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### PERSPECTIVE

We are adopting a multi pronged strategy to detect illegal immigrants - regulating Aadhar issuance via DCs is just one step we are taking in this direction.

- Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM, Assam

### Six killed, 20 injured in chemical factory explosion in Telangana

HYDERABAD

Six people were killed and 20 others injured, some of them critically, following an explosion in a chemical reactor at a factory in the Pashamylaram industrial area of Sangareddy district in Telangana this morning.

According to police, the explosion occurred at Sigachi Industries, triggering a massive fire that engulfed parts of the facility. Upon receiving the alert, 11 fire engines rushed to the spot and managed to bring the blaze under control. The force of the blast reportedly threw workers into the air, with some landing as far as 100 meters away. Factory management stated that around 30 workers were on duty at the time of the incident. While five workers died on the spot, one more succumbed to injuries at the hospital. The explosion also caused severe damage to the factory's manufacturing and administrative buildings. The injured were immediately shifted to a nearby hospital for treatment. Officials warned that the death toll may rise further, given the severity of injuries.

#### WHO SAID WHAT



I applaud the Assam Rifles for their strong commitment in the fight against drugs. Their continued efforts in combating illegal drug trafficking and poppy cultivation are a crucial pillar in our War on Drugs. Wishing all officers and personnel of Assam Rifles continued strength, safety, and success in your service to the people of Manipur and the Northeast.

@official\_dgar

- N. Biren Singh, Former CM, Manipur

## 'Buffer zone' imaginary, unconstitutional line: Manipur MP

IMPHAL

Inner Manipur MP Akoijam Bimol Angomcha has accused the Manipur government of enforcing an "imaginary and unconstitutional buffer zone" after he was barred by central forces from visiting Phougakchao Ikhai, a sensitive village on the edge of the Imphal Valley.

The Congress MP said he was prevented from entering the area—located between Meitei-majority Bishnupur and Kuki-majority Churachandpur districts—despite it falling within his parliamentary constituency. The village has remained heavily guarded by security forces since the ethnic violence of May 2023.

"I, an elected Member of Lok Sabha, was stopped from visiting Phougakchou-Ikhai Makha Leikai Keithel in Bishnupur district today, despite the heavy presence of security forces, including the Indian Army," Akoijam posted on X late Sunday night.

In a pointed remark, he added,



"Tellingly, civilians belonging to other communities (such as Pangals) are allowed to travel through

the same place right in front of me, a Member of Parliament of the largest democracy in the world!"

He alleged that the so-called buffer zone was being used to support "communal forces" and deepen divisions in the state. "It speaks of the clandestine ways through which the state has been nurturing a communally founded division of Manipur," he wrote.

The MP urged for truth, justice, and peace, saying, "Honest and determined efforts will solve the issue, not lies and a cynical approach."

Phougakchao Ikhai was among the first flashpoints in the ethnic conflict that erupted on May 3, 2023, when mobs from Churachandpur district torched homes in nearby Torbung. Retaliatory attacks followed in Imphal, escalating the violence that has since claimed over 260 lives and displaced thousands.

Despite heavy deployment of central forces, including the Indian Army, tensions remain high in buffer zone areas separating Meitei and Kuki populations.

## PM Modi hails Bodoland CEM Cup in 'Maan Ki Baat'

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated the transformative power of sports in Assam's Bodoland during the 123rd episode of his monthly radio address, Mann Ki Baat, on Sunday. He praised the Bodoland CEM Cup Football Tournament for uniting communities, fostering talent, and giving the region a renewed sense of identity and hope.

Modi described the tournament as more than just a sporting event; it represents a broader social shift in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).

The CEM Cup, organised by the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), aims to promote peace, youth engagement, and grassroots football development in an area once marked by unrest.

"Picture this," the Prime Minister said. "As sunlight breaks over the hills and reaches the plains, groups of football enthusiasts make their way to the field. A whistle blows, cheers erupt, and with every pass and goal, excitement builds. This isn't just imagination, it's the reality of Bodoland today."

He highlighted how the tournament takes place at multiple administrative levels, from Village Council

Development Committees (VDCs) and BTCLA constituencies to district and council-level matches, making it accessible to players across the region. Modi also commended related initiatives such as local football academies and the participation of Bodoland FC in national tournaments like the Durand Cup.

With over 3,700 teams and nearly 70,000 players, including significant participation from young women, the CEM Cup reflects a dramatic shift in the region's sports culture. "These numbers tell the story of change," Modi noted. "Bodoland is now establishing itself on the country's sports map." The Prime Minister acknowledged the region's journey from conflict to peace, crediting sports for bringing together diverse communities. "This area once symbolised struggle. Opportunities for youth were scarce. But today, their eyes carry new dreams and their hearts hold the courage of self-reliance," he said. Modi also recognised successful footballers from the region, Halicharan Narzary, Durga Boro, Apurba Narzary, and Manbir Basumatari, as role models who inspire the next generation. "They are not just athletes; they are symbols of a new era in Bodoland," he added.

## Train services resume in Northeast after week-long disruption due to landslides



GUWAHATI

After a week-long suspension caused by landslides, regular train services connecting South Assam, Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram, and the rest of the country via Guwahati resumed fully on Monday, officials from the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) confirmed.

The disruption began on June 23, when heavy rainfall triggered massive landslides in Assam's Dima Hasao district, severely damaging the railway tracks in the Lumding-Badarpur Hill Section of the Lum-

ding division.

According to a senior NFR official, both passenger and freight train services have now been restored and are operating normally through the affected stretch at Jatinga Lampur. Partial services over the Lumpur-New Haffong section resumed on Sunday.

"Our engineers and officials will continue to closely monitor the situation, especially given the ongoing monsoon season. We remain vigilant across the entire hilly terrain of the Lumding division," the official said.

On Saturday, NFR Chief Public

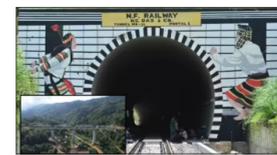
Relations Officer Kapinjal Kishore Sharma stated that the Lumpur-New Haffong route had suffered extensive damage due to multiple earth slips triggered by relentless rain.

To oversee the restoration work, NFR General Manager Chetan Kumar Shrivastava visited the site personally, reviewed the operations, and encouraged the field teams working on the ground.

"Under his leadership, maximum manpower and equipment were deployed. NFR teams worked around the clock to remove debris and restore the tracks," Sharma said. He credited the engineers and field workers for the safe and successful resumption of services through this critical hill section. In the wake of the damage, several trains had to be cancelled, diverted, or short-terminated, causing inconvenience to passengers. The NFR expressed its gratitude to the public for their patience during the disruption and advised travelers to stay updated via official communication channels for any further changes in train operations.

Each year during the monsoon months (June-September), the northeastern region — especially Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur, and southern Assam faces recurring rail disruptions due to landslides, water-logging, and track damage.

## Eco-friendly LED lighting, solar power installed in Bairabi-Sairang railway line tunnels: DEE



AIZAWL

Eco-friendly LED lighting and solar power installed in the tunnels of the recently completed 51.38-km Bairabi-Sairang railway line in Mizoram, Divisional Electrical Engineer Md Zahid Akhtar said. Md Zahid Akhtar told, "We have installed LED lighting in the tunnels, which is environment-friendly. We are also utilising solar power and plan to have a plant for the same in the future." He added that the cables installed in the tunnels will emit low smoke in case of a mishap, serving as a safety measure.

"We are also using cables that will emit low smoke in the event of any mishap, and these cables will not release toxic gases," Akhtar said.

The Bairabi-Sairang railway line in Mizoram is fully complete and awaits inauguration. Connecting Aizawl to India's rail network via Silchar, the project includes 48 tunnels and multiple bridges, marking a major boost to North East connectivity and develop-

ment. The Chief Engineer of the Bairabi-Sairang Project, Vinod Kumar, pointed out that the project was sanctioned in 2008-09 and later declared a National project.

