Separate time zone for Northeast

Why in news?

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The Gauhati High Court has dismissed a PIL seeking a direction from the Central government to notify a separate time zone for the Northeast.

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What did the judgment say?

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- Legislators, industrialists and others from the Northeast have often complained about the effect of IST on their lives, and pursued the issue of having a separate time zone, without much success.
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- None of the other proposals such as the **introduction of daylight saving time (DST)** in India has met with any approval and it is felt that having two time zones would be unsuitable.
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- The court cites a high-level committee study that recognised the **difficulties faced by a single time zone in eastern India** but concluded that IST should nonetheless be retained.
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What is Daylight Saving Time?

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- DST is the practice of **turning the clock ahead as warmer weather approaches** and back as it becomes colder again so that people will have one more hour of daylight in the afternoon and evening during the warmer season of the year.
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- Less than 40% of the countries in the world use DST. Countries in equatorial and tropical climates do not observe Daylight Saving Time.

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- DST usually starts in March-April and ends in September-November when the countries return to standard time.
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- When Germany switched to DST on April 30, 1916 for the first time, it became the first country to use DST nationwide.
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- Some studies show that DST **could lead to fewer road accidents** and injuries by supplying more daylight during the hours more people use the roads.
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- DST is also used to **reduce the amount of energy needed** for artificial lighting during the evening hours.
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What is the history of application of different time zones?

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- A cursory history of time in India reveals that the cities of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras had their own time zones, and these were determined almost precisely by their geographical longitude.
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- Bombay Time was instituted in 1905 and was maintained right up to 1955 with Bombay following its own time zone which was **38 minutes ahead** of the rest of the country.
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- In colonial times, there was a 1-hour 9-mins time difference between Kolkata and Mumbai. Yet, today these cities, which are 1,650km apart, share the same time.
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- A few years ago, the then Assam CM, frustrated with the decision of the Centre, decided that Assam would follow **ChaiBagaan time**.
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- Bagaan time or tea time is a reference to an **informal practice followed in tea gardens** in Assam which is an hour ahead of IST.
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What is the basis of the demand?

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- India stretches from 97.4 East in Arunachal to 68 East in Gujarat.
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- The time difference between the two extreme points is approximately two hours, the effect of which is that **the sun rises and sets much earlier** than it does in the rest of the country.
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- In the Northeast, the sun rises as early as four in the morning and in winter it sets by four in the evening.
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- By the time government offices or educational institutions open, **many daylight hours are already lost.**
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- In winter this problem gets even more accentuated and the ecological costs are a disaster with much more electricity having to be consumed.
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- The National Institute of Advanced Studies claim that advancing IST by half an hour would result in **saving 2.7 billion units of electricity** every year.
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Why their demand is getting rejected?

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- Two time zones is not advisable for India as it would cause **‘unimaginable chaos’,** given the country's demographic size.
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- People would have to adjust to multiple time zones & administrative integration would be difficult.
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- Also, India's lifeline, **the railways is not yet automated enough** to handle time shifts mid-journey and this could induce major accidents due to human error.
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- There is also a strong **political dimension** to granting a separate time zone in the Northeast given the region’s long history of self-determination movements.
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- The unstated assumption is that the grant of a different time zone is only the **first temporal step towards conceding spatial autonomy**.
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Source: The Hindu

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