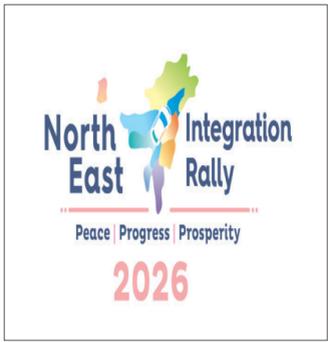




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PERSPECTIVE

“The highest status people in human history are those that asked for nothing and gave everything.”

Manipuri film Boong to hit theatres on Sept 19

IMPHAL

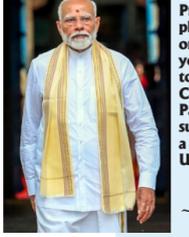


National award-winning filmmaker Lakshmi Priya Devi's critically acclaimed Manipuri film Boong is set for a theatrical release on September 19.

Jointly produced by Farhan Akhtar and Ritesh Sidhwani's Excel Entertainment along with Chalkboard Entertainment and Suitable Pictures, the film stars Gugun Kipgen and Bala Hijam in lead roles. According to a press release, Boong will be screened in select cities and cinemas under PVR INOX. Set in a Manipuri village, the story follows a young boy and his single mother as they struggle with the mysterious disappearance of his father, Joykumar, who vanished while working away from home. The uncertainty—whether he is dead or has abandoned them—drives the narrative. Determined to bring closure and joy to his mother, the boy embarks on an emotional journey with his best friend to find his missing father.

The film, which has already drawn attention at film festivals, now looks to connect with wider audiences through its theatrical run.

WHO SAID WHAT



Thank you, my friend, President Trump, for your phone call and warm greetings on my 75th birthday. Like you, I am also fully committed to taking the India-US Comprehensive and Global Partnership to new heights. We support your initiatives towards a peaceful resolution of the Ukraine conflict.

~ Narendra Modi, PM India

Assam Congress to file police complaint against BJP over alleged AI videos targeting Gaurav Gogoi and Muslims

GUWAHATI

The Assam Congress on September 18 said it will file a police complaint against the BJP for circulating alleged AI-generated videos on social media targeting state Congress president Gaurav Gogoi and the Muslim community.

An Assam Congress spokesperson said the complaint will be lodged at the Dispur Police Station here for registering an FIR. The party alleged that the BJP's IT cell had circulated videos using artificial intelligence to spread misinformation.

The videos, according to Congress, carried captions such as "Assam without BJP" accompanied by AI-generated visuals of Muslims taking over Guwahati's airport, stadium, and Rangghar amphitheatre. Another video claimed, "We can't let this dream of pajjan (outsider) be true" and appealed to people "to choose to vote carefully."

The BJP, the Congress alleged, has been referring to Gogoi as "pajjan" ever since Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma accused him of having alleged links with Pakistan's ISI.

Reacting to the videos, Gogoi said that the BJP was attempting



to communalise the election campaign. "The words, actions and images produced by the BJP IT cell do not have the strength to scratch the surface of Assamese society. We will file a police complaint over AI-generated videos uploaded by the BJP targeting me and the Muslim community," Gogoi said.

Gogoi asserted that the proud Assamese people want politics that lifts the state to new heights. "Assam has been nurtured by Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardev, Ajan Pir, Swargadeo Sukapha, Lachit Borphukan and Bhupen Hazarika. People with links to smuggling of cattle, coal, betel leaves, drugs will not dictate the Assamese mind," he added.

Gogoi emphasised that the Congress wants to build "a society of

pilots, engineers, doctors, entrepreneurs, bankers and business owners."

The BJP, however, countered Gogoi's remarks. The party alleged in a social media post that Gogoi was promising to build "a paradise" where his own hometown did not feature. "He screams about a Bor Axom (great Assam) day and night, but when it comes to his own constituency Koliabor, he has nothing but a promised land reserved for the Kanglaju (sic). Step down, No one is buying it," the BJP wrote.

Meanwhile, Assam Information and Public Relations Minister Pijush Hazarika alleged that Congress leaders had always spoken about "illegal immigrants who are changing Assam's demography," yet were now raising claims of Islamophobia. "If saying the presence of illegal immigrants is Islamophobia, then aren't they themselves suggesting that all Muslims are illegal immigrants?" Hazarika asked.

He also criticised the Congress for allegedly enjoying "the failed ecosystem of journalists" and said that if AI was used to depict what Assam would look like if "pajjan" grabbed power, "the picture would not be different."

All Schools, Colleges Closed in Manipur Following Flood, Landslide Crisis



IMPHAL

All educational institutions across Manipur will remain closed on September 16, as heavy rainfall continues to trigger flooding and landslides in multiple districts of the northeastern state.

The state government issued two separate orders on September 15, with the Directorate of Education ordering closure of all schools while the Directorate of University and Higher Education shutting down colleges in valley districts.

Ng. Bhogendra Meitei, Di-

rector of Education, announced that all schools across the state - including government, central government, private, aided and unaided institutions - will remain closed on Tuesday due to prevailing weather conditions that have caused floods and landslides across various districts.

Meanwhile, L. Radhakanta, Director of University and Higher Education, specifically ordered closure of colleges in five valley districts - Imphal West, Imphal East, Bishnupur, Kakching and Thoubal - citing incessant rain over the past few days and subsequent flooding in different parts of these areas.

The comprehensive shutdown affects thousands of students from primary level to higher education across the state. The decision underlines the severity of the weather situation, with authorities taking a precautionary approach to ensure safety of students and staff. Educational authorities are monitoring the situation closely and are expected to announce resumption of classes once weather conditions improve and safety can be ensured for the academic community.

Tripura govt to launch initiatives to strengthen tribal welfare: CM Saha



AGARTALA

Tripura is stepping up efforts to support its tribal communities with the launch of Adi Seva Kendras and new administrative measures aimed at improving governance and development programs.

The state government will establish Adi Seva Kendras across Tripura to provide a single-window system for addressing the issues of tribal residents. One day each week will be dedicated to resolving complaints under a "Seva Hour," and "Seva Day" will be observed monthly.

The announcement was made by Chief Minister Manik Saha at the State Level Orientation Programme and State Process Labs under the Aadi Karmayogi Abhiyan at Prajna Bhavan.

To strengthen administrative oversight, TCS-equivalent officers will be appointed at every subdivision and district level to ensure effective implementation of tribal welfare programs.

"Officers and employees are the driving force of the government, as policies are implemented through them," Saha said.

Highlighting the Prime Minister's vision, Saha added, "PM Modi says that the country will not develop until the most marginalised improve in all aspects. There are about 700 tribal groups across the country, of which 19 are in our state. Many of their subgroups are gradually disappearing."

He emphasised the responsibility of officials to ensure proper execution of government programmes, guided by the principles of Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas.

The Adi Karmayogi Abhiyan has already appointed 8 master trainers, 40 district master trainers, and 260 block master trainers at the State Process Lab. These trainers will serve around 8 lakh tribals in 392 revenue villages. So far, 789 Gram Panchayats and Village Committees in 52 blocks across 8 districts have benefited from the Dharti Aava Janajati Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan.

The government also plans to set up nine Forest Rights Cells and has approved Rs. 14.21 crore for 119 Anganwadi centres. Additionally, the honorary allowance for Janajati community leaders has been increased to Rs. 5,000.

"Our government wants development to reach the last person and the last family," Saha said, stressing the administration's focus on inclusive growth and welfare for tribal communities.

Manipur Govt Unveils Online Portal for Citizen Grievances



IMPHAL

The Manipur government on September 17 launched the "Nation First @75 Campaign" alongside an online grievance redressal portal aimed at improving citizen engagement and service delivery, officials said.

Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla inaugurated the campaign and the "GovConnect Manipur" portal at Raj Bhavan in the presence of Chief Secretary Puneet Kumar Goel, NDDB Chairman Meenesh Shah, and senior officials.

The campaign, part of the state's efforts under Viksit Bharat Viksit Manipur, focuses on rural development, women's empowerment, skill-building, and digital governance, aligning with the national Swasth Nari Sashakt Pariwar Abhiyan (SNSPA). Running from September 17 to October 2, it will target initiatives in

environment, entrepreneurship, fitness, Atmanirbhar Bharat, Fit India, PMJANMAN, Aspirational Districts, and local industry promotion under Vocal for Local and Make in India.