He said the biggest challenge has been the season, as the region has a prolonged monsoon season and also has landslide issues. "This project was sanctioned in 2008-09, and later it was declared a National project. Land acquisition was completed till 2014, and then PM Modi laid the foundation stone, and now it has been completed," Kumar said. "The biggest challenge has been the season, as this region has a prolonged monsoon season and landslide issues. Additionally, there are issues related to the labour force, as most of them come from other states. We have also designed the project so that it remains unaffected even during the monsoon season. This is the second-highest bridge in Northeast India, and the life of the project is expected to be above 100 years. PM Modi laid the foundation stone in 2014, and we are happy that it is being completed in his tenure only. It is one of the government's achievements in 11 years," the Chief Engineer added.

The rail project between Bairabi and Sairang was first initiated on November 29, 2014, after Prime Minister Narendra Modi remotely unveiled the project.

# Northeast identified as new hotspots for rare earth & critical minerals: GSI

GUWAHATI

The states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have emerged as promising zones for graphite, vanadium, REEs, base metals, gold, coal and limestone, while Meghalaya and Nagaland hold extensive resources of limestone, coal, and minor strategic metals, a Geological Survey of India (GSI) report has revealed.

Rare Earth Elements (REEs) are a group of 17 chemically similar elements (including lanthanum, neodymium and yttrium) critical in magnets, electronics, and green technologies. The REEs — grouped into light and heavy categories — are indispensable in modern electronics, wind turbines, electric vehicles and defence systems.

"Since 2015, several high-impact resource estimations have been made in the region. These include 24.81 million tonnes of graphite and 17.17 million tonnes of vanadium in Arunachal Pradesh; over 6,600 million tonnes of limestone in Me-



ghalaya; more than 1,400 million tonnes of limestone in Assam and

strategic REE resource of 2.15 million tonnes in Arunachal Pradesh

and 28.64 million tonnes in Assam," the report said.

In Arunachal Pradesh, the Lodoso area in Papum Pare district has yielded a delineated resource of 2.15 million tonnes of REE-bearing ferruginous phyllite, with average grade of 1.08 per cent total REE (including Yttrium). Significant Nd (Neodymium) concentrations have also been recorded from West Siang and East Kameng districts. Assam's Jashora and Samchampi alkaline complexes have demonstrated encouraging results through petrogeochemical surveys and trench sampling. These complexes have returned REE concentrations ranging from 1000 to 5000 ppm, alongside associated elements such as Nb and Y.

The granite gneisses within Assam Meghalaya Gneissic Complex (AMGC) is also potential for REE and Rare Metal (RM).

In Meghalaya, the Sung Valley ultramafic-alkaline-carbonatite

complex has presence of titaniferous bauxite cappings.

Assam's geology is dominated by the sedimentary sequences of the Brahmaputra and Barak plains, the granitic and gneissic cores of the Mikir Hills and the Shillong Group rocks in central Assam. The State is traditionally known for its oil and natural gas reserves, but it also hosts valuable deposits of iron ore, glass sand, limestone, and REEs.

Assam's largest non-energy mineral resource is limestone, with over 1,490 million tonnes delineated from Dima Hasao district alone. These resources, hosted in the tertiary formations of the Jaintia Group, are suitable for cement and other industrial applications.

Iron ore deposits with an estimated resource of 18.29 million tonnes at an average grade of 37.45 per cent Fe have been reported from the Chandardinga area in Dhubri district.

Glass sand with high silica con-

tent has been identified in Nagaon and Karbi Anglong districts, while placer gold has been recorded from the Subansiri River basin in upper Assam. Although modest in grade, these gold occurrences are important indicators of potential upstream mineralization, the report said.

Quaternary sediments are widespread in the Brahmaputra and Barak River basins and form the fertile plains of Assam and Tripura. Though these areas are generally less prospective for hard-rock minerals, recent studies have indicated potential for placer gold and groundwater-hosted lithium, it added.

Between 2015 and 2024, GSI has carried out more than 200 mineral exploration projects and delineated 38 potential blocks in the region across multiple states—Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, and Nagaland—through Geological Reports (GR's) and Geological Memorandum (GM's).



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## THE FRAGILE CEASEFIRE IN WEST ASIA

In just three days, missiles flew, oil prices spiked, and the world held its breath. Now, a fragile ceasefire in West Asia has paused the fighting, but for India, the consequences are far from over."

Israel's operation Rising Lion on June 13 had killed many of Iran's senior generals, nuclear scientists and neutralised a large portion of Iranian air defences and enrichment facilities at Natanz and Isfahan. On June 22, 2025, West Asia edged precariously close to a regional inferno. In a coordinated operation codenamed Midnight Hammer, U.S. B-2 stealth bombers, armed with Bunker Busting Bombs, Tomahawk missiles and Israeli fighter jets, launched precision strikes on Iran's nuclear infrastructure, explicitly targeting the subterranean Fordow enrichment complex, Natanz and Isfahan nuclear facilities. President Donald Trump publicly celebrated the mission as a "surgical dismantling of a global threat". In a swift reprisal, Iran unleashed a barrage of over 200 missiles, targeting key Israeli sites, including energy nodes, urban centres, and most provocatively, the Dimona nuclear facility. Israel's Iron Dome and Arrow defence systems neutralised the majority of the missiles. Reports later confirmed that Dimona sustained structural damage, with its core systems remaining intact. Tehran also struck a US military base named Al-Udeid in Qatar, though the strike was more symbolic than lethal.

A tenuous ceasefire has been announced, but it is prone to rupture given the level of mistrust and strategic brinkmanship between the three intransigent contestants. Informed media sources suggest that the much hyped US B2 bomber strikes could, at worst, have delayed Iran's nuclear ambition by a few months. The prospects of Iran bouncing back with a vengeance to develop a nuclear bomb look plausible. And that may trigger a new phase of conflict between the warring sides. This uneasy interlude may soon fracture its strategic tremors already reverberating across energy conduits, diplomatic circles, and India's core national interests.

India's economy is perilously vulnerable to energy shocks. With over 85 per cent of crude oil imported, mainly from the Gulf, the mere threat of regional escalation sent Brent crude prices up nearly 10 per cent. Insurers hiked premiums, and Indian refiners began absorbing higher costs, which nudged inflation and widened the trade deficit. Should hostilities resume, Iran could easily target the Strait of Hormuz, through which one-fifth of the global oil supply passes. India's Strategic Petroleum Reserves offer temporary insulation, but they are finite in nature. Russian oil, while politically expedient, cannot match the Gulf's volume or logistical viability. For a country chasing 7 per cent annual growth, this is no longer a red flag- it's a strategic alarm bell.

India's Gulf diaspora-over nine million live and work in the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Their annual remittances, in the billions of dollars, sustain countless Indian households. Yet in the event of a regional conflagration, these communities become invisible hostages to geopolitical upheavals. If Iran retaliates against U.S. bases in the region or Israel conducts fresh strikes with collateral fallout, Indian expatriates could be trapped in the line of fire. While India's record in emergency evacuations be it Kuwait (1990) or Yemen (2015) and now from Israel and Iran has been exemplary, real-time coordination amid mounting chaos is a far more complex scenario. With Gulf countries wary of public panic, evacuations could become diplomatically sensitive. India's embassies have activated contingency planning, but the ceasefire's instability means any new incident could test the limits of logistical capacity and political resolve. Any casualties or delays in rescue efforts will have serious domestic repercussions.

