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2026

VOLUME:1, ISSUE 586 | SILCHAR FRIDAY, OCTOBER 03, 2025. EAST AND NE INDIA EDITION | e-mail: krctimes@gmail.com ,www.krctimes.com

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PERSPECTIVE

A bird asked a bee: "Don't you feel sad when man steals your honey?" The bee replied: "He can steal my honey, but not my art of making it." ~ Harsh Goenka, Chairman RPG Enterprises

'I think he was forcefully taken to the water': Zubeen Garg's wife

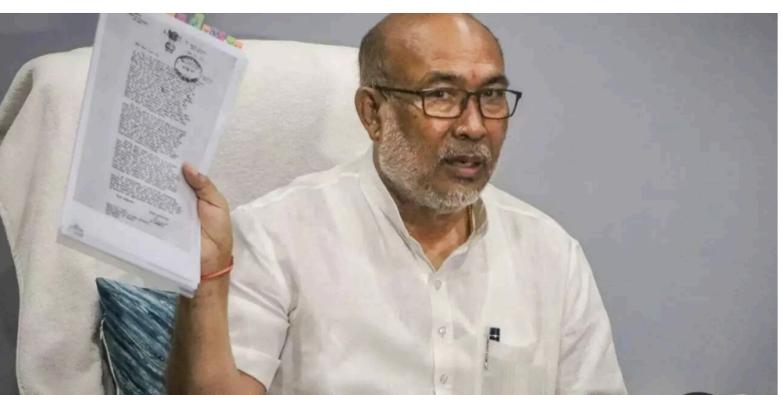
GUWAHATI
In an exclusive interview with India Today, Garima Saikia Garg, wife of late Assam music icon Zubeen Garg, alleged that the singer had been forced into water despite medical advice, raising questions about the circumstances of his death. "The doctor had advised him to refrain from swimming and to stay away from water," Garima said. She added that since Zubeen's first seizure in 2020, Siddhartha, Shyamkanu Mahanta, Shekhar Jyoti Goswami, and others were aware of his medical condition and the precautions prescribed. Garima also questioned why Amritprabha Mahanta, who was reportedly making videos that have now circulated widely, did not inform the family or the police. "That day I think he was forcefully taken to the water... because he didn't even change the dress he was wearing the previous night," she said. On October 1, musician Shekhar Jyoti Goswami and singer Amritprabha Mahanta were arrested by authorities in connection with Zubeen Garg's death. Both had been under interrogation by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) for six days prior to their arrests as part of the ongoing probe. According to sources, both suspects were reportedly in Singapore at the time of Zubeen Garg's passing—a detail that investigators are examining closely to determine their involvement in the case. The arrests mark a significant development in the high-profile investigation, as authorities continue to probe the circumstances surrounding the untimely demise of one of Assam's most celebrated cultural figures.

WHO SAID WHAT

Vijaya Dashami celebrates the triumph of good and righteousness over evil and falsehood. May courage, wisdom and devotion always guide our paths. Wishing my fellow Indians a happy Vijaya Dashami. Vijaya Dashami celebrates the triumph of good and righteousness over evil and falsehood. May courage, wisdom and devotion always guide our paths. Wishing my fellow Indians a happy Vijaya Dashami.

~ Narendra Modi, PM Modi

Present situation turning point for Manipur, says former CM Biren Singh



IMPHAL
Former Chief Minister N Biren Singh has described the present situation in Manipur as a turning point for building a safe and secure future for the state and its people. Reflecting on the legacy of Hijam Irawat, Biren said the ti-

