday.

The assault took place on Thursday evening. The accused, Harvinder Mann, tried to kill himself with the same knife after repeatedly stabbing Dimple. Both were rushed to hospital where she was declared brought dead, a Mohali police official said.

Mann, whose parents live in the US, is recovering from his injuries in hospital and has been booked for murder. Both Mann and Dimple are residents of Patiala, worked at the same office and lived in separate paying guest accommodations in

"So don't give me this nonsense about the defence of India. Every single BJP person who is spreading this is trying to protect Mr. Adani, his interests and his link with the PM (Narendra Modi)," Gandhi says. He said INS Baaz should be given full right of expansion.

"Allow them to expand as much as they want, there is no need to destroy any rain forest. You can give them the best equipment, they can scale their base up as much as they want and we will support 100 per cent. We don't want Mr Adani sitting in Nicobar Islands," Gandhi says.

Tagging Gandhi's video, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said the Great Nicobar Island Project is an "ecological disaster".

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A Brij Agrawal, a native of Chhattisgarh, moved to Houston in 1979 and earned a degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Houston.

The latest donation adds to the family's longstanding record of philanthropy in the

Houston region. The Agrawals have previously contributed USD 1 million in 2022 to the University of Houston at Sugar Land to support manufacturing education and research facilities.

The varsity has named the building's ground-floor auditorium, the Brij and Sunita Agrawal Auditorium, in the couple's honour.

He credits his experience



Mohali. Purported CCTV footage from the premises shows in graphic detail what happened – the accused can be seen approaching Dimple sitting at a computer table, empty chairs to her left and right, from behind and attacking her. An employee seated at a distance appears unaware of

the man entering the room. Dimple then attempts to flee but the man, believed to be Mann, follows her and drags her by the hair. As colleagues rush to help her, he allegedly brandishes the knife at them and continues the assault. At the time of the incident, there was a shift change and only two to

three people were at present at the floor. According to preliminary investigation, Dimple and Mann were in a relationship and had parted ways a few months ago. He tried to reconnect but she rejected his proposal, a police official said, recapping events leading up to the killing. (Agencies)

Indian-American couple gives USD 5.5 million for healthcare infra in US

HOSTON, JUNE 5: A prominent Indian-American entrepreneur couple has donated USD 5.5 million to expand medical services in the Greater Houston area and its suburb in the US.

The donation by Brij Agrawal and his wife, Sunita Agrawal, will support clinical programmes at St Luke's Health&Sugar Land Hospital and help establish a nearby Primary Care Community Clinic in a city with limited access to primary healthcare.

According to hospital officials, the donation is the largest single gift in the hospital's history. In recognition, the hospital's main patient tower and pavilion will be renamed in honour of the Agrawals.

The couple, longtime Sugar Land residents, have

combined business success with philanthropy focused on healthcare, education and community development.

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5 ICU patients die after fire breaks out at private hospital in Bihar's Muzaffarpur

PATNA, JUN 5: Five patients choked to death at a private hospital in Muzaffarpur district of Bihar on Thursday after smoke filled the ICU following a fire incident, and the staff allegedly ran away leaving those admitted there in the lurch, a top official said.

A short circuit apparently triggered the fire in the hospital, and the district administration formed a committee to look into the matter.

Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary directed the authorities to pay an ex-gratia of Rs four lakh to the next of kin of each deceased.

The rescue operations began within four minutes of receipt of information that there was a fire at Prasad Hospital, situated in Brahmapura locality of the north Bihar town, Shobha Ahotkar, the Director General (Fire), told PTI Video in the state capital.

"Our brave firefighters were at the ICU, situated on the fifth floor of the hospital, within four minutes of the receipt of information, and they were able to evacuate 23 patients altogether. All the deaths have been caused by asphyxiation, and there were no burn injuries," Ahotkar said.

Fire officer R N Pandey, who had led the team that carried out the rescue operations, told reporters in Muzaffarpur that they received the information about the fire around 3 AM.

"But when we reached there, we found no flames but only dense, black smoke which was making it difficult

Digvijaya Singh writes to PM, calls for Govt white paper on exam leaks

NEW DELHI, JUNE 5: Senior Congress leader Digvijaya Singh has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the NEET-UG paper leak issue, urging the government to issue a white paper documenting the instances of paper leaks or irregularities in NTA-conducted examinations in the last eight years and the action taken on them.

Singh, who is also the chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports, said that at a time when lakhs of students are under heavy pressure, it is critical to reinforce their faith in the system. Education

"I am writing to you to raise a very important concern which several students have relayed to me in the last few weeks. At a time when the cancellation of the NEET-UG 2026 examination has wreaked havoc on the mental health of lakhs of students, one critical stressor for them has been the lack of clarity on how previous paper leaks, etc. have been investigated," Singh said in his letter to Modi.

There is presently no consolidated public record of cases relating to paper leaks and how they are being prosecuted by the CBI and other investigative agencies of the Centre and state governments, the Rajya Sabha MP said.

Amidst the absence of official information, there are plenty of reports and rumours that have taken their place, Singh pointed out.



"For instance, one repeated complaint I have received is that the main accused in the NEET-UG 2024 paper leak in Hazaribagh, Mr. Sanjeev Kumar alias Mukhiya, is reportedly out on bail. Similarly, the CBI has reportedly filed a closure report stating that no irregularities occurred in the UGC-NET exam of 2024 which had been cancelled by the National Testing Agency (NTA) back then," he said.

When asked by a Delhi court to provide a written explanation for its closure report, the CBI has asked for more time, Singh pointed out.

The CBI's delay in providing its explanation has similarly sent out a negative message among India's students, Singh said.

"To inspire renewed confidence in the administration's ability and willingness to deliver justice to India's students, I therefore propose that the Government of India issue a white paper documenting the list of instances of paper leaks and/or irregularities which have occurred in NTA-conducted examinations in the last eight

years," Singh said.

He said the white paper should also list the action taken by the NTA and the investigative agencies, including who was arrested by them, for each of these examinations.

Singh said the white paper should mention the status of each investigation – whether it is ongoing or has been completed, and if a chargesheet or closure report has been filed by the investigative agency.

It should also give reasons why a closure report may have been filed and also the status report of each of the accused and their present status (trial ongoing, on bail, convicted, etc., be given, Singh said.

"At a time when lakhs of students are under heavy pressure, it is critical that we reinforce their faith in the system. Such transparency will act as a confidence-building measure among our youth," the Congress leader said in his letter to Modi dated June 4.

"I trust that you will give the issues raised herein the urgent attention they deserve," Singh said.

Earlier this week, Singh had claimed that Prime Minister Modi is so miffed with the failures of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan that he has taken all responsibilities upon himself and if there is a leak in the NEET-UG retest, the PM's resignation would have to be demanded.

Singh had referred to the solicitor general's remarks in court a few days ago and said the PM has taken responsibility to ensure that the NEET-UG re-exam takes place successfully on June 21.

Top officials from the National Testing Agency (NTA) had told the parliamentary standing committee headed by Singh that the agency's complete focus for now was to hold the June 21 NEET-UG re-test properly in pen-paper format.

Singh and other members had questioned the NTA about the safeguards in place to prevent any paper leaks this time. The officials assured them that adequate measures have been implemented.

Committee members had also raised concerns about the potential for hacking in computer-based tests, to which the NTA representatives responded that a special committee has been formed to examine this issue, with a report expected in three months.

The NEET (UG) 2026 exam, held on May 3 by the NTA, was cancelled on May 12 amid allegations of paper leak which is now being probed by the CBI.

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