India's Chabahar Port in Iran, a cornerstone of its regional connectivity agenda, is mired in uncertainty. Developed as an alternative gateway to Central Asia and Afghanistan, bypassing Pakistan, Chabahar was meant to anchor India's International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). However, renewed conflict has once again put Chabahar on geopolitical fault lines. If U.S. sanctions are tightened after the strikes, India's presence and investments in the project could come under scrutiny. More worryingly, an isolated Tehran may lean deeper into China's orbit, inviting Chinese capital and strategic control over Chabahar, undermining India's leverage and diminishing its counterweight to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). There is a significant dilemma: either abandon ground hard-won over two decades or recalibrate engagement through diplomatic manoeuvring and economic recalibration. India has long practised a delicate multi-vector engagement-defence collaboration with Israel, strategic convergence with the U.S., and civilizational goodwill with Iran. The recent crisis has exposed the intrinsic contradictions of this posture. New Delhi's initial response was measured, calling for restraint and de-escalation from Tehran but remaining reticent on the US and Israel. Yet as global alignments shift, India may be forced into hard choices. Washington may push for public endorsements, while Iran could demand clarity on India's regional commitments. Complicating matters further, China's role as a potential ceasefire facilitator adds a new layer of complexity to the diplomatic situation. India cannot afford to cede more diplomatic space in West Asia to Beijing or bind with the US or Israel at the cost of facing condemnation from the Islamic countries. What India offers is its ability to act as an interlocutor, respected by all sides. However, for this to happen, India will need to shed its hesitation and become more active in its outreach to West Asia. That role, if nurtured, could redefine India's global brand as a stabiliser in turbulent theatres.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

Balance your thoughts with action. — If you spend too much time thinking about a thing, you'll never get it done. -Bruce Lee

# MISUSE OF INDIAN ARMY UNIFORMS A SERIOUS NATIONAL SECURITY CONCERN

COL SHIV CHOUDHARY

India has been witnessing an increasingly troubling phenomenon: the unauthorised use and public display of Indian Army combat uniforms by civilians, private security personnel, private guards, protestors, entertainers, and even institutional authorities. Once regarded as a symbol of sacrifice, duty, and discipline, the military uniform is now too often reduced to a fashion statement or a prop for intimidation. This growing misuse is not only disrespectful to those who wear the uniform in service of the nation, but it also poses grave national security concerns and undermines the trust the Indian public places in its Armed Forces. The Indian Army's distinctive Disruptive Pattern camouflage uniform has become a common sight in places it was never meant to appear from student protests and movie sets to music videos and police deployments. While such usage may seem innocuous to some, it represents a slow erosion of military prestige and causes operational confusion in high-stakes scenarios. Worse still, the symbolic dilution of the uniform has already been weaponized by those who wish to harm the nation, making it far more than a question of optics.

The combat uniform of the Indian Army is more than just fabric; it represents the soldier's identity, the nation's sovereignty, and the line between military and civilian roles. Designed for tactical effectiveness and battlefield identification, it plays a critical role in distinguishing combatants from non-combatants and helps maintain order during joint operations. When civilians or non-military personnel wear Army-pattern camouflage, it blurs those lines and weakens the institutional integrity of the Armed Forces. In a disturbing trend, even state police and central paramilitary forces are increasingly seen in camouflage fatigues that closely resemble Army gear. During protests, law enforcement deployments, or riot control duties, the presence of such uniforms has led civilians to mistakenly believe the Army is involved despite its constitutional mandate to remain apolitical and aloof from internal law and order responsibilities. This confusion not only distorts public perception but challenges the foundational principle of military neutrality, a cornerstone of Indian democracy.

A striking case of such confusion arose in 2019 when the Rajya Sabha Secretariat introduced a new uniform for its marshals that bore an uncanny resemblance to military dress, complete with shoulder insignia and caps reminiscent of Army regalia. The move drew sharp criticism from lawmakers, veterans, and the general public. Former Army Chief General VPMalik (Retd) called it not just inappropriate but a serious security hazard. Facing the backlash, the Secretariat withdrew the new uniforms and reinstated traditional attire. Yet, the fact that such a change was proposed and approved at the highest levels of government revealed a deeper malaise: a growing insensitivity to the symbolic weight carried by military uniforms, and an institutional lack of awareness about the implications of their misuse.

India's legal framework does, on paper, prohibit the impersonation of military personnel. Section 171 of the Indian Penal Code penalizes those impersonating public servants, while Section 140 explicitly bars civilians from wearing military uniforms or insignia. The Private Security Agencies Regulation Act also restricts private guards from donning uniforms resembling those of the Armed Forces. However, enforcement of these laws remains minimal and sporadic. Online marketplaces and local vendors continue to sell military-style clothing with little to no oversight. There is no system in place to verify buyer identity or restrict the distribution of camouflage gear. As a result, near-authentic military apparel is freely available to anyone, including indi-



viduals with malicious intent. These legal provisions remain more aspirational than functional, reflecting policy inertia rather than effective governance.

The Indian Army has repeatedly voiced its concern to both the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Home Affairs. Following the 2020 anti-CAA protests in Delhi, where Delhi Police and CAPF personnel were spotted wearing combat-style gear, the Army cautioned that such visual overlap could lead to public confusion and diplomatic misinterpretation. The presence of uniformed figures resembling Army personnel during civil protests may create a false perception of military involvement, undermining the democratic principle of civilian supremacy. In conflict-prone zones like Jammu and Kashmir, where multiple forces-Army, CRPF, BSF, and state police-operate in tandem, the misuse of Army uniforms becomes a matter of operational security. The presence of Army-like attire on non-military personnel hampers coordination, confuses civilians, and makes it difficult to assign responsibility or manage accountability during joint missions. It has led to both commendable actions being misattributed and controversial incidents incorrectly blamed on the Army, eroding public trust critical to counterinsurgency efforts.

More alarmingly, this confusion has been exploited by militants with devastating consequences. The 2016 terrorist attack on the Pathankot airbase involved assailants disguised in Indian Army uniforms. The attackers used their appearance to breach security perimeters and kill seven personnel. A year earlier, in Dinanagar, terrorists similarly wore combat attire to launch a deadly assault on a police station. Incidents in Kalu Chak and Tandra further illustrate how militants have repeatedly worn Army uniforms to gain unauthorized access and carry out attacks. These were not isolated acts of deception; they were the result of systemic failure to control the distribution and visibility of military-style clothing. When the uniform becomes an easily replicable disguise, it endangers not just those who wear it, but the very institutions it represents.

There is also a significant psychological dimension to this issue. Research in the field of enclothed cognition, particularly by Professor Adam Galinsky of Columbia University, demonstrates that clothing influences both behaviour and self-perception. When civilians, guards, or protest organizers wear Army-style attire, they may begin to adopt the psychological traits associated with authority and aggression. In tense situations, this subtle shift in demeanor can escalate conflict rather than defuse it. The militarization of civilian

roles also weakens the democratic ideals of restraint, transparency, and accountable law enforcement. Popular culture has only made matters worse. From movies and web series to music videos and social media posts, the military uniform has been trivialized and commercialized. Civilians wear camouflage to parties, on motorcycles, and in photoshoots, unaware of or indifferent to the profound meaning the uniform carries. The cumulative effect is a cultural erosion of the military's symbolic power, reducing a badge of honour to mere aesthetics.

India is not alone in facing this dilemma. In countries like Iraq, Lebanon, and the Philippines, unauthorized use of military uniforms has enabled impersonation crimes, insurgent infiltration, and psychological warfare tactics. These international examples offer sobering lessons: when the symbolic and operational sanctity of a military uniform is not protected, national security is placed at risk.

India must act with urgency and clarity. The first step is strict enforcement of existing laws. Impersonation and illegal sale of military attire must be met with immediate penalties, including criminal prosecution and license cancellations. Second, the sale of combat-style gear must be tightly regulated. Only authorized stores should be permitted to sell such clothing, and buyers must be required to present valid military identification. Vendors should be mandated to maintain digital records, subject to audit. Third, CAPFs and state police forces should be issued uniforms that are clearly distinguishable from those of the Army. Camouflage should be reserved strictly for combat zones, not urban environments. Fourth, a national registry of camouflage clothing manufacturers and vendors should be created, with severe penalties for violations. Defence-run outlets and military canteens must be the exclusive sources for authentic uniform gear. Fifth, a nationwide awareness campaign must be launched to instill respect for the military uniform. Just as the public is educated to respect the national flag and anthem, the same reverence must be extended to the uniform of the Armed Forces.

The Indian Air Force has already set an example. It enforces strict control over the distribution and disposal of its uniforms, mandating that damaged or outdated clothing be returned and destroyed. Implementing similar practices in the Army and Navy would significantly reduce unauthorized access. As Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain (Retd), former GOC of the 15 Corps, rightly said, the military uniform is not a costume, it is a symbol of honour, sacrifice, and constitutional duty. Its misuse, whether by civilians

or even other security forces, disrespects the Armed Forces and weakens national integrity. The issue of military uniform misuse is not cosmetic-it strikes at the heart of identity, legality, and public trust. Each unauthorized use erodes the prestige earned through blood, sweat, and sacrifice. Each instance of impersonation, especially when exploited by adversaries, places lives and sovereignty at risk. India must not wait for another tragedy to act. Legislative reforms, regulatory enforcement, cultural awareness, and institutional discipline are essential to preserve the sanctity of the uniform and the strength of the democracy it defends.