GovConnect Manipur provides 24x7 online grievance registration, instant confirmation with a unique tracking ID, and WhatsApp integration for real-time updates. Bhalla said, "The launch of the portal marks a transformative leap for the administration by embracing digital technologies and reaffirms our commitment to transparency, accountability, and responsive governance for every citizen of Manipur." He urged residents to actively use the platform to strengthen government responsiveness.

Five other initiatives were unveiled along with the portal: measures to strengthen the Manipur

Milk Union, Migration Support Centres in Delhi, Bangalore, and Hyderabad, a Residential Skill Development Program for cabin crew placement, and four new digital services from the Transport Department.

As part of the dairy development drive, a ₹5 crore cheque was handed to the Manipur Milk Union, and a 2KL Bulk Milk Cooling Centre was inaugurated at Kakching. Certificates were also distributed to three trainees completing the cabin crew skill program. The Milk Union initiative aims to improve rural livelihoods, nutritional security, and the role of women in the sector, officials said.

The Migration Support Centres are expected to help skilled youth secure employment in major cities, while the skill development program provides global career opportunities. New digital transport services aim to streamline citizen access and enhance administrative efficiency.

The campaign called on youth and women to actively participate in these initiatives, emphasising citizen involvement in building a model of development and progress in the state.

Ethnic clashes between the Meitei and Kuki communities since May 2023 have left more than 260 dead and thousands displaced, underscoring the need for improved governance and citizen outreach.

Power, Education, Health Ministries Among Top Changes in Meghalaya Cabinet

SHILLONG

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma has allocated portfolios to the newly sworn-in ministers of his Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA-II) government, a day after eight of the state's 12 ministers stepped down to make way for a reshuffle.

The Chief Minister will retain Cabinet Affairs, the Finance Department, and any portfolios not specifically assigned to others. Deputy Chief Ministers Prestone Tynsong and Sniawbhalang Dhar have been handed crucial responsibilities. Tynsong will look after Home (Police), Public Works (Roads and Buildings), District Council Affairs, and Parliamentary Affairs, while Dhar will oversee Urban Affairs, Transport, Commerce and Industries, and Prisons and Correctional Services.

Among the senior leaders, United Democratic Party (UDP) chief Metbah Lyngdoh has been



given charge of Power, Water Resources, and Taxation. His party colleague Lakhmen Rymbui will handle Education,

Revenue and Disaster Management. Former deputy speaker Timothy D. Shira will now lead

Tourism and Agriculture, in addition to Fisheries, while Brending A. Sangma has been allotted Excise and Border Area Development.

ment. Wailadmiki Shylla will take on Sports and Youth Affairs, along with Health and Family Welfare.

Sanbor Shullai, who entered the cabinet after replacing AL Hek, has been assigned multiple portfolios, including Animal Husbandry and Veterinary, Fisheries, Printing and Stationery, and Secretariat Administration. Sosthenes Sohtun will head Community and Rural Development and the General Administration Department, while Hill State People's Democratic Party legislator Methodius Dkhar will manage Food and Civil Supplies.

NPP leader Marcuse N. Marak will continue to handle Public Health Engineering, Housing, and Soil and Water Conservation.

The expansion and reshuffle, which brought in eight MLAs—seven of them fresh faces—marks one of the most significant reorganisations of the MDA-II cabinet since its formation.

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GST 2.0: EMPOWERING INDIA'S ECONOMY

In a landmark move that underscores the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the GST Council has rolled out sweeping reforms under what is being hailed as GST 2.0. These changes, effective from September 22, 2025, simplify the tax structure to just two primary slabs – 5% and 18% while introducing zero percent tax on essential items and a 40% rate on select luxury goods. This overhaul is not merely a fiscal adjustment; it is a strategic masterstroke designed to boost domestic consumption, invigorate economic growth, and provide much-needed relief to the common Indian citizen amid global uncertainties.

Under Prime Minister Modi's stewardship, the BJP commands a strong position in Parliament to drive these transformative policies. With 240 seats in the Lok Sabha alone, as secured in the 2024 general elections, the party, along with its NDA allies, holds a commanding majority to pass legislation swiftly and effectively. This parliamentary strength has enabled the seamless implementation of GST 2.0, reflecting the trust reposed in Modi's leadership by the Indian electorate.

At the heart of these reforms is a commitment to making life easier for millions of Indians. By rationalizing tax rates, the government aims to reduce the cost of living, stimulate manufacturing, and foster a more inclusive economy. Daily essentials such as hair oil, soap, shampoo, toothbrushes, toothpaste, bicycles, and kitchenware will now attract only 5% GST, down from higher slabs previously. Small cars, which were burdened with a 28% tax, will see a reduction to 18%, making them more affordable for middle-class families.

Even more significantly, a host of items will become entirely tax-free, including life-saving drugs, individual health insurance policies, and several school stationery products. Notebooks, pencils, erasers, maps, and even geometry and colour boxes previously taxed at 12% or higher will now be available at zero percent GST, directly benefiting students and parents across the nation. This reduction from as high as 28% on certain items to zero percent on many everyday necessities exemplifies the BJP-led government's people-centric approach, ensuring that education and basic needs are not luxuries but rights accessible to all.

These reforms come at a pivotal time when the global trade landscape is fraught with challenges, particularly from the aggressive tariff policies of US President Donald Trump. Trump's imposition of up to 50% tariffs on Indian exports, ostensibly as retaliation for India's continued purchase of Russian oil, threatens to disrupt supply chains and impact sectors like textiles, jewelry, and apparel, which could potentially shave off 0.8% of India's GDP if prolonged.

However, GST 2.0 serves as a robust countermeasure. By slashing taxes on domestic goods, these reforms encourage local consumption and manufacturing, reducing reliance on exports vulnerable to such tariffs. This shift bolsters the 'Make in India' initiative, making Indian products more competitive at home and potentially in alternative global markets. As domestic demand surges due to lower prices, it cushions the blow from external shocks, ensuring that India's economic engine keeps humming without significant disruptions.

Importantly, these changes will not adversely affect India's GDP; in fact, they are poised to enhance it. The simplified tax structure is expected to improve compliance, widen the tax base, and spur consumer spending, leading to higher economic activity overall. Projections indicate that the focus on affordability for essentials will drive growth in key sectors without inflationary pressures, maintaining fiscal stability. The BJP government, with its proven track record, knows precisely how to navigate such situations—balancing bold reforms with prudent economic management.

I must take a moment to appreciate Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for her instrumental role in architecting these reforms. Her meticulous planning and unwavering dedication have made goods cheaper for Indian consumers, alleviating financial burdens on households and small businesses alike. Sitharaman's leadership in the GST Council has turned complex taxation into a tool for empowerment, ensuring that the benefits trickle down to the last mile.

As India goes global, these reforms align perfectly with our ambitions. While countering protectionist measures like Trump's tariffs, the BJP government is fortifying the 'Make in India' program, particularly in the defence sector. Investments in indigenous manufacturing of defence equipment not only reduce import dependencies but also position India as a reliable exporter in a multipolar world. This dual strategy of domestic resilience and global outreach is strengthening our economy, creating jobs, and enhancing national security.

In a commendable move by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, the Union Budget 2025-26 had also introduced several duty reductions and GST reforms that make essential items more affordable, acting as a true Diwali bonanza for poor and middle-class families. Consumer durables and building materials now attract reduced GST easing the financial burden on middle-class households and enabling more festive spending on home improvements and appliances.

On the flip side, the budget wisely increased costs on luxury and non-essential items to curb extravagant spending and encourage responsible consumption, while ensuring the nation's economic equilibrium remains intact. This strategic approach balances GDP growth—projected at 6.3-6.8% for FY 2025-26—by stimulating demand in essential sectors like agriculture, MSMEs, and manufacturing through lower input costs and tax reliefs up to ₹12.75 lakh income slab, fostering employment and domestic production.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

“One who believes in himself has no need to convince others.” - Lao Tzu

YOUTH REVOLT, HOPE AND CHAOS



ASHOK OGRA

Student and youth protests have long acted as powerful accelerators in the course of history as they are the first to rise when change is needed. What often starts as a small spark on a university campus can quickly spread and shake entire nations. This year alone, countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal have seen how student and youth anger can grow overnight into massive movements that topple leaders who once seemed untouchable.

Admittedly, Interim Governments have been established in both Bangladesh and Nepal; however, the future remains fraught with constitutional crises.

Also, one must credit the military leaderships of countries like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal for resisting the temptation to seize power during times of crisis. This restraint is quite remarkable, especially when compared to neighboring Pakistan, where the army has often taken control at the slightest pretext.

