

Ram Temple Donations Row: SC Asks SIT To Conclude Probe Expeditiously, File Status Report

NEW DELHI, AUG 17: The Supreme Court on Monday asked a court-appointed Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the alleged embezzlement of donations at the Ram temple in Ayodhya to complete its investigation expeditiously and take it to a logical conclusion.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joy-malya Bagchi and V Mohana directed the SIT to file its status report in a sealed cover on the progress made in the investigation into the donations theft case.

The bench also asked the SIT to consider objectively any suggestions made by the different litigants before the court for qualitative improvement of the investigation and its transparency.

The bench said after examining the report of the SIT, the court may issue certain directions for reforms in the management of donations made by the devotees visiting the Ram temple.

On July 27, the top court



took note of the setting up of the four-member SIT headed by IGP Kiran S to probe the alleged embezzlement of donations at the Ram temple. It had asked the Uttar Pradesh government to also include a forensic auditor in the probe team.

Observing that "remedial actions will have to be taken", the bench had said steps will be taken to "ensure transparency".

The bench had also directed the SIT to submit a status report in two weeks.

On July 20, the bench had asked the Uttar Pradesh government to apprise it about the possibility of setting up an SIT to probe the alleged embezzlement of donations.

On July 13, the bench had directed the Uttar Pradesh Police to submit a status report in the matter. It had also issued a notice to the Shri

Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust on pleas seeking a fair and time-bound probe into the alleged donations theft. After allegations of irregularities in managing of donations surfaced at the temple, several petitioners, including RJD MP Sudhakar Singh, have moved the apex court seeking a probe by the CBI and a forensic audit of the finances of the temple trust. (AGENCIES)

Rahul Seeks Accountability Over UGC-NET Exam Cancellation By NTA

NEW DELHI, AUG 17: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday targeted the Modi government over the UGC-NET re-exam, and demanded that the National Testing Agency's leadership must be held accountable for it.

In a post on X, he alleged that "this is no longer an education system. It is an extraction machine". South Asians & Diaspora

"Modi ji, look at what your NTA has just done. UGC-NET exams for Sociology, English and Commerce were held between 22 and 30 June. Nearly two months later, NTA has cancelled all three because it set faulty papers and repeated old questions," he said.

Gandhi said thousands of candidates who prepared for years, filled forms, paid the fees, travelled to distant centres, must now do it all again in September.

"NTA makes the mistake but the student serves the sentence," he said.

"I said this in Kota, in



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

"Just like every other arm of the Modi government, NTA never says it's their fault. Just like every other compromised paper, I am

absolutely sure there will be no accountability," Gandhi also said. Newspaper advertising space

The Congress leader said Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation was the first step, not the last. "NTA's leadership must be held accountable too," he demanded.

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

who take it. Your years are being stolen and we will not stop until PM Modi answers for it," Gandhi said in his post.

The National Testing Agency (NTA) on Sunday announced the retest for three papers of the UGC-NET June 2026 examination -- English, Commerce and Sociology -- following complaints about several errors in these papers.

The English paper will be held on September 9 from 9 am to 12 noon in Shift 1, while the Commerce paper will be conducted the same day from 3 pm to 6 pm in Shift 2.

The Sociology paper will be held on September 10 from 9 am to 12 noon in Shift 1.

The NTA conducted the UGC-NET June 2026 examination from June 22 to 30 across 87 subjects for the award of Junior Research Fellowship (JRF), eligibility for assistant professor, and admission to PhD programmes.

Rain-soaked protest: UP schoolgirls stage second demonstration over teacher shortage in four days

NEW DELHI, AUG 17: Girl students of a government-run residential school here blocked a busy intersection in heavy rain on Monday, August 17, marking the second protest by students of the institution in four days over a shortage of teachers and disrupted classes, officials said.

The agitation by students of Jai Prakash Narayan Sarvodaya Vidyalaya drew a sharp reaction from Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, who attacked the state's BJP government over children being forced onto the streets to demand their rights.

Uttar Pradesh minister Asim Arun said the issue was linked to a pending appointment case involving guest teachers that is before the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court, with a verdict expected on Tuesday, August 18.

Students left the school around 9 am and gathered at the Dubagga-Kanpur Bypass and Balaganj intersections, carrying placards and shouting slogans over grievances affecting their education, according to the report. Some sat at the protest site with towels wrapped around their heads to shield themselves from the rain, while others linked hands to form a human chain blocking traffic.

The protest snarled traffic during the morning rush hour, prompting police deployment to restore order. The Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police (West), the ACP of Kakori, the Sub-Divisional Magistrate and the Chief Development Officer went to the site and persuaded the students to call off the demonstration. Students were then escorted back to the school, where senior officials held talks with



them, and traffic returned to normal, police said.

This was the second such protest in four days male students at the same school had staged a similar demonstration on Friday over related grievances.

A student identified as Anamika said the school day runs from 8 am to 4 pm with assembly sessions stretching nearly two hours, leaving little time for extracurricular activities. She said the school has only a chemistry teacher despite a large number of science-stream students, with no teachers posted for physics or biology.

With board examinations approaching, she said academics were suffering due to the lack of teachers, and students were also struggling with online classes. Students additionally demanded action against the school warden and the appointment of more teachers, warning of further protests if their demands go unmet.

Reacting on social media platform X, Akhilesh Yadav said the biggest failure of the BJP government, in power since 2014, was that the children up to age 14 no longer had any hope from it. He said girl students who should be

in classrooms were instead being forced onto the streets due to teacher shortages and inadequate facilities, and questioned whether Uttar Pradesh even has an education minister. He also shared a video of the protest.