(The writer is a motivational speaker and social worker.)

### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

I, an elected Member of Lok Sabha, was stopped from visiting Phoungakchou-Ikhai Makha Leikai Keithel (Bazar) in Bishnupur District, which falls within my parliamentary constituency (Inner Manipur) today, despite the heavy presence of security forces, including the Indian Army, in the area guarding the place. Tellingly, civilians belonging to other communities (such as Pangals) are allowed to travel through the same place right in front of me, a Member of Parliament of the largest democracy in the world! It speaks of the clandestine ways through which the state has been nurturing a communally founded division of Manipur; and drawing up and enforcing an imaginary and unconstitutional line, the so-called "buffer zone", in support of communal forces in the state. Honest and determined efforts will solve the issue, not lies and cynical approach. Let truth, justice and peace prevail!

- Angomcha Bimol Akoijam, MP (LS), Inner Manipur

## VIETNAM'S GROWING STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENTS WITH INDIA

DR BHARTI CHHIBBER

With Vietnam joining BRICS as a partner country, it has become the fourth ASEAN state in BRICS, following Indonesia which is a member and Malaysia and Thailand as partner countries. The partnership not only adds to Vietnam's diplomatic profile but also amplifies economic opportunities for wider trade, investment, and technological cooperation with other members and partners. In the evolving geopolitics, Vietnam's diversifying international collaborations resonates with its widely recognized 'Bamboo diplomacy'. Vietnam's diplomatic achievements from the Doi Moi reform in 1986 and foreign diplomacy of the Ho Chi Minh era, are reflected in the contemporary success of bamboo diplomacy of Vietnam. As Vietnam's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister Mr Bui Thanh Son said an open foreign policy creates favourable conditions for Vietnam. Asian culture is about safeguarding independence and sovereignty which bamboo diplomacy signifies. A high number of foreign visits by Vietnamese leaders to strategic and neighbouring partners has built trust and consolidated cooperation in wider domains. It has emerged as an attractive destination for foreign investors and diversifying supply chains. Vietnam's foreign diplomacy has added to its international position both in ASEAN and other international organizations. Of late Vietnam has served as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, Vice Chair of the 77th session of the UN General Assembly, and

member of the UN Human Rights Council. It has also contributed to the UN peacekeeping operations. It is the result of Vietnam's foreign diplomacy that in the security realm, naval operations in the Pacific involve Vietnam whether in the form of port visits or capacity-building by countries including the United States, India, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Japan. Many states have supported freedom of navigation, and peaceful resolution of disputes in compliance with the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea as pursued by Vietnam in the South China Sea.

Vietnam's partner status with BRICS has the potential to further solidify bilateral and multilateral collaboration between India and Vietnam. Sharing close historical and cultural ties, India and Vietnam have come a long way since the formal establishment of diplomatic relations in 1972. The deepening of bilateral collaboration from 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership' in 2016 to Joint Vision for Peace, Prospects and People adopted in 2020 are testament to their growing engagements. The two countries are also working together in the realm of security including high-level visits and defence policy dialogues. In 2023, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam Mr. Bui Thanh Son and External Affairs Minister of India Dr. S. Jaishankar co-chaired the Vietnam-India Joint Committee on Economic, Trade, Science and Technology Cooperation meeting in Hanoi. They agreed to continue to build up security cooperation as envisaged in the Joint

Vision Statement on the Vietnam-India Defence Partnership until 2030.

Cooperation received another impetus with a new plan of action which was adopted during the Prime Minister of Vietnam Mr Pham Minh Chinh's visit to India at the invitation of our Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi in August 2024. India and Vietnam signed agreements on strengthening comprehensive strategic partnerships, cooperation in customs capacity building, radio and television, and agriculture. They also agreed on a US\$300 million credit line for Vietnam to enhance its maritime security asserting the message of a free and rules-based Indo-Pacific. The 4th India-Vietnam Policy Planning Dialogue was held in New Delhi in March this year where issues of regional and global importance including the Indo-Pacific, reforms in multilateral institutions, and growth in the global South were discussed. Likewise, joint military exercise VINBAX was instituted in 2018 as an annual event conducted alternately in India and Vietnam to promote defence cooperation between the two armies and share best practices. The 5th Edition "VINBAX 2024" was conducted in India to enhance joint military capability in the deployment of Engineer Companies and Medical Teams for engineering tasks as part of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. Earlier in 2023, India also gifted indigenous missile corvette INS Kirpan to Vietnam highlighting the strong strategic partnership between the two countries. In the economic

realm, from \$200 million in the year 2000, bilateral trade between India and Vietnam has reached about US\$15 billion. The two countries are now keen to reach the US\$20 billion mark. Other significant areas of cooperation are the implementation of the Framework Agreement on Agricultural Cooperation to export fruit products to each other's markets, and digital technology. There is regular interaction through trade fairs and exhibitions to strengthen the trade ties between the two countries. In addition, within the Mekong Ganga Cooperation framework, India is working on Quick Impact Projects in Vietnam for capacity building at the community level. Spiritualism, cultural diplomacy and soft power are India's forte and India and Vietnam share the heritage of Buddhism creating a strong bond between the two. Recently, the Sacred Relics of Lord Buddha from Sarnath, India arrived in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam as part of the UN Day of Vesak celebrations with an Indian delegation led by Indian Union Minister of Parliamentary and Minority Affairs Shri Kiren Rijiju. The holy relics returned to India on 3rd June after a month-long exposition tour across Vietnam.

Moreover, the Archaeological Survey of India is also aiding the conservation and restoration of the 'My Son' in Quang Nam Province of Vietnam which is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Two-way tourism is another area where there is significant potential. Vietnam is already emerging as one of the top destinations for Indian tourists with direct flights

## Massive eviction drive in Nalbari's Bakrikuchi, 93 families displaced as bulldozers roll in

NALBARI

The Nalbari district administration, with the support of over a thousand military and paramilitary personnel, demolished more than 100 homes in Bakrikuchi, Mukalmua under the Barkhetri Revenue Circle. A total of 93 families were evicted from government land, triggering scenes of distress and anguish as many, including elderly and women, collapsed in tears on the roadside.

Residents of the evicted families cried out in despair, with one saying, "Let the government crush us under the JCB machines. Our children have been without food since 5 AM. The government has harassed us in the name of eviction. Where will we go now? Where will we live? We will die here itself." Several people, overcome with emotion, fainted on the road after losing their homes. Many now say they have no option but to live on the roadside.

This was reportedly the largest eviction operation in the history of Nalbari district. The drive was



conducted using bulldozers and excavators on government land at Bakrikuchi, which falls under Dag No. 106 of North Barkhetri Mouza—covering a total area of 452 bighas, 1 katha, and 14 lechas. The land had been under illegal occupation for years by around 93 families who had built houses, dug ponds, and created community infrastructure like Eidgah fields, government schools, and Anganwadi centres.

Earlier, the district administration had issued notices to vacate the

land. On June 3, the Barkhetri Revenue Circle office formally served eviction notices to the encroachers. Despite attempts to get a stay order from the Gauhati High Court, the petitioners faced disappointment. Following the court's verdict, the district administration launched the eviction operation today.

Ahead of the official eviction, some encroachers had already dismantled their homes and moved to other locations. This, according to Deputy Commissioner Dibakar

Das Patowary, contributed to the smooth execution of the eviction process. He confirmed that 93 families had been residing on the encroached land. Inspector General of Police (IGP) Akhilesh Singh was also present at the eviction site and asserted that no one has the right to encroach on government land. "This is government property, and no one can occupy it illegally," he said in a press briefing. It is worth noting that many of these families had originally migrated to Bakrikuchi from erosion-affected char (riverine) areas such as Kapladari and Bhangnamari. At the time, the then Revenue Minister and former Chief Minister, the late Bhumidhar Barman, had reportedly allowed them to settle in the area. IGP Akhilesh Singh stated that the government will look into the possibility of rehabilitating the evicted families in the future. He emphasized that occupying government land is illegal and expressed confidence that locals understand this principle. He also claimed that the eviction drive received full support from the public.