What social media has done in recent years is to boost protest gatherings dramatically. A single video of police violence or a viral hashtag can gather thousands in protest within hours. The streets fill quickly, voices amplify, and Governments find themselves scrambling to respond.

But if history has taught us anything, it is that the collapse of authority rarely leads to a smooth or easy transition. Students and young people have always been brilliant at tearing down old systems, but less successful at building new ones. Their idealism can go astray – leading to confusion, division, or even new forms of repression.

These uprisings often create political vacuums. In the days following the fall of a regime, chaos can reign before any order is restored.

This pattern is as old as the modern era itself. In South Asia, for instance, student protests have repeatedly shaken the foundations of power. In 1990, students helped end General Ershad's authoritarian rule in Bangladesh, but democracy since then has been marked by fierce, often bitter political clashes, leaving institutions weak and the country's future uncertain.

Sri Lanka offers a similar story. Student and youth protests (as well as the public) were instrumental in bringing down Mahinda Rajapaksa's Government amid the 2022 economic crisis, reflecting deep dissatisfaction among the younger generation and wider population. But like so many uprisings before it, the fall of a leader has not yet translated into lasting political stability. The aftershocks continue, reminding us that while student and youth movements have the energy to demand change,

they often struggle to define what comes next.

Across the world, these patterns repeat. The late 1960s saw an explosion of youth activism that reshaped societies in profound ways. In France, the events of May 1968 remain legendary. Students began by occupying universities, protesting rigid educational systems and authoritarianism. Police clashed violently with protesters, and the hero of World War II, President Charles de Gaulle, fearing the collapse of the state, briefly fled to a military base to consult his generals. The protests didn't lead to revolution in the strict sense, but they permanently shifted French politics, culture, and society, inspiring generations to question authority and demand change.

In Eastern Europe, student activism was a constant thorn in the side of communist regimes. The 1956 Hungarian uprising, sparked by students in Budapest, was crushed within days by Soviet tanks. Twelve years later, in 1968, the Prague Spring saw students join intellectuals demanding reform in Czechoslovakia-only to be violently suppressed by another Soviet invasion. It was not until 1989, when Soviet power finally began to crumble, that student-led protests helped bring down the Communist regimes in places like Prague and Budapest peacefully. Even then, the joy of revolution was tempered by the economic hardships and political fragmentation that followed.

In the United States, the 1960s and early 1970s were marked by fierce student activism centered on the Vietnam War and civil rights. Campuses like Berkeley, Columbia, and Kent State became battlegrounds of political dissent. Students organized massive protests, sit-ins, and teach-ins that helped shift public opinion and delegitimize the war effort. While American democracy survived, the era exposed deep cultural and political divides whose effects remain visible today.

Elsewhere, student protests had darker outcomes. In Iran, students played a central role in toppling the Shah in 1979, initially pushing for a pluralistic revolution. However, their hopes were soon dashed as the new regime became a theocratic dictatorship, with students eventually becoming tools of state repression themselves. Indonesia's experience was similar. Students helped remove Sukarno in 1966, but this paved the way for General Suharto's decades-long authoritarian rule. Even when Suharto was ousted in 1998, the transition was marred by riots, economic collapse, and ethnic violence before some stability returned.

Who can forget the scenes witnessed during the Tiananmen Square protests against the Chinese Government in 1989?

The recurring thread throughout all these movements is the same: students and young people possess the idealism, energy, and moral

clarity to challenge entrenched power. They are less weighed down by the compromises and responsibilities that come with governance. Protests can dismantle the old order, but building a new one requires organization, patience, and often, compromise—things that are hard to sustain amid the emotional intensity of youth.

The internet also amplifies misinformation and factionalism, making post-protest politics even more chaotic. In this way, social media gives protest wings but no anchor.

India's own history of student and youth protests mirrors these global patterns. Since independence, students have been a key barometer of social and political change. From the anti-Hindi agitations in Tamil Nadu in the 1960s to the radical Naxalite movements in Bengal during the 1970s, student activism has repeatedly pushed the nation to confront its social and political contradictions.

The 1970s also saw students mobilize against corruption and authoritarianism, culminating in the Bihar Movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan, which directly challenged Indira Gandhi's Government, and that ultimately led to the imposition of the draconian and unconstitutional Emergency in 1975. Fortunately, people's verdict prevailed and she was overthrown from power in 1977.

The 1980s and 1990s saw protests over issues like illegal immigration in Assam and caste-based reservations. Yet, much like elsewhere, the energy and hope generated by these protests have rarely translated into sustained institutional reforms or shifts in governance.

What drives students and young people to protest? It is partly a psychological mix of emotional intensity, moral idealism, and a quest for identity. Young people at university and beyond are forming their worldview and often confront a world that fails to live up to their ideals. They feel the gap sharply between what society promises and what it delivers. This sense of injustice, combined with the collective courage that comes from joining peers, fuels rebellion.

But history reminds us of a sobering truth: students and young people excel at resistance but struggle with governance. The aftermath of a protest requires different skills than the protest itself.

This romanticism of rebellion is best captured in the Bollywood film *Hazaaron Khwaishen Aisi* (2003), and the descent from idealism to disillusionment in the film *Yuva* (2004).

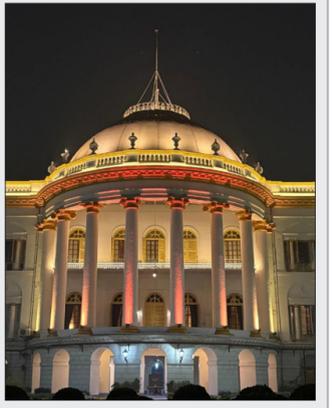
Needless to say, India too has been experiencing what Nobel Laureate V.S. Naipaul called 'A Million Mutinies' – metaphorically to describe the countless small-scale rebellions taking place in Indian society. These have been assertions of identity and selfhood by groups

and individuals—Dalits, women, linguistic communities, regional movements—who had felt marginalized in traditional hierarchies. To Naipaul this is a way of India's democracy producing a restless energy where every community asserts itself, leading to social churn but also democratic vitality. India's democratic setup acts as a safety valve, channelling protests and discontent into elections, parties, and public debate.

Caveat: history also informs us that survival in the face of violent protests is not just about safety valves as enshrined in democracies. It also rests on the resolve of Governments to negotiate challenges without losing risk-taking stability. To paraphrase Lenin: Governments must know when to combine steel-like firmness with the softness of compromise.

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

In Kolkata, ordinary citizens came together through WhatsApp to fund and light up 90+ heritage buildings & restore old clocks, turning forgotten structures into glowing landmarks of pride. A wonderful initiative. A model for every city! ~ Harsh Goenka, Chairman, RPG Enterprises



The complex web of India's international relations

VISHAL SHARMA

International relations at best of times are all smoke and mirrors. India-US relationship has turned rocky recently much to everyone's surprise. Relationship between two countries—more so when influential countries like India and US are involved—does not exist as an isolated subset in the wider set of relations. Such a relationship influences other relationships just as it is influenced by them in the wider international setting. In this case, Russia, China and Pakistan have had a role in the souring of Indo-US relation. Or in the way India has chosen to react as a consequence. Social media is full of memes on the downward spiral the relationship has taken. Some meme makers have made really droll memes. India's important international relations can be best explained through different analogies.

President Trump's anti India stance is akin to a Mafiosi suddenly discovering that his closest friend is having an affair with his moll. Mafiosi is expectedly quite protective of his moll, and as he all along thought that she was his, and her loyalty to him was unquestionable, he is gone bonkers. Mafiosi can't bring himself to believe that she has strung him along, God knows for how many months, pretending that she was interested in him. His shock is, thus, understandable. India's quick throwing of glances in the direction of Russia and China on the other hand is emblematic of a jilted lover on the rebound.

India and the US have had a rocky relationship, more in the nature of 'saas' and 'bahu'—a staple of present day Indian soap operas—right from fifties to early 2000s. The fight between 'saas' and 'bahu' is generally

over a common turf—one's son and another's husband. In this epic battle, the 'saas' does not want anything less than a full and uncontested control over her son. And 'bahu', well, she also does not want to be seen to be yielding an inch. If anything, she would rather double down on it by keeping her husband from seeing his mother often and getting intimate with him when she knows her 'saas' is sneaking a peek at them. This tug of war has characterized Indo-US relation for the most part of independent India's history.