Minister Arun told PTI on Monday, August 17, evening that schools run by the Social Welfare Department had adequate infrastructure build-

ings, food, education and coaching but acknowledged the teacher shortage as a genuine concern.

He said guest teachers selected last year to fill vacancies had approached the court seeking continuation of their jobs, and the matter's pendency had left some posts unfilled.

Arun said he shared the students' concerns and was worried about their academic future in the absence of adequate teaching staff. He said the department had presented its position before the court on Monday and expressed hope for a favourable order on Tuesday, August 18, adding that guest teachers would be reinstated and the selection process reviewed given questions raised over it. He said strict action would be taken

against officials found negligent, noting teachers had been unavailable at the school for nearly a month and a half.

Social Welfare Department Director Sanjeev Singh said earlier in the day that officials had engaged with students and were working to resolve their concerns through dialogue.

A department official confirmed students were taken back to campus after the morning protest, with senior officials present to discuss their demands. Police said officials from the social welfare, education and police departments, along with school authorities, held discussions with students on campus.

The teacher appointment issue is tied to a case listed for hearing before the Allahabad High Court's Lucknow bench on Monday, with further action on appointments to depend on the court's proceedings.

The protests come amid a string of similar demonstrations by school students elsewhere in Uttar Pradesh in recent months, including in Fatehpur, Hamirpur and Kannauj over education and infrastructure issues.

Konkanis, Gorkhas lead India's 80th Independence Day celebrations in Israel

JERUSALEM, AUG 17: The Indian community in Israel celebrated the country's 80th Independence Day with the largest community event at Jaffa's St. Anthony's Church, showcasing their enduring connection to their home country.

The celebrations on Saturday, organised by the Konkani community at the church, featured vibrant singing and dance performances in Kannada, Konkani, Goan and Hindi, presented by members of the Indian Konkani diaspora.

The performances showcased the community's rich cultural heritage and enduring connection with India, adding colour and spirit to the Independence Day celebrations.

India marked its 80th Independence Day celebrations on August 15.

Ambassador of India to Israel J P Singh attended the celebrations along with Father Santhosh Lobo and other prominent members of the church community.

Addressing the gathering, Singh underlined the diaspora's role in strengthening India-Israel relations, describing the community as "a



living bridge" between the two countries.

He noted that preserving their connections with India, diaspora members celebrate its festivals and traditions and contribute to a greater understanding of India in Israel.

Singh noted that Indians working in demanding circumstances have made a valuable contribution to Israeli society and built a strong and positive "brand" for the community. War &

Conflict

More than forty thousand Indians are said to be working in various sectors of the Israeli economy, with reports of many more waiting to join the workforce.

Members of the Indian Gorkha community in Israel, associated with Sahayogi Haat Samuha, also marked the 80th Independence Day with pride and unity.

First Secretary Garika Tejeswar hoisted the tricolour at the event and ap-

preciated the exemplary work of Indian caregivers in Israel.

Workplaces with a strong Indian presence also organised events on the occasion despite it being a weekend in Israel. Jerusalem's iconic Chords Bridge, also known as Friendship Bridge, was illuminated in the colours of the Indian tricolour, as a mark of "a powerful symbol of friendship, shared values and a future full of possibilities". (PTI)

Assam Cong opposes Kaziranga ESZ cut, alleges move to aid corporate mining

ASSAM, AUG 17: The Assam Congress on Monday staged a protest near Kaziranga National Park against the state government's proposal to reduce the Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) around the World Heritage Site, alleging that the move was aimed at facilitating corporate mining.

Scores of Congress workers, led by state party president and Deputy Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi, gathered at Kohora Range and raised slogans demanding protection of Kaziranga and withdrawal of the proposal.

Addressing the protesters, Gogoi alleged that the move to shrink the ESZ was part of a "deep-rooted conspiracy" to benefit corporate groups, including the Adani and Ambani groups, and facilitate large-scale commercial mining in the neighbouring Karbi Anglong hills.

He accused BJP leaders, ministers and MLAs of encroaching upon elephant corridors to build resorts and of forcibly dispossessing Adivasi families of land to construct hotels in Engle Pathar.

Gogoi further said, "Rampant illegal coal, stone and sand mining patronised by



the ruling dispensation has triggered catastrophic floods across Upper Assam, destroying over 4,000 houses and claiming more than 100 lives."

He said unabated deforestation and hill mining have also forced tigers and elephants into human settlements, escalating man-animal conflict.

Targeting Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Gogoi alleged that instead of cracking down on the 'mining mafia', the government was granting them legal protection.

He demanded the immediate release of activist

Pranab Doley, arrested under the NSA for opposing the government's "anti-people and ecology-destroying policies" of forcibly acquiring land to construct a five-star hotel near the Kaziranga National Park.

Commercial activities in the Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) or the buffer zone of a forest is either prohibited, regulated or allowed as per the set norms.

The controversy over Kaziranga National Park's ESZ stems from the Assam government's proposal to reduce the buffer area around the World Heritage Site from the default 10 km to 1 km.

The opposition and activists allege that the cut is aimed at facilitating corporate mining and tourism in the forest area along with Karbi Anglong hills, which is also an elephant corridor.

Environmentalists have also warned that a smaller buffer zone will increase man-animal conflict and threaten the fragile biodiversity.

On the other hand, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has strongly defended the move to cut the buffer zone and said the reduction is to protect villagers living inside the ESZ and safeguard their livelihood.