## "Popular govt should be brought in Manipur": BJP chief Sharda Devi

IMPHAL

Amid President's rule in Manipur, all the BJP MLAs met at the party office and discussed forming a popular government in the state, BJP President I Manipur Adhikarmayum Sharda Devi has said.

Speaking to reporters on Sunday, A Sharda Devi said, "All the MLAs of BJP met at the party office. We had a discussion on the overall situation in the state. We had a discussion that the popular government should be brought to Manipur. All the MLAs were present here. The BJP is united."

Meanwhile, Manipur's former Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Saturday stated that efforts are being made to find an "amicable solution" and restore peace to the ethnic violence-hit Manipur, further stating that meetings were also being held with the BJP and NDA MLAs to form a government in the state.

"We are only focusing on the current crisis. We are approaching the Cen-

tral government and concerned persons to find an amicable solution and bring peace to the state of Manipur. We are also meeting the BJP and NDA MLAs to form a government in the state of Manipur. Now peace is being restored, and the Central government, under the leadership of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, is working day and night to bring peace," said Singh while speaking to reporters here.

On May 28, ten MLAs, including eight from the BJP, one from the NPP, and one independent MLA, met Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla at Imphal's Raj Bhavan and demanded the formation of a "popular" government in the ethnic violence-hit state. Their meeting with the Governor came amid a civil disobedience campaign in Imphal valley led by a Meitei organisation, which alleged that Central armed forces had insulted the state's identity by masking the words "Manipur State Transport" on a state-run bus on May 20.

## "Send my son back": Grieving mother's tearful appeal to ULFA (I) commander Paresh Baruah

GUWAHATI

The mother of a missing youth from Uday Nagar, Sadiya, Assam has urged ULFA (Independent) chief commander Paresh Baruah to allow her son to return home. With her health deteriorating and her heart burdened by years of silence, the mother called upon the militant leader to show compassion and facilitate her son's return.

The appeal concerns Janardan Gogoi, a married man who left his home on April 16, 2022, under the pretext of traveling to Tinsukia for official work. He never returned, and is believed to have joined the banned insurgent outfit ULFA (Independent).

The family's ordeal intensified after Janardan's disappearance—especially since it came barely four months after the death of his father. Now, his aging and ailing mother lives in constant anguish, awaiting a reunion that grows more uncertain with each passing day.

Janardan's wife and young son, too, remain hopeful, though their lives have been shadowed by emotional and financial instability. The household, once secure and whole, is now on the verge of collapse.

"I spend each day praying for his return. My health is failing. I just want to see my only son once again," the mother said through tears.

Adding to the heartfelt appeal, Janardan's elder sister also reached out to her brother, urging him to consider the emotional toll his absence has taken on the family and to return home for their sake.

## Statue of renowned Karbi folklorist 'Ru Bonglong Terang' unveiled in Diphu

SUSHANTA ROY

DIPHU: Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang, graced two significant events today as the Chief Guest. On Sunday afternoon, the KAAC Chief Tuliram Ronghang, unveiled a statue of the esteemed Karbi folklorist, writer, and cultural reformer, Ru Bonglong Terang, at the Karbi Lammet Amei - KLA (Karbi Sahitya Sabha) office in Diphu. The ceremony, chaired by Karbi Lammet Amei (KLA) General Secretary Liladhar Teron and other office bearers, marked a significant tribute to Terang's enduring legacy. Before the unveiling, CEM Ronghang paid homage to Ru Bonglong Terang's portrait, seeking divine blessings and guidance. Addressing the gathering, Ronghang highlighted the importance of preserving Terang's contributions to Karbi society, urg-

ing the youth to follow his legacy. "Although I didn't know Ru Bonglong Terang personally, his writings reflect his immense dedication to our culture and traditions," Ronghang remarked. Ru Bonglong Terang was a pivotal figure in promoting and preserving Karbi heritage through his literary works. His contributions earned him the prestigious Karbi Lamkuru Sarpoo Award in 1973 from Karbi Lammet Amei, along with numerous other accolades. The statue, crafted by renowned sculptor Diben Timung, took six months to complete under the direction of KLA officials. The event was graced by notable dignitaries, including Member of Legislative Assembly Bidyaseng Englang (Diphu LAC) and Padma Shree Dhaneswar Engti, among others, who gathered to honor Terang's profound impact on Karbi culture.

## Manipur MLA calls for unity and peace in state amid crisis, urges people to avoid hatred

IMPHAL

Sapam Nishikanta Singh urged Manipur to reject hatred and division. He linked global crises to local unrest in Manipur. Rotary Club of Imphal recognised key frontline workers' contributions.

Amid the ongoing unrest and ethnic strife in Manipur, Independent MLA of Keishamthong Constituency, Sapam Nishikanta Singh, made a heartfelt appeal for preserving the idea of Manipur by shunning hatred and enmity. The MLA was speaking as the Chief Guest at the 53rd Installation Ceremony of the Board of Directors (2025-2026) of the Rotary Club of Imphal, held at the Club's office in Mantripukhri, Imphal East.

Addressing the gathering, Nishikanta expressed grave concern over the continuing instability in the state. "The people of Manipur must act with caution and compassion. Unless we prevent the spread of hatred and division, the very essence of Manipur is at risk," he said. He emphasized that Manipur should function as a bridge between communities, not a barrier divided along ethnic lines.

Speaking in the context of the global and



local crises, the legislator referred to 2025 as a year of 'Mangal' (calamity). "We are witnessing devastating incidents globally — the Russia-Ukraine conflict, tensions between Israel and Iran, the India-Pakistan standoff, and the recent tragic crash of a London-bound flight that claimed the lives of two daughters of Manipur," he lamented. He added that Manipur, too, has been grappling with two years of continuous unrest that requires immediate healing and reconstruction efforts.

He encouraged citizens to engage in noble deeds and contribute to restoring peace and harmony in the state. "This is a time for reflection and compassion. We must all

contribute to healing and hope," he said, expressing optimism about the reinstatement of a popular government in the near future.

Praising the Rotary Club of Imphal for its ongoing humanitarian efforts, he remarked, "Humanity knows no boundaries. I hope the Club's service continues to reach every nook and corner of the state."

The event also honoured individuals from essential services for their dedicated contributions. Awardees included:

Rotary Meritorious Civil Constable 2025: Lisham Sanjit Singh  
Rotary Traffic Police Personnel 2025: Waikhom Ratan Singh  
Rotary Nurse 2025: Leimapokpam Ranjita Devi

Rotary Journalist 2025: Phurailatpam Keny Devi  
Rotary Fireman 2025: N. Iboishak Singh

In addition, scholarships were awarded to selected students, and wheelchairs and hearing aids were distributed as part of the Club's outreach initiatives.

The newly appointed office bearers of the Rotary Club of Imphal were also congratulated and extended best wishes by the MLA.

## Meghalaya SIT recovers key evidence in chilling Sohra killing

SHILLONG

A breakthrough in the Sohra murder case has brought investigators closer to unravelling the conspiracy behind Raja Raghuvanshi's brutal killing. The Meghalaya Police Special Investigation Team (SIT) recovered critical evidence, including Raja's missing gold chain, during a raid at the home of arrested property dealer Silom James in Ratlam district, Madhya Pradesh, officials confirmed on Sunday. The operation led to the seizure of gold jewellery, laptops belonging to Raja and his wife Sonam, and other incriminating materials.

"The electronic devices and documents seized hold significant evidentiary value and may shed further light on the May 23 murder case involving Sonam Raghuvanshi and her lover Raj Kushwaha," East Khasi

Hills SP Vivek Syiem said.

Sub-inspectors Anthony Khongsit and Karan Pachua led the SIT team and were supported by personnel from Alkapuri Police Station during the well-coordinated operation, Syiem told.

The SIT busted the carefully orchestrated plot behind the murder of Raja Raghuvanshi, whose decomposed body was recovered near Weisawdong Falls on June 2, ten days after he and his wife went missing from Sohra. According to investigators, the couple had rented a scooter from Keatinge Road in the city on May 22 and travelled to Sohra. After failing to secure a room at a homestay due to a lack of prior booking, they left their luggage and trekked down 3,000 steps from Mawlakhat to Nongriat, where they spent the night.

The next morning, they checked out around 5:30 am and began their ascent back to Mawlakhat, where they parked their rented scooter.