During 1971 war, the US even militarily threatened India to get it to cease military operations in the then East Pakistan. It's another story that India did not blink and Bangladesh was birthed. In 1998, when India crossed the proverbial Rubicon of nuclear threshold by detonating nuclear devices, the US did what it does the best. It sanctioned India. India looked the other way and continued merrily down the track it had set its eyes on. During these five decades, relation between the two countries was marked by mutual suspicion and chariness, with India maintaining a strong strategically autonomous posture.

A slight thawing of ties happened during the twilight of the presidency of the US President, Bill Clinton. Clinton, the charmer that he was, began warming up to India as he saw India as a vibrant democracy that regularly held elections, followed rule based governance, and above all, he saw it as a very big market—something that could no longer be kept out of the international mainstream. He did recognise India's fabled non aligned posture, but at the same time had the foresight to accept that by allowing some

measure of strategic autonomy, he could win India over to the side of the wider western democratic world.

The relationship, however, began in real earnest during president George Bush's term, commonly known as Bush Junior presidency. Both India and the US started taking steps to deepen their relationship, overcoming decades of misgivings and trust deficit, which had made them view each other as natural enemies. But this relationship really blossomed through the Obama-Manmohan years. The two leaders used the respect they had for each other to get the south block and the states dept to forge a consensus on the idea taking shape in some circles in Washington DC that Indo-US relation is going to be the most defining relationship in the second half of 21st century.

Their efforts, however, did not stop at that. In fact, both the leaders were instrumental in creating a bipartisan consensus in the US for the Indo-US strategic partnership. When PM Modi arrived at the scene, he used his personalized approach to foreign policy to further deepen the Indo-US relationship. His charisma charmed everyone at the Capitol Hill and he made it a point to remain personally invested in the relationship to derive maximum leverage out of it. During Manmohan and Modi years, relationship with the US turned strategic as civil nuclear deal and many military agreements came to be signed during this period.

The US also allowed India a raft of special privileges and exemptions from the US laws and the international treaties. As if this was not enough, transfers of some strategic technologies were also made by the

US to India. India that had not purchased any military hardware from the US up until then, became a significant buyer of the US arms during this period. All through this, India though remained a partner and not an ally of the US.

Despite the bonhomie, India was always fearful of crossing the 'laxmanrekha' of this much touted and celebrated partnership, because it could never bring itself to fully trust the US. Indian foreign policy mandarins strongly held a view that should India walked into the US's embrace without erecting guardrails around its strategic autonomy, it would end up becoming its sidekick.

The US, however, desperately wanted this relation to transition to the level of strategic alliance. But that did not happen as the US wanted India to commit fully to the vows its deep state had set out. India found the commitments too daunting and was instead happy to be a part of the existing arrangement.

Then came the President Trump and he upended the whole arrangement. Apart from India calling out Trump in the wake of Op Sindoor and not ceding an inch on BTA talks with the US, there is another reason for this relationship to have come apart, which is that Trump sees in Pakistan an 'inamorata' who is willing to submit fully to his whims. Pakistan's submission to her master is full and unconditional and like a true Mafiosi, he really fancies Pakistan. Given India's unyielding stance, his fondness for his pleasure girl, read Pakistan, therefore, will surely be as profound and unconstrained as his revenge for his estranged best buddy.

BTR accelerating with trade, training and transformation: Assam BJP chief Dilip Saikia

GUWAHATI

With the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) set to go to polls on September 22, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has intensified its campaign, focusing on youth empowerment and employment opportunities in the region. Assam BJP president Dilip Saikia, while addressing people on Wednesday, September 17 said that under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the leadership of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, the youth of BTR have been given new avenues to grow and prosper.

"Bodoland is accelerating with trade, training, and transformation. Our youth are thriving. Over 20,097 young people have already been trained in diverse skills and thousands have found employment. We are committed to building a developed and self-reliant BTR," Saikia said.

According to Saikia, in the past four years, 15 new trades with 22 units have been launched in BTR, all upgraded as per National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) and National Coun-



cil for Vocational Training (NCVT) norms. These efforts are aimed at aligning local skills with national standards, ensuring that the youth can find opportunities not only within BTR but also across India.

He highlighted that more than

20,000 young people across the region have been trained in different sectors, with the government setting a target to skill 50,000 youths in the near future. Importantly, 4,680 candidates have already been certified under Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in trades

like electrician, plumber, mason, and farmer. "This recognition gives formal value to their existing skills and opens doors to better jobs and wages," Saikia explained. The skill development programs have also extended into agriculture and allied activities. A total of 1,723 young people across the five districts of BTR have been trained in piggy, goat and sheep farming, and fish seed growing. These training programs are directly linked to the rural economy, helping families to improve their income while also strengthening the local supply chain.

In addition, placement-linked training programs have benefited more than 1,800 youths in trades such as tailoring, floriculture, and food services. These sectors, Saikia said, have high demand both in rural towns and urban centres, creating steady livelihood opportunities. A group of 75 candidates have even been trained in heavy vehicle and JCB driving along with mechanical operations, giving them a chance to work in construction and transportation projects, both within Assam and beyond.

KOHIMA

The Naga Students' Federation (NSF) has given the Nagaland government ten days to address the long-pending grievance of the 367 RMSA 2016 batch teachers, warning of strong agitation if no action is taken.

At an emergency Presidential Council meeting held on September 17 at NSF Oking, the federation deliberated extensively on the matter and expressed appreciation for the teachers' contribution to the state's education sector. "Their steadfast dedication has significantly contributed to the growth of school education in Nagaland and to the nurturing of countless Naga students," the NSF stated.

The federation said continued government neglect was not only an

"affront to the dignity of teaching professionals" but also undermined the aspirations of the Naga people for quality education.

In its ultimatum, the NSF urged the government to take "all necessary and appropriate measures" within ten days to deliver justice to the teachers. It further cautioned that failure to comply would force the federation, along with its constituent bodies, to denounce the state government publicly and launch democratic forms of

agitation. The issue of the RMSA 2016 batch teachers has been pending for years, with repeated appeals made for resolution. The latest move by the NSF marks an escalation in pressure on the government.



Veterinary Officer Under Probe for Alleged Fund Misuse in Assam

ANUP BISWAS

HAFLONG: The Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption, Assam, has launched an inquiry into alleged misappropriation of government funds by Dr. Jadav Gogoi, the then Additional Director of the Veterinary Department (Hills), Dima Hasao, Haflong, during the period 2003-2016. The investigation was detailed in a letter dated July 21, 2025, addressed to the Commissioner & Secretary of Animal Husbandry & Veterinary, Assam Secretariat, Dispur.

The letter, signed by the Superintendent of Police, Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption, requests Dr. Gogoi to furnish his annual property returns (immovable and movable) along with expenditure details, as well as year-wise detailed salary statements from January 1, 2003, to August 2016. The salary statements are to be countersigned by the respective controlling officers or Drawing and Disbursing Officers (DDOs) to ensure accuracy.

The inquiry stems from a regular case initiated at the office regarding the alleged misuse of funds during Dr. Gogoi's tenure. The Directorate has urged for prompt action to facilitate the investigation, emphasizing the need for the requested information to proceed with necessary steps.

Authorities have not disclosed further details about the nature or extent of the alleged misappropriation, but the case has raised concerns about financial oversight within the Veterinary Department. The outcome of this inquiry could lead to significant repercussions depending on the findings.

Daniel Langthasa announces new political party in Dima Hasao



ANUP BISWAS

HAFLONG: In a significant political development, former Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) Haflong, during the period 2003-2016. The investigation was detailed in a letter dated July 21, 2025, addressed to the Commissioner & Secretary of Animal Husbandry & Veterinary, Assam Secretariat, Dispur.

Addressing a press meet, Langthasa declared that the party, to be called a "people's party," will work with a clear mission to safeguard the rights of the people living in the Sixth Schedule area

as and to uphold the principles of true democracy. He emphasized that the party would remain rooted in the aspirations of the indigenous communities of the hill district and would function as an alternative platform for people-centric governance.

Langthasa further confirmed that he would contest the forthcoming Assam Assembly election as the People's Party candidate from the 113th Tribal Reserved Haflong constituency.

"This decision is driven by the need for a genuine people's voice in the political sphere, one that can ensure protection of the Sixth Schedule provisions and stand firmly for democratic values," Langthasa asserted during the press interaction.

His announcement is being seen as a move that could potentially reshape the political landscape of Dima Hasao ahead of the state polls, with the new party expected to draw attention from sections of the electorate seeking change.