Unknown to Raja, they were being trailed by three other persons from Indore, known to Sonam and later were identified to be the hitmen. A tourist guide and an Instagram user had separately spotted and recorded the group on their trek, videos of which surfaced online after the five accused were rounded up from Indore. By 11 am on May 23, the group had reached a secluded area near Weisawdong Falls where Raja was brutally attacked with 2 machetes and his body dumped into a nearby gorge.

The three assailants, along with Sonam, fled the scene minutes later, as confirmed by Syiem.

"This wasn't a random act. The

attack was calculated. Initially, it seemed like Sonam and her boyfriend had hired contract killers. But we've now confirmed the three men were close friends of Raj and killed him as a favour to Sonam," Syiem told. The SIT has now confirmed that the hitmen procured the murder weapon, a machete, in Guwahati before arriving in Shillong on May 21. All individuals involved arrived around the same time, travelling to Sohra soon after. Sonam, who fled the scene by taxi, was arrested in Uttar Pradesh on June 9. Her mangalsutra and a ring were found abandoned at a Sohra homestay, further implicating her. DGP I Nongrang, who is personally monitoring the investigation, stated, "We are looking at all possible angles. It's unusual for such deep animosity to develop within days of marriage.

## 706 hectares added under Mango cultivation since 2018: Tripura minister Ratan Lal



AGARTALA

Tripura Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Minister Ratan Lal Nath on Sunday highlighted the remarkable strides made in mango cultivation in Tripura, revealing that since 2018, nearly 706 hectares of land have been newly brought under mango cultivation through various government-backed initiatives.

Addressing the gathering at the Monsoon Mango Fiesta 2025 held at Narikel Kunj, Gandatwisa in Dhalai district, Minister Nath emphasized the state's natural advantages for mango farming. "Tripura's tropical climate, moderate temperature, abundant rainfall, and fertile soil provide an ideal environment for mango cultivation. Since 2018, the government has laid significant focus on fruit cultivation to empower farmers and make them economically self-reliant," he said.

Currently, the total area under fruit cultivation in Tripura stands at 58,491 hectares, yielding around 5,98,241 metric tonnes annually. Of this, mango orchards alone cover 10,192 hectares, with a production output of 51,368 metric tonnes, averaging 5.04 MT per hectare.

The Horticulture and Research Centre at Nagichara is nurturing 13 indigenous improved mango varieties such as Ambika, Arunika, Amrapalli, and Himsagar. In addition, the state also grows 22 improved foreign varieties, including the famed Miyazaki, Haribhanga, Yellow Banana, Japanese All Time, and Thai Himsagar.

In Gandatwisa subdivision, mango cultivation has seen robust development since 2018. Presently, 186 farmers manage 4 indigenous and 18 foreign orchards covering

277 hectares of land. Remarkably, Gandatwisa reports a higher-than-average yield of 8 to 9 MT per hectare, surpassing the state average of 5.04 MT and approaching the national average of 9.66 MT per hectare.

The economic returns have also been encouraging. The net income per hectare is estimated between Rs 5 to 6 lakh annually. This year, Gandatwisa farmers sold local mango varieties at wholesale prices ranging between Rs 50 to Rs 70 per kg, while foreign varieties fetched between Rs 150 to Rs 300 per kg in key markets including Agartala, Ambassa, Kumarghat, and Dharmanagar.

To further enhance productivity, drip irrigation facilities under the PMKSY scheme have been introduced in nine mango orchards. Additionally, 30 hectares of old mango gardens have already been revived, with another 18 hectares targeted for rejuvenation this year. In a significant development, 130 farmers from the subdivision will undergo training in advanced fruit cultivation technology this year.

The government has also set a target to bring 50 hectares of new area under mango cultivation in Gandatwisa.

Beyond mangoes, diversification is also on the agenda. Plans are in place for pineapple cultivation across 10 hectares and jackfruit cultivation in 1 hectare.

In an effort to strengthen the post-harvest ecosystem, 10 Solar-Based Cool Chambers have already been established across the state. This year, an additional cool chamber will be set up in Gandatwisa, offering local fruit farmers better storage solutions and reducing post-harvest losses.

## Mizoram: 'Remna Ni' commemorated with message of unity and peace in Aizawl

AIZAWL

Remna Ni, Mizoram Peace Accord Day, was commemorated today at Lamual, Aizawl, in a solemn yet spirited celebration organised by the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) General Headquarters.

Mizoram Chief Minister Pu Lalduhoma graced the occasion as Chief Guest, accompanied by his wife, Pi Liangsailovi. The programme commenced with the ceremonial hoisting of the Remna Ni Flag by the Chief Minister, followed by a stirring rendition of "Ro Min Reksak Ang Che" by the 1st Battalion Mizoram Armed Police Brass Band, setting a reflective tone for the event. In his address, the Chief Minister extended warm greetings to the Zo people worldwide, commending the MZP for organising the event at such a symbolically significant venue. He described peace as the "bedrock of development" and assured the gathering that his government remains steadfast in its commitment to safeguarding and promoting peace in the state.

"Unrest is a threat to progress," he said, calling on citizens to uphold



peaceful coexistence. He also spoke of Mizoram's future, highlighting plans for major infrastructural upgrades, especially through enhanced north-south connectivity. These developments, he noted, would also foster greater ties with communities outside the state.

Pu Lalduhoma stressed the importance of unity across differences, reminding the audience that Mizo nationalism must remain rooted in inclusivity and collective progress. "True nationalism uplifts others and builds togetherness," he said.

He also urged continued cooperation with the Central Government, regardless of political differences, in the larger interest of Mizoram. Cautioning against divisive rhetoric, he emphasised, "Politics must be guided by mutual respect. Let us uphold dignity in public discourse."

Referring to a recent remark by the Union Home Minister that nearly half of Mizoram's crimes were committed by refugees, the Chief Minister expressed concern. "It is regrettable that the actions of a few miscreants tarnish the image of

many law-abiding individuals. I appeal to all our refugee friends to respect the laws of our land," he said, while urging for harmony in society.

The event was chaired by MZP Vice President Dr. C. Lahremruata. Rev. Dr. Lalmangaiha, General Secretary of the Council of Churches of Mizoram (CCM), led the opening prayers, and MZP General Secretary Pu Chinkhanmanga Thomte presented the annual report.

In his remarks, MZP President Pu H. Lalthianghlina underlined that Remna Ni is a day for unity beyond politics and generations. "This celebration is not about glorifying the past, but about honouring unsung heroes and giving thanks for the gift of peace," he stated.

Among the dignitaries present were Home Minister Pu K. Sapdanga; Ministers Pu B. Lachanzova and Pu F. Rodingliana; Deputy Speaker Pu Lalfamkima; Chief Minister's Adviser Pu Lalmuanpuia Punte; and several senior government officials and public leaders.

Since 2018, the MZP has honoured individuals and organisations for their contributions to peace. However, this year, no peace honours were conferred.

Remna Ni marks the signing of the historic 1986 Mizoram Peace Accord, which ended decades of insurgency and laid the foundation for peace and democratic governance in the state.

Quest!

You will remember a person's name better if you hold their gaze as you're being introduced.

## Law student 'gangrape' pre-planned, accused trio targeted victim for quite some time: Police



KOLKATA

Three out of the four persons arrested in connection with the alleged gang-rape of a female student at a city-based law college had pre-planned the assault, a police officer said on Monday.

Deaths of the nine-member Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the incident also found that the three accused — Monojit Mishra, Pratim Mukherjee and Zaid Ahmed — had a history of sexually harassing female students of the college.

The fourth accused

is the college's security guard. According to the officer, the trio would record such episodes on their mobile phones and later use the footage to blackmail the victims. "The entire matter was premeditated. The trio had been plotting for several days to carry out this torture on the victim. We have found that the victim was targeted by the prime accused from the very first day she got admission to the college," the police officer said.

Kolkata Police has launched a search for mobile videos allegedly filmed by the trio.

"Searches were conducted at the residences of accused Mukherjee and Ahmed on Sunday. We are looking for footage related to this and possibly other incidents," the officer said.

The investigators also said a video clip of the June 25 alleged gangrape might have been shared by the accused.