Thirteen-year-old neighbour charged in death of four-year-old Shillong girl

SHILLONG

Police have identified a 13-year-old boy as the prime suspect in the death of Insaphira Lyngdoh Mawnai, the four-year-old girl whose body was found in an under-construction building in Nongrah Nonglum, Shillong, on September 15.

East Khasi Hills Superintendent of Police Vivek Syiem announced on September 17 that the teenage neighbour, who frequently visited the victim's home, has confessed to accidentally causing the child's death by drowning.

The breakthrough came after three days of intensive investigation by a Special Investigation Team (SIT), which examined witness statements and forensic evidence, including footprint impressions that placed the boy at the scene.

According to Syiem, the boy admitted to taking Insa-



phira over a boundary wall to the nearby construction site on September 14. The boy told investigators he was washing mud from his feet in a water-filled cavity when he slipped and accidentally pulled the girl into the pit, causing her to drown.

The post-mortem report confirmed death by drowning, with no evidence of sexual assault, robbery, or external injuries, Syiem said.

as relatives slept. Her body was discovered the following morning, face down in stagnant rainwater on the ground floor of the under-construction building, approximately 100 metres from her home. A stone had been placed on her back, initially leading family members to suspect murder.

The accused minor has been remanded to a juvenile home and will face proceedings under the Juvenile Justice Board.

The investigation remains active, with the SIT having 90 days to complete its probe and verify all aspects of the boy's confession.

The tragic incident has left residents of Nongrah Nonglum grappling with the loss of the young girl and the unexpected revelation about her death. Police continue to examine all evidence to ensure a thorough understanding of the circumstances surrounding the case.

ACS officers in Dhubri face serious allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse of power

GUWAHATI

Serious allegations of sexual exploitation, emotional manipulation, and misuse of official power have been leveled against two Assam Civil Service (ACS) officers posted in Dhubri district.

Assam ACS officers in Dhubri face serious allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse of power. Serious allegations of sexual exploitation, emotional manipulation, and misuse of official power have been leveled against two Assam Civil Service (ACS) officers posted in Dhubri district.

A formal complaint has been filed with the Revenue and Disaster Management Department of Assam against Partha Pratim Barman, Circle Officer of Mankachar Revenue

Circle, and his wife, Debasena Barman, Assistant Commissioner at Golakganj, CDC.

The complaint, addressed to Revenue Minister Keshab Mahanta, seeks immediate disciplinary proceedings and a high-level inquiry into the charges. The complainant, who has chosen to remain anonymous, alleges that the misconduct began in September 2024, shortly after Partha Pratim Barman's posting in Dhubri.

According to the petition, Barman allegedly lured the complainant into a personal relationship by repeatedly assuring her that he would divorce his wife and marry her. Based on these assurances, the complainant claims she was drawn into a physical relationship which she later realized was

fraudulent and deceitful. The matter allegedly escalated on August 21, 2025, when both Barman and his wife reportedly began issuing threats of harassment, intimidation, and character assassination through WhatsApp calls and messages. The complaint accuses the couple of "jointly threatening to destroy my personal life, reputation, and dignity solely to shield themselves from exposure."

The petition emphasizes that both officers are misusing their official status to suppress the complaint and silence the victim. The charges outlined include: Sexual exploitation under the false promise of marriage. Moral turpitude and misconduct unbecoming of government officers. Misuse of official position to

intimidate the complainant. Breach of public trust and violation of service ethics.

The complainant has appealed for swift disciplinary and departmental action, along with a neutral high-level inquiry, to ensure that the accused do not obstruct justice by leveraging their official clout.

Describing the matter as "a crime against womanhood, against the sanctity of trust, and against the law of the land," the complainant urged the minister to set a precedent through lawful action, including possible criminal prosecution.

As of now, the Revenue Department has not issued an official response, and the accused officers are reportedly absent from duty and avoiding public appearances.

Assam Governor Felicitates Six Divyangjans with Vishwakarma Samman

GUWAHATI

The "Governor Assam Vishwakarma Samman" was presented to six differently-abled people of Assam in recognition of their outstanding contributions in various fields on the occasion of Vishwakarma Jayanti, on Wednesday.

Handing over the awards, Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya congratulated the recipients and highlighted the cultural and symbolic significance of the day, which also coincides with the birthday of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Governor's Assam Vishwakarma Samman Award was presented to six Divyangjans for their outstanding courage, innovation, and dedication in their respective fields.

Praising the awardees as the "true Vishwakarmas of society", the Governor said their lives embody resilience, creativity, and service to the community.

Acharya called for a society that values individuals not for their physical conditions, but for their contributions, character, and capabilities. "Let us build a Bharat where no one is left



behind, no one is neglected, and every hand is given dignity," he said.

Maulik Rabha from Goalpara, a visually impaired teacher, was honoured in the field of art and culture for his role

in preserving Assamese musical traditions through his music school.

In the category of literature and education, Nibedita Ghosh from Karbi Anglong, who is 100% visually im-

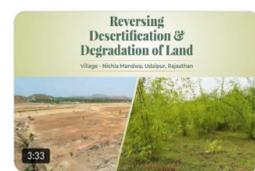
paired, was recognised for her work as an inspiring educator and motivational speaker.

Dharani Kalita from Bajali was honoured in the field of science, engineering, medicine and environment for his innovative work in converting manual tricycles into electric ones, benefiting many differently-abled individuals.

Rakesh Banik from Nagaon received the award in the category of social work and public affairs for his efforts, including a 2500-kilometre journey to raise awareness and support for Assam's flood victims. Abhishek Gogoi from Kamrup Metro was recognised in the field of sports for his achievements as a para-athlete, including medals at the Special Olympics and national-level competitions. In the category of trade, industry and commerce, Akoni Baruah from Jorhat was awarded for his entrepreneurship in traditional handicrafts, which has also generated employment for local youth.

Acharya also praised the initiatives of the Assam government under Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma, highlighting schemes such as the Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation scheme which are aimed at rehabilitation, financial assistance, and skill development for differently-abled citizens. Just as Bhupen da's music united people, IWA's mission on the Brahmaputra seeks to weave communities together, empowering lives along its banks.

Assam's Bamboo Saplings Flourish in Rajasthan, Transforming Barren Land into Green Oasis



BISWADEEP GUPTA

GUWAHATI: What began in 2021 as a bold experiment to green a barren stretch of land in Rajasthan has today grown into a thriving ecosystem, with Assam's bamboo saplings playing a central role.

Under the leadership of V K Saxena, then Chairman of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) and now Lieutenant Governor of Delhi, 5,500 bamboo saplings—mostly Assam's Jati Baa (Bambusa Tulda)—were transported from Khetri, Assam, to Nichla Mandwa village in Udaipur district. The initiative was carried out at the peak of the pandemic, when logistics were difficult, recalls Dr Sukamal Deb, former Deputy CEO of KVIC and in-charge of the North East Region. "Arranging transport during COVID was an enormous challenge. My team and I had to stay up the entire night to monitor the transition," Dr Deb said. "But seeing the tall, swaying bamboo today makes every hardship worthwhile."

The project, launched on July 4, 2021, began after villagers offered 25 acres of Gram Sabha land for rejuvenation. With support from KVIC, Ahmedabad-based NGO National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCCL), local representatives, and community mem-

bers, the land was prepared for mass plantation. Along with bamboo, saplings of guava, papaya, mango, gooseberry, and moringa were planted. Measures such as digging trenches, repairing a defunct check-dam, installing a solar borewell, and using organic mulching helped sustain the plantation.

Saxena shared a video of the site's transformation on X (formerly Twitter), calling it "a small oasis of hope and regeneration in the arid landscape of Rajasthan." He highlighted that the effort aligns with India's commitment, announced by the Prime Minister in June 2021, to restore 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030.

Visiting the site earlier this month, Saxena noted the return of wildlife—squirrels, peacocks, butterflies, dragonflies, and more—around the bamboo groves and fruit trees. "The entire exercise was completed at a cost of just Rs 5 lakh. It is proof of how community effort, innovation, and low-cost measures can bring life back to degraded land," he said.

Beyond environmental restoration, the bamboo plantation is expected to support local livelihoods by providing raw material for incense sticks, kites, and furniture. For Dr Deb, the project is also symbolic: "When bamboo from Assam grows in Rajasthan, it connects the Northeast with the desert culturally, emotionally, and economically. It is a tribute to Mother Earth and a reminder of our duty toward her," he said. Nichla Mandwa today stands as a model of land reclamation, offering lessons in sustainability, integration, and resilience that could be replicated across the country and beyond.

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2008 Malegaon blast: Bombay HC issues notice to NIA, 7 acquitted persons on appeal by victims' kin



MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Thursday issued notices to the seven persons acquitted in the 2008 Malegaon blast case, on an appeal filed by the family members of the victims.

A bench of Chief Justice Shree Chandrashekhar and Justice Gautam Anhad also issued notices to the prosecution — National Investigation Agency (NIA) and the Maharashtra government — and posted the appeal for hearing after six weeks.

The HC was hearing an appeal filed by the family members of the six persons who lost their lives in the blast against the acquittal judgment.

The appeal challenged a special court judgment acquitting the seven accused in the case, including former BJP MP Pragma Singh Thakur and Lt Col Prasad Purohit.

The appeal filed last week claimed that a faulty investigation or some defects in the

probe cannot be the grounds for acquitting the accused. It also contended that the conspiracy (of the blast) was hatched in secrecy and hence, there cannot be direct evidence of it.

The petitioners claimed the order passed by the special NIA court on July 31, acquitting the seven accused, was wrong and bad in law and hence deserved to be quashed.

On September 29, 2008, an explosive device strapped to a motorcycle went off near a mosque in Malegaon town, located about 200 km from Mumbai in Maharashtra's Nashik district, killing six persons and injuring 101 others.

The appeal said the trial court judge should not act as a "postman or mute spectator" in a criminal trial. When the prosecution failed to elicit facts, the trial court can ask questions and/or summon witnesses, it added.

"The trial court has unfortunately acted as a mere post office and allowed a deficient

prosecution to benefit the accused," the appeal said.

It also raised concerns over the manner in which the National Investigation Agency (NIA) conducted the probe and trial in the case and sought the accused to be convicted.

The state Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS), by arresting the seven persons, unearthed a large conspiracy, and since then, there has been no blast in areas populated by the minority community, the appeal said.

It claimed the NIA, after taking over the case, diluted the allegations against the accused persons.

The special court had, in its judgment, said mere suspicion cannot replace real proof and there was no cogent or reliable evidence to warrant a conviction. Special judge AK Lahoti, presiding over the NIA court, had said there was no "reliable and cogent evidence" against the accused that proved the case beyond a reasonable doubt.

The prosecution's case was that the blast was carried out by right-wing extremists with the intention to terrorise the Muslim community in the communally sensitive Malegaon town.

The NIA court, in its judgment, had flagged several loopholes in the prosecution's case and the investigation carried out, and said the accused persons deserved the benefit of doubt.

Rahul Gandhi calls CEC 'protector of vote thieves'; presents 'proof' for massive vote deletion in Karnataka

NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday launched yet another scathing attack on the Election Commission of India, accusing Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar of "protecting vote thieves."

Addressing a special press conference at the AICC headquarters in New Delhi, the former Congress chief presented what he described as proof to substantiate allegations of mass vote deletion in a constituency in Karnataka.

"I'm going to show black and white proof that the Chief Election Commissioner of India is protecting the people who have destroyed Indian democracy. I'm also going to show you how it is done," he said.

Gandhi said that he was making the statements fully aware of his responsibility as the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha.

The Congress leader also said that he has been getting help from within the Election Commission.

"We have started getting help from inside the Election Commission. I am making it clear that we are now getting information from inside the Election Commission, and this is not going to stop," he said.

Gandhi alleged that over the years, in different elections, "some forces" have been systematically targeting millions of voters across India with the deletion of votes. He alleged that the votes of communities, including Dalits, minorities, OBCs and Adivasis who were voting for the opposition, were specifically targeted.

Key allegations raised by Rahul Gandhi:

1. Massive vote deletion in Karnataka constituency

Rahul Gandhi alleged that in the Aaland constituency of Karnataka, a

stronghold of the Congress, over 6000 votes were deleted using the names of different voters, who were unaware of the exercise.

"Somebody tried to delete 6018 votes. We don't know the total number of votes that were deleted in Aaland in the 2023 election. They are much higher than 6,018, but somebody got caught deleting those 6018 votes, and it was caught by coincidence," Gandhi said.

"What happened was that the booth-level officer there noted that her uncle's vote was deleted, so she checked who deleted her uncle's vote, and she found that it was a neighbour who deleted the vote. She asked her neighbour, but they said I did not delete any votes. Neither the person deleting the vote nor the person whose vote was deleted knew. Some other force hijacked the process and deleted the vote," he said.

Gandhi also presented one of the voters whose name was used by the alleged perpetrator to submit an application to delete the votes. Voters whose names were deleted from the voters list were also present.

The Congress leader further alleged that similar irregularities were found in several other states, including Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Haryana.

"In Rajura, Maharashtra, 6815 targeted voters were added. In Aaland, we caught delitions, in Rajura, we got additions, but the basic idea is the same... It's the same system that is doing this. It's doing it in Karnataka, Maharashtra, Haryana, UP, and we have proof of all that," he said.

2. Congress voters targeted, centralised system used

Rahul Gandhi alleged that the vote deletion happened targeting Congress voters in the constituency and that a sophisticated centralised system was used for the process.

Gandhi claimed that the applica-

tions for the deletion of voters were filed "automatically using a software."

"Mobile numbers from outside Karnataka, from different states, were used to delete numbers in Aaland, and it was done targeting Congress voters," he said.

The Opposition leader pointed out similarities in the serial numbers of the applicants and claimed that a centralised system was used to file the applications.

"Look at the serial numbers... A software is picking up the first name in the booth and using it to delete votes. Someone ran an automated program to ensure that the first voter at the booth was the applicant. That same person got cell phones from outside the state, used them to file the application, and we are pretty certain that this was done in a centralised manner and it was done at scale. This was not done at a worker level; this was done at a whole simpler level," he alleged.

3. Black and white evidence against CEC Gyanesh Kumar

Training his guns on the Election Commission, Gandhi alleged that CEC Gyanesh Kumar was directly complicit in the vote deletion as he has refused to provide crucial data and take any action despite repeated appeals from Karnataka CID.

"Let's come to why I'm making such a direct accusation about Gyanesh Kumar. There is an ongoing investigation into this matter in Karnataka. The CID of Karnataka has sent 18 letters in 18 months to the Election Commission, and they have asked the Election Commission for some very simple facts. Number one, give us the destination IP from where these forms were filled. Number two, give us the device destination ports from where these applications were filed. And number three, most importantly, give us the

OTP trails because when you file, you have to get OTP," Gandhi said.

"18 times in 18 months, the CID of Karnataka has written to the Election Commission for this, and they are not giving it. Why are they not giving it? Because this will lead us to where the operation is being done, and we are absolutely convinced where this is going to go," he said.

"FIR is filed on February 23. Karnataka CID writes to ECI requesting all details of these numbers and these transactions almost immediately in March. In August, EC gives a reply, doesn't fulfil any of the demands and doesn't give us the information. It doesn't provide the CID of Karnataka with the information that will lead them to their destination. January 24th, Karnataka CID writes to ECI again and says please send us full information. No answer. Karnataka CID, by September 25, has written 18 reminder letters," Gandhi claimed.

"While this is going on, the CEC of Karnataka writes to the Election Commission in Delhi and says there is a matter, please provide this information and the CEC of Karnataka multiple times asks the Election Commission. Now this is absolute solid proof that Gyanesh Kumar is protecting the people who are doing this. This is also absolute solid proof that this is being done in a centralised way, this is being done at scale and this is being done using large resources," he alleged.

Calling on the EC to provide the data regarding the alleged vote deletion, Gandhi said, "The Chief Election Commissioner of India, Gyanesh Kumar, needs to stop protecting the people who are destroying Indian democracy. We have given you 100% bulletproof proof here. EC has to release this data of these phones, these OTPs, within a week."

INTERNATIONAL

After the royal pomp, Trump's UK state visit turns to politics and meeting with PM Starmer



LONDON:

US President Donald Trump will meet Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Thursday, the final day of his state visit to Britain, with tech investment, steel tariffs and potentially tricky topics on the agenda.

The president and first lady Melania Trump were feted by King Charles III and Queen Camilla on Wednesday at Windsor Castle with all the pageantry the monarchy can muster: gold-trimmed carriages, scarlet-clad soldiers, artillery salutes and a glittering banquet in a grand ceremonial hall.

British officials have festooned the trip with the kind of superlatives Trump revels in: It's an "unprecedented" second state visit for the US leader, featuring the biggest military honor guard ever assembled for such an occasion.