"We are trying to find out whether those clips were forwarded or shared with some other groups. In that case, we have to get in touch with those who have received that," the officer said. The SIT has prepared a list of over 25 people, mostly students of South Calcutta Law College, who were present at the educational institution on June 25 evening, he said.

"All these people will be questioned in connection with the investigation. We have to find out what they witnessed that evening," he said.

A female student of South Calcutta Law College in the city's Kasba area was allegedly gangraped by three persons, including an alumnus of the educational institution and two current students.

## Karnataka congress unrest: General Secretary Surjewala to gauge mood of party MLAs, report to High Command



BENGALURU

With certain Congress MLAs raising their voices against the ruling Congress government led by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, AICC General Secretary and Karnataka in-charge Randeep Singh Surjewala is camping in the state capital for three days starting today to hear their grievances.

Amid speculations about a change in leadership in the government and the KPCC president post, Surjewala is likely to assess the mood of the MLAs and report to the party high command,

according to sources.

His exhaustive exercise is also crucial to evaluate the performance of the government and its ministers so that the high command can decide whether to reshuffle the Siddaramaiah cabinet or bring about a change in the Chief Minister, sources added.

Each day, Surjewala will meet around forty MLAs, spending an average of twenty minutes with each, and is expected to cover all 137 legislators over the three-day period.

The MLAs are likely to raise issues such as lack of developmental funds for their respective



constituencies and non-cooperation by ministers. Surjewala is also expected to gather information on the implementation of the guarantees and the party's organisational strength at the grassroots level.

In addition to the legislators, he is likely to meet party functionaries who wish to express their opinions. He will begin with senior leader B.R. Patil, a Siddaramaiah associate, who recently triggered controversy by alleging corruption in the housing department.

Supporting Patil, MLA Raju Kage also alleged delays in the

issuance of work orders for government-approved development works. Following instructions from the high command, Siddaramaiah had called both of them, as well as Housing Minister Zameer Ahmed Khan, for separate discussions on the matter.

Recently, Cooperation Minister K.N. Rajanna predicted a "revolution" in state politics after September. Analysts interpret this as an indirect message to the party high command that if Siddaramaiah is asked to step down in October, after completing two and a half years as CM, it could lead to political developments.

However, Siddaramaiah's son, Dr. Yathindra, MLC, has stated that the high command has not issued any instructions for his father to step down and that he will continue as CM. Hitting out at the Siddaramaiah camp, DCM D.K. Shivakumar's loyalist and Ramanagara MLA Iqbal Hussain stated that there was an agreement at the high command level that there should be a change in leadership after two and a half years. Siddaramaiah must pass the baton, and D.K. Shivakumar will become CM, as the high command is expected to make a decision in two to three months, he said. "I am eager to meet Surjewala today regarding the funds for development in my constituency and to express my opinion on the government and the ministers. However, I wish Siddaramaiah to continue as CM, as no other leader can manage the state of affairs in Karnataka," a senior MLA from the Old Mysuru region told.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Debate is underway in the Senate on Trump's big bill. It may go all night

WASHINGTON

Debate is underway in the Senate for an all-night session Sunday, with Republicans wrestling President Donald Trump's big bill of tax breaks and spending cuts over mounting Democratic opposition — and even some brake-pumping over the budget slashing by the president himself.

The outcome from the weekend of work in the Senate remains uncertain and highly volatile. GOP leaders are rushing to meet Trump's Fourth of July deadline to pass the package, but they barely secured enough support to muscle it past a procedural hurdle in a tense scene the day before. A handful of Republican holdouts revolted, and it took phone calls from Trump and a visit from Vice President JD Vance to keep it on track.

GOP Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina announced Sunday he would not seek reelection after Trump badgered him for saying he could not vote for the bill with its steep Medicaid cuts. A new analysis from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office found that 11.8 million more Americans would become uninsured by 2034 if the bill became law. It also said the package would increase the deficit by nearly \$3.3 trillion over the decade.

But other Senate Republicans, along with conservatives in the House, are pushing for steeper cuts, particularly to health care, drawing their own unexpected warning from Trump. "Don't go too crazy!" the president posted on social media. "REMEMBER, you still have to get reelected."

All told, the Senate bill includes some \$4 trillion in tax cuts, making permanent Trump's 2017 rates, which would expire at the end of the year if Congress fails to act, while adding the new

ones he campaigned on, including no taxes on tips.

The Senate package would roll back billions in green energy tax credits that Democrats warn will wipe out wind and solar investments nationwide, and impose \$1.2 trillion in cuts, largely to Medicaid and food stamps, by imposing work requirements and making sign-up eligibility more stringent.

Additionally, the bill would provide a \$350 billion infusion for border and national security, including for deportations, some of it paid for with new fees charged to immigrants.

If the Senate can push through overnight voting and pass the bill, it would need to return to the House. Speaker Mike Johnson has told lawmakers to be on call for a return to Washington this coming week.

Unable to stop the march toward passage of the 940-page bill, the Democrats as the minority party in Congress is using the tools at its disposal to delay and drag out the process.

Democrats forced a full reading of the text, which took some 16 hours. Then senators took over the debate, filling the chamber with speeches, while Republicans largely stood aside.

"Reckless and irresponsible," said Sen. Gary Peters of Michigan. "A gift to the billionaire class," said Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont.

Sen. Patty Murray, the ranking Democrat on the Appropriations Committee, raised particular concern about the accounting method being used by the Republicans, which says the tax breaks from Trump's first term are now "current policy" and the cost of extending them should not be counted toward deficits.

"In my 33 years here in the United States Senate, things have never — never — worked

this way," said Murray, the longest-serving Democrat on the Budget Committee.

She said that kind of "magic math" won't fly with Americans trying to balance their own household books.

"Go back home and try that game with your constituents," she said. "We still need to kick people off their health care — that's too expensive. We still need to close those hospitals — we have to cut costs. And we still have to kick people off SNAP — because the debt is out of control."

Sanders said Tillis' decision not to seek reelection shows the hold that Trump's cult of personality has over the GOP.

"We are literally taking food out of the mouths of hungry kids," Sanders said, while giving tax breaks to Jeff Bezos and other wealthy billionaires.

Republicans are using their majorities to push aside Democratic opposition, and appeared undeterred, even as they have run into a series of political and policy setbacks.

"We're going to pass the 'Big, beautiful bill,'" said Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., the Budget Committee chairman.

The holdout Republicans remain reluctant to give their votes, and their leaders have almost no room to spare, given their narrow majorities. Essentially, they can afford three dissenters in the Senate, with its 53-47 GOP edge, and about as many in the House, if all members are present and voting.

Trump, who has at times allowed wiggle room on his deadline, kept the pressure on lawmakers to finish. He threatened to campaign against Tillis, who was worried that Medicaid cuts would leave many without health care in his state. Trump badgered Tillis again on Sunday morning, saying the senator "has hurt the

great people of North Carolina."

Later Sunday, Tillis issued a lengthy statement announcing he would not seek reelection in 2026.

In an impassioned evening speech, Tillis shared his views arguing the Senate approach is a betrayal of Trump's promise not to kick people off health care.

"We could take the time to get this right," he thundered. But until then, he said he would remain opposed.

Using a congressional process called budget reconciliation, the Republicans can muscle the bill through on a simple majority vote in the Senate, rather than the typical 60-vote threshold needed to overcome objections.

Without the filibuster, Democrats have latched on to other tools to mount their objections.

One is the full reading of the bill text, which has been done in past situations. Democrats also intend to use their full 10 hours of available debate time, now underway.

And then Democrats are prepared to propose dozens of amendments to the package that would be considered in an all-night voting session — or all-day, depending on the hour.

As Saturday's vote tally teetered, attention turned to Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, who was surrounded by GOP leaders in intense conversation. She voted "yes."

Several provisions in the package are designed for her state in Alaska, but some were out of compliance of the strict rules by the Senate parliamentarian.

A short time later, Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., drew holdouts Sen. Rick Scott of Florida, Mike Lee of Utah and Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming to his office. Vance joined in.

Later, Scott said, "We all want to get to yes."

### India's ban on ships carrying Pakistani cargo hits shipping costs, delays freight: Report



ISLAMABAD

India's ban on ships carrying Pakistani goods from anchoring at its ports has increased freight charges and transit time, according to a media report.

Following the Pahalgam terror attack, India imposed a comprehensive ban, effective May 2, 2025, on the direct or indirect import or transit of goods originating in or exported from Pakistan.

Pakistani importers said the Indian ban has resulted in longer shipping times and higher freight charges, Dawn newspaper reported on Sunday.

"Mother vessels are not coming to Pakistan due to this Indian action, which delays our imports

by 30 to 50 days," said Javed Bilwani, President of the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

He said importers are now relying on feeder vessels, which raises costs.

Exporters also reported a spike in shipping and insurance costs following the Indian ban. However, they said the overall impact on exports remains minimal, the paper reported. "There is no significant impact on exports... except for a rise in insurance costs. Shipping charges had already gone up even before the escalation," said Aamir Aziz, an exporter of textile made-ups.

Pakistan's exports are heavily reliant on imported inputs for value addi-

tion. With the government maintaining tight controls on imports to conserve foreign exchange, any disruption in supply chains has broader economic implications, the paper said.

The India-Pakistan trade relations soured after the Pulwama terror attack, following which India raised the import duty to 200 per cent on all goods imported from Pakistan.

Formal trade relations between Pakistan and India have remained frozen since 2019, and bilateral trade declined from USD 2.41 billion in 2018 to USD 1.2 billion in 2024.

Pakistan's exports to India decreased from USD 547.5 million in 2019 to just USD 480,000 in 2024.

## DHUBRI FLARE-UP RAISES QUESTIONS ON ASSAM'S COMMUNAL RESILIENCE



The recent incident in Dhubri, Assam, where a severed cow's head was discovered at a Hanuman temple, has once again brought the complex dynamics of religious harmony and citizenship identity in Assam into sharp focus. The incident, which occurred on June 7, 2025, during Eid celebrations, triggered widespread protests and led to 38 arrests as authorities scrambled to restore order in this Muslim-majority town bordering Bangladesh. In continuation of the similar incident on June 18, a severed head of a cow was found outside a Namghar, in Lakhimpur, Assam.

**The Dhubri Incident: A Catalyst for Concern**

What began as a disturbing act of religious provocation quickly escalated into communal tensions that required the intervention of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who issued shoot-at-sight orders to maintain law and order. The incident was particularly troubling as it was repeated the following day, suggesting a deliberate attempt to inflame religious sentiments in a region already sensitive to demographic and cultural changes.

The discovery of banned meat at the Bajrangbali temple in Ward No. 3 of Dhubri town sparked immediate outrage among the local Hindu community, leading to protests and heightened tensions. The incident represents more than just a criminal act; it symbolizes the fragile nature of communal harmony in a state that has long grappled with questions of identity, citizenship, and demographic transformation.

**Instances of Unity Amidst Division**

Despite the recent tensions, Assam has numerous examples of Hindu-Muslim unity that deserve recognition. Throughout the state's history, communities have come together during natural disasters, cultural celebrations, and times of crisis. The syncretic culture of Assam, influenced by various religious and ethnic traditions, has historically been a source of strength.

Many local leaders from both communities have consistently worked to bridge divides and promote understanding. Educational institutions, cultural organizations, and civil society groups continue to foster interfaith dialogue and cooperation. These efforts, though sometimes overshadowed by incidents like the Dhubri case, represent the true spirit of Assamese society.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, instances of Muslims providing food to Hindu families and

Hindus supporting Muslim COVID-19 victims demonstrated that communal harmony remains strong at the grassroots level. Similarly, during floods and other natural disasters, religious boundaries often dissolve as communities unite to help each other.

**The Path Forward: Religious Harmony**

The Dhubri incident serves as a reminder that religious harmony cannot be taken for granted and requires continuous effort from all sections of society. Several steps are essential for maintaining harmony:

**Community Leadership:** Religious and community leaders must take responsibility for promoting tolerance and understanding. They should actively discourage provocative acts and work to defuse tensions before they escalate.

**Education and Awareness:** Educational initiatives that promote understanding of Assam's diverse heritage and the importance of peaceful coexistence are crucial. Schools and colleges should emphasize the shared history and common interests of all communities.

**Economic Development:** Many communal tensions have underlying economic causes. Ensuring equitable development and opportunities for all communities can help reduce competition and mistrust.

**Transparent Governance:** Government actions and policies must be transparent and fair, avoiding any perception of bias toward particular communities. Officials must be held accountable for maintaining law and order while protecting the rights of all citizens.

**Safeguarding Indian Values:** The preservation of India's constitutional values of secularism, pluralism, and respect for all religions must be paramount. Acts that deliberately hurt religious sentiments or attempt to disturb communal harmony strike at the very foundation of Indian democracy and must be recognized as attacks on the nation's core principles.

**Deterrent Punishment:** There must be strict and severe punishment for perpetrators of communal provocations. The legal system should ensure swift justice for those who engage in acts designed to inflame religious tensions. This includes not only immediate criminal charges but also provisions under existing laws such as the Indian Penal Code sections dealing with deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings, and relevant provisions of state-specific laws aimed at maintaining communal harmony.

**Upholding Constitutional Values and Ensuring Justice**

The Dhubri incident, followed by Lakhimpur represents more than a local law and order problem; it constitutes an assault on the fundamental values that define India as a nation. The Indian

Constitution enshrines secularism, religious tolerance, and the right to practice one's faith freely. When individuals or groups deliberately target religious sites or symbols, they undermine these constitutional principles and threaten the very fabric of Indian society.

The perpetrators of such heinous acts must face the full force of the law. India's legal framework provides adequate provisions for dealing with communal provocations, which addresses deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings. Additionally, various state laws and central legislation provide mechanisms for swift and decisive action against those who seek to disturb communal harmony.

However, the application of the laws must be consistent and unwavering. Too often, communal provocateurs escape with minimal consequences, emboldening others to commit similar acts. The message must be clear: attacking religious sentiments and attempting to create communal discord will result in severe legal consequences, including imprisonment and financial penalties.

**The Imperative of Deterrent Action**

The response to incidents like the

Dhubri case must serve as a deterrent to potential perpetrators. This requires not only immediate arrests and charges but also fast-track prosecution to ensure that justice is delivered swiftly. Delayed justice often leads to further communal tensions and can be perceived as weakness by those who seek to exploit religious divisions for their own purposes.

The investigation into the Dhubri incident must be thorough and professional, ensuring that all those involved, including any conspirators or instigators, are brought to justice. The authorities must also examine whether the incident was part of a larger pattern or conspiracy aimed at creating communal unrest in the region.

**Conclusion: Building a Harmonious Future**

The Dhubri and Lakhimpur incident, while disturbing, should serve as a wake-up call for all stakeholders to recommit to the principles of religious harmony. Assam's journey toward resolving its demographic and citizenship challenges requires patience, wisdom, and good faith from all communities.

The state's rich cultural heritage, which includes contributions from various religious and ethnic groups, provides a foundation for building a harmonious future. However, this requires active effort from government, civil society, and ordinary citizens to prevent incidents like the Dhubri and Lakhimpur from undermining the social fabric.

Moving forward, Assam must find ways to address legitimate concerns about cultural preservation while ensuring that these concerns do not translate into communal animosity. The goal should be to create a society where all rightful citizens, regardless of their religious or ethnic background, can live with dignity and security.

The path ahead requires acknowledging past mistakes, learning from successful examples of unity, and building institutions that can effectively address grievances before they escalate into violence. Equally important is the need to demonstrate that Indian values of tolerance, respect, and unity are non-negotiable, and that those who attack these values will face severe consequences.

Only through such comprehensive efforts—combining strict law enforcement with community building—can Assam achieve the harmony and stability that its people deserve. The state must send a clear message that while it welcomes diversity and protects the rights of all citizens, it will not tolerate attempts to exploit religious differences for divisive purposes.

The Dhubri incident may have temporarily disrupted peace, but it also presents an opportunity for renewal and recommitment to the values that make Assam a unique and vibrant part of India.

The choice between division and unity ultimately lies with the people of Assam, and their decision will shape not only their own future but also serve as an example for other diverse societies facing similar challenges.

It is also the responsibility of the government to act swiftly to prevent such heinous acts and provide a response which acts as a deterrent for such future acts.

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