On Thursday it is Starmer's turn to welcome the president to Chequers, a 16th-century manor house northwest of London that serves as a rural retreat for British leaders.

Trump's British hosts want to celebrate the strength of the US-UK relationship, almost 250 years after its rocky start in 1776.

Trump will be welcomed by ceremonial honor guard complete with bagpipers — a nod to the president's Scottish heritage — and shown items from the archive of wartime leader Winston Churchill, who coined the term "special relationship" for the bond between the United States and Britain.

There's also a lunch of Dover sole followed by key lime pie, and a display by the Red Devils army parachute team.

To coincide with the visit, Britain said US companies had pledged \$50 billion pounds (\$204 billion) in investment in the United Kingdom, including \$9 billion pounds (\$122 billion) from investment firm Blackstone in the next decade. Investment will also flow the other way, including almost \$30 billion by pharmaceutical firm GSK in the US.

The two leaders will sign a "tech prosperity deal" that UK officials say will bring thousands of jobs and billions in investment in artificial intelligence, quantum computing and nuclear energy.

It includes a UK arm of Stargate, a Trump-backed AI infrastructure project led by OpenAI, and a host of AI data centers around the UK. American firms are announcing \$1 billion pounds (\$42 billion) investment in the UK's AI sec-

tor, including \$30 billion from Microsoft for protects including Britain's largest supercomputer.

British officials say they have not agreed to scrap a digital services tax or water down internet regulation to get the deal, some details of which have yet to be announced.

The British government is learning that when it comes to deals with the US administration, the devil is in the detail. In May, Starmer and Trump struck a trade agreement that reduced US tariffs on Britain's key auto and aerospace industries. But talks on slashing duties on steel and aluminum to zero from their current level of 25% have stalled, despite a promise in May that the issue would be settled within weeks.

The British Chambers of Commerce said failure to cut the tariffs would "greeted with dismay" by the British steel industry.

Starmer wants a successful state visit to balance weeks of bad news that saw him lose not just an ambassador but Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner — who quit over a tax error on a home purchase — and a senior aide. Fourteen months after winning a landslide election victory, Starmer's government is struggling to kickstart Britain's sluggish economy and his Labour Party is lagging in the polls.

Leslie Vinjamuri, president of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, said the trip was likely to be "a difficult visit for the prime minister, much more so than for the US president."

For Trump, "this plays well at home, it plays well abroad. It's almost entirely to President Trump's advantage to turn up to Britain and be celebrated by the British establishment," she said.

Starmer will be bracing for awkward questions about Jeffrey Epstein when he and Trump hold a news conference at Chequers. Days before the state visit, Starmer fired Britain's ambassador to the

US, Peter Mandelson, over the envoy's past friendship with the convicted sex offender.

Questions about Epstein overshadowed Trump's last visit to the UK in July, when he sat with Starmer at his golf club in Scotland. As they took questions from journalists, Trump was repeatedly peppered with queries about Epstein as his government faced pressure from back home to release government records into the criminal case of the now-disgraced financier, who authorities say killed himself in 2019. There are also potentially difficult conversations to be had over Ukraine and the Middle East. Starmer has played a major part in European efforts to shore up US support for Ukraine. Trump has expressed frustration with Russian President Vladimir Putin but has not made good on threats to impose new sanctions on Russia for shunning peace negotiations.

As he left Washington for the UK on Tuesday, Trump appeared to put the onus on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, saying, "He's going to have to make a deal."

Last week's Russian drone incursion into NATO member Poland drew strong condemnation from European NATO allies, and pledges of more planes and troops for the bloc's eastern flank. Trump played down the incident's severity, musing that it "could have been a mistake."

The king gave Trump a gentle nudge in his state banquet speech on the strength of the trans-Atlantic relationship. Charles noted that "as tyranny once again threatens Europe, we and our allies stand together in support of Ukraine, to deter aggression and secure peace."

Starmer also departs from Trump on Israel's war in Gaza, and has said the UK will formally recognize a Palestinian state at the United Nations later this month. Trump has threatened to penalize Canada during trade negotiations for making a similar move.

Saudi Arabia, Pakistan sign mutual defence pact treating attack on one as attack on both nations

ISLAMABAD

Saudi Arabia and nuclear-armed Pakistan have signed a mutual defence pact that regards any attack on either nation as an attack on both in the wake of Israel's strike on Qatar earlier this month.

The kingdom has long had close economic, religious and security ties to Pakistan, including reportedly providing funding for Islamabad's nuclear weapons program as it developed. Analysts — and Pakistani diplomats in at least one case — have suggested over the years that Saudi Arabia could be included under Islamabad's nuclear umbrella, particularly as tensions have risen over Iran's atomic program.

But the timing of the pact appeared to be a signal to Israel, long suspected to be the Middle East's only nuclear-armed state, which has conducted a sprawling military invasion since Oct. 7, 2023, stretching across Iran, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Qatar, Syria and Yemen.

Israel did not immediately acknowledge the pact, which was the first firm defense decision made by a Gulf Arab country since the Qatar attack last week. The United States, long the security guarantor for the Gulf states, also did not immediately acknowledge the agreement.

Saudi Arabia's powerful Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman signed the pact Wednesday with Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. While not specifically discussing the bomb, the agreement states "any aggression against either country shall be considered an aggression against both," according to statements issued by both Pakistan's Foreign Affairs Ministry and the state-run Saudi Press Agency.

"This agreement... aims to develop aspects of defense

cooperation between the two countries and strengthen joint deterrence against any aggression," the statement said. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have a defense relationship stretching back decades, in part due to Islamabad's willingness to defend the Islamic holy sites of Mecca and Medina in the kingdom. Pakistani troops first traveled to Saudi Arabia in the late 1960s over concerns about Egypt's war in Yemen at the time. Those ties increased after Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution and the kingdom's fears of a confrontation with Tehran.

Pakistan developed its nuclear weapons program to counter India's atomic bombs. The two neighbors have fought multiple wars against each other and again came close to open warfare after an attack on tourists in April in Indian-controlled Kashmir. India is believed to have an estimated 172 nuclear warheads, while Pakistan has 170, according to the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists.

On Thursday, India's Foreign Ministry acknowledged the Saudi-Pakistan pact and said it "will study the implications of this development for our national security as well as for regional and global stability." Saudi Arabia also maintains close ties with India.

Retired Pakistani Brig. Gen. Feroz Hassan Khan, in his book on his country's nuclear weapons program called "Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb," said Saudi Arabia provided "generous financial support" for the program's effort.

In a 2007 US diplomatic cable published by WikiLeaks, American diplomats in Saudi Arabia noted that their Pakistani counterparts had brought up the idea of the kingdom pursuing a weapons program alongside Islamabad. "According to these officials, they understand that

(Saudi Arabia) does want to protect itself and the region, and since, in their opinion, some of the other regional players — specifically Egypt — are unable to develop such weapons systems due to financial constraints, it is logical for the Saudis to step in as the physical 'protector' just as the they have been increasingly stepping in as peace mediators in various regional conflicts," the cable read.

Both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia did not respond to questions from The Associated Press on Thursday on whether the pact extended to Islamabad's nuclear weapons arsenal.

Saudi Arabia has sought to US assistance to advance a civilian nuclear power program, in part with what had been a proposed diplomatic recognition deal with Israel prior to the 2023 Hamas attack. That could allow Saudi Arabia to enrich uranium in the kingdom — something that worries nonproliferation experts as spinning centrifuges opens the door to a possible weapons program.

Prince Mohammed has said the kingdom would pursue a nuclear weapon if Iran had one. The kingdom already is believed to have a domestic ballistic missile program, which can be a delivery system for a nuclear weapon. However, Saudi Arabia is a member of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and isn't known to have move toward acquiring the bomb through its own work.

Before the defense pact was signed, Iran dispatched Ali Larjani, a senior political figure who now serves as the secretary of the country's Supreme National Security Council, to visit Saudi Arabia. That may have seen the kingdom acknowledge the pact to Tehran, with which it has had a Chinese-mediated détente with Iran since 2023.

MODI'S MANIPUR VISIT: Symbolism Without Settlement



On September 13, 2025, nearly two and a half years after ethnic violence first tore through Manipur, Prime Minister Narendra Modi finally set foot in the conflict-torn state. His itinerary included a brief stop in Churachandpur - one of the worst-affected districts during the unrest - and the state capital, Imphal. The long-anticipated visit has left behind as many questions as it attempted to answer, exposing the contradictions of New Delhi's approach to the Northeast, the fragile peace that holds in Manipur, and the deeper political wounds that development promises alone cannot heal.

A Visit Years Too Late
For many Manipuris, the Prime Minister's arrival evoked a mixture of relief, bitterness, and resignation. Relief because the highest office of the land finally acknowledged their suffering; bitterness because the gesture came so late that it felt almost ceremonial; and resignation because many feared that, once again, promises would replace solutions.

The timeline sharpened these sentiments. In March 2024, when violence in Manipur was already more than ten months old, Modi flew to neighbouring Assam to unveil a massive Rs 18,000-crore development package and inaugurate a statue in Kaziranga. That trip - just miles away, yet politically worlds apart - intensified the sense that Manipur was expendable in Delhi's priorities. His long silence since May 2023, punctuated by foreign visits and domestic political engagements, was often likened to arriving at a funeral after the mourners had already left.

And yet, the September 2025 visit did have a historic weight. No Prime Minister had set foot in Churachandpur since Rajiv Gandhi in 1988. That it took nearly four decades for the state's most marginalised district to be acknowledged at this level was itself an indictment of how peripheral the hill regions have been to the Indian state - administratively neglected, economically underserved, and politically expendable. The violence of 2023 merely exposed what residents of the hills already knew: they live in a state that governs them, but rarely represents them.



"One who believes in himself has no need to convince others." - Lao Tzu

A Carefully Balanced Itinerary

The Prime Minister's "touch-and-go" schedule - Churachandpur in the hills, Imphal in the valley - was framed as an attempt at balance, a signal that both communities mattered equally. But the lived realities on the ground mocked this choreography. The sharp divide between the valley and the hills remains unhealed: Meiteis cannot safely travel into the hills, while Kuki-Zo people are unwelcome in the valley. The barbed wire that physically separates these geographies has become more than symbolic; it is a lived border within India itself.

This contradiction was echoed in conversations across the state: Can hill people safely enter Imphal today? Can Meiteis cross into Kuki-Zo areas without fear? Is "unity" in Manipur only a rhetorical flourish while lives remain divided? Why does Delhi only arrive when blood has already been spilled?

The Language of Exclusion
Perhaps the most telling moment of Modi's visit came at Peace Ground in Churachandpur. Addressing a crowd still raw from years of displacement and loss, the Prime Minister spoke entirely in Hindi, without translation into local dialects or even English - a language he had used fluently in Mizoram just hours earlier.

In a state where Hindi is not widely understood, the choice of language felt less like inclusion and more like imposition. It was not about opposing Hindi - India's linguistic diversity has always been a source of strength, not division. But language is not merely a communication tool; it is a recognition of presence. To speak in a tongue unfamiliar to the audience in a moment of collective pain was to deepen the distance between leader and people.

In a region long alienated from Delhi's gaze, silence speaks louder than words, and many heard in that speech not reassurance, but exclusion.

Development Without Dignity
The highlight of the Prime Minister's visit was the announcement of Rs 7,300 crore in development projects for Manipur. The projects were framed as symbols of renewed national commitment: to connectivity, inclusivity, and recovery. Yet in a state fractured by displacement, distrust, and contested sovereignty, such announcements cannot be reduced to capital expenditure figures. Development here is a political act, and allocations are read as declarations of who matters.

The numbers tell their own story. Of the Rs 7,300 crore, Rs 4,163 crore is earmarked for "statewide" projects - investments which, in practice, will disproportionately benefit the

valley. By contrast, the Kuki-Zo inhabited regions, which bore the heaviest losses of the 2023 violence, have been allocated just Rs 70 crore. Churachandpur itself, the epicentre of the humanitarian tragedy, is allotted a paltry Rs 23 crore across two projects. There is no comprehensive rehabilitation plan, no dedicated investment in rebuilding lives.

This imbalance is more than a bureaucratic oversight; it is a refusal of recognition. What does "inclusivity" mean when those most devastated are treated as marginal in the plans meant to heal them? What meaning does "connectivity" carry when Kuki-Zo residents still cannot safely access Imphal's airport or hospitals, and Meiteis cannot pass through the highways that cut across restive hill districts?

Roads cannot bridge trust. Corridors cannot substitute for constitutional guarantees. And projects without accountability risk becoming yet another chapter in the story of misgovernance and patronage politics in the Northeast.

If development is to be a form of justice, it must be transparent and measurable - not only in roads built and bridges inaugurated, but in the restoration of dignity, equality, and trust. Every rupee must be accounted for publicly, not as a number in a speech, but as a tangible intervention in people's lives.

The Constitutional Blind Spot

What disillusioned the Kuki-Zo community most was not the delay of Modi's visit, but the silence around their central political demand: self-determination through a separate administrative arrangement. Since 2023, this demand has been articulated not only through street protests, but also through informal consultations and backchannel dialogues initiated by government interlocutors.

That it found no place in the Prime Minister's speech was, for many, a quiet extinguishing of hope. Nor did he meet the 10 Kuki-Zo legislators who had repeatedly sought an audience. In the aftermath, those legislators submitted a petition for an "early political settlement," underscoring that the visit felt more like a performance of presence than a process of listening.

The demand for self-determination should not be misread as secessionist. It is not a rejection of India but a response to structural failures that have denied the community protection, political agency, and equal dignity under Imphal's administration. The real question is not why they are demanding separation, but why existing structures have so profoundly failed them.

India's Constitution is visionary in its commitment to pluralism, but its mechanisms have often lagged behind the evolving aspirations of In-

digenous and peripheral communities. To defend the Constitution in spirit requires adapting its institutions, not freezing them. India is not a homogenous nation-state but a federation of distinct histories, cultures, and geographies. To sustain this federation, the Centre must listen not with suspicion, but with openness.

Meanwhile, the Meitei community's primary concern remains the integrity of Manipur. The Prime Minister appeared to gesture towards this by praising Manipur's cultural contributions to India, but without any new commitments, the reassurance fell flat. Balancing these two competing aspirations - Meitei integrity and

Kuki-Zo autonomy - is perhaps the hardest political challenge ahead.

Optics or Signals?

Was Modi's visit a genuine political intervention or a carefully choreographed performance? Opinions are divided. To many, the timing suggested symbolism over substance: the visit came not in the heat of crisis, but after the fires had cooled, when the political cost of continued silence had grown too high.

Yet to dismiss the visit entirely as optics would miss a subtler reading. Modi is not known to walk into political firestorms without calculation. His arrival may suggest that quiet backchannel negotiations have reached a stage where visible engagement was necessary. His visit, therefore, could be interpreted less as closure and more as a cautious acknowledgement that some momentum - however faint - exists beneath the surface.

Presence is not measured in hours spent but in the intent behind it. A leader could remain for days and achieve little; a brief visit can still matter if it marks a shift in posture. For a state long neglected, even symbolic recognition has weight. The challenge is whether it translates into concrete outcomes.

What Must Come Next

There is no easy road ahead. Resolving Manipur's crisis requires far more than development projects or ceremonial speeches. At its heart lies a historically entrenched asymmetry of power and representation, compounded by mutual suspicion, systemic neglect, and competing visions of belonging. Healing this fracture demands both political courage and emotional honesty. The government must move beyond vague reassurances and engage in a principled, inclusive political dialogue. This means bring-

ing all stakeholders to the table, especially communities long excluded from decision-making. It also means avoiding the temptation to engage only with radical voices while ignoring the everyday people at the core of the crisis. The goal cannot be a superficial calm but a durable framework for peace rooted in justice, trust, and mutual recognition. Governance must evolve to reflect India's layered realities: linguistic and cultural inclusion must be structural, not symbolic; federalism must be reimagined to allow Indigenous communities not merely to comply with existing structures, but to actively shape their own futures.

Connectivity, too, must be understood not only as roads and networks but as safe, mutual access to spaces, institutions, and opportunities. Without this, bridges of steel and concrete will remain hollow.

Better Late Than Never?

The Prime Minister's visit, late and limited though it was, has not been meaningless. For a state that endured silence for over two years, even a brief gesture of recognition matters. But symbolism is no substitute for justice. The real test will be whether the government uses this moment to open the door to genuine dialogue, equitable development, and constitutional imagination.

If not, Manipur risks repeating the same cycle: violence, silence, visit, announcement, appeasement, neglect. Breaking this cycle will require Delhi to recognise that the periphery cannot be remembered only in moments of crisis.

He came. He saw. He extended a hand - cautiously, but consciously. Whether that hand leads Manipur out of its long shadow, or whether it retreats once more into silence, remains the unanswered question.

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