GUWAHATI
Assam entrepreneur and cultural activist Shyamkanu Mahanta, who has come under the scanner following the death of iconic singer Zubeen Garg, has approached the Supreme Court under Article 32 of the Constitution, seeking protection of his fundamental rights. Shyamkanu Mahanta filed a petition in the Supreme Court on September 30 while he was in Singapore. The petition, intended as a pre-emptive legal step ahead of his return to India, has not yet gained significant momentum. In his writ petition, Mahanta described himself as a victim of a "well-calculated witch-hunt," alleging that certain sections of the media have been running "irresponsible and false narratives" linking him to Zubeen's death. He claimed that he has been subjected to a "media trial" and "large-scale public hatred," without any substantive basis. "The Petitioner seeks to invoke the extraordinary writ jurisdiction of this Hon'ble Court as the sentinel on the qui vive to protect his life, limb and personal liberty," the plea states. Mahanta asserted that allega-



tions of his involvement were "ludicrous to say the least," as he was in Singapore on September 19, 2025, the day of Zubeen's passing, busy over-seeing preparations for a cultural festival scheduled from September 19 to 21. He further claimed that he could not even meet the late singer on the day of the incident, with their last meeting having taken place on September 17.

The petition also highlights what Mahanta termed as prejudicial conduct by top government functionaries. "According to media reports, the top executives of the State of Assam have gone to the extent of publicly making derogatory and damaging remarks against the Petitioner on their official social media handles during the pendency of the investigation, which renders the investigation process futile. Such alleged prejudicial public remarks... are bound to further influence the ongoing investigation being carried out by the SIT formed by Respondent No. 2 itself," the plea contends. Mahanta argued that such remarks from senior state officials compromise the neutrality of the probe and further aggravate the atmosphere of hostility against him. The petition underscores that the ongoing media speculation, coupled with public comments from officials, has irreparably damaged his reputation and undermined his right to life and liberty guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution. The matter is likely to be listed for hearing after the Supreme Court reopens next week.

Mirabai Chanu wins Silver at World Weightlifting Championships in Norway



GUWAHATI
Indian weightlifting star Mirabai Chanu clinched the silver medal in the women's 48kg category at the World Weightlifting Championships, further solidifying her impressive track record at the global level. The former world champion lifted a combined total of 199kg, 84kg in snatch and 115kg in clean and jerk, to make her third career podium finish at the prestigious event. Chanu, who previously competed in the 49kg division, moved down a weight class for this competition. Despite facing early challenges in the snatch, where she missed two attempts at 87kg, she found her rhythm during the clean and jerk, nailing all three lifts. The 31-year-old executed clean lifts of 109kg, 112kg, and 115kg, matching the

Storms, Power Woes and Zubeen Garg's Death Mar Barak Valley's Puja Celebrations

SILCHAR
Barak Valley bade farewell to Maa Durga on Thursday in a finale overshadowed by grief and rain. The sudden death of cultural icon Zubeen Garg in Singapore on September 19 cast a pall of mourning over the celebrations, even as a violent storm lashed Silchar, uprooting pandals and plunging neighbourhoods into darkness. While Mahashanti morning began with sunshine and prayers, the evening turned chaotic as gusty winds and heavy rain battered the town. A towering light gate collapsed in Tarapur, damaging an auto-rickshaw, while waterlogged lanes and power cuts disrupted the festive cheer. Yet, devotees thronged pandals under umbrellas, with processions carrying on late into a storm-hit Mahanavami night. This year's Puja was marked by remembrance. Many barowari committees cancelled cultural shows, choosing instead to honour Zubeen Garg. His songs, especially the haunting Mayabini, echoed from pandals, restaurants and loudspeakers, blending seamlessly into the devotional chants and creating a poignant undercurrent of loss. Despite setbacks, artistry remained a highlight. Udharbond's Kali Bari Road Puja stunned with its Disney-land theme, while the Hospital Road Puja recreated Vrindavan's Chandrodya temple and Tirupati's Balaji shrine. In Silchar, Mitali Sangha's Eiffel Tower pandal and Dakshin Bilpar's Puja drew massive crowds, while the 47-year-old Kali Mohan Road Puja depicted Badrinath. The Cachar District Administration carried forward its 60-year-old tradition of hosting Puja within the District Court, with Deputy Commissioner Mridul Yadav leading the sankalpa rituals. He extended Sharodiya greetings, wishing peace and prosperity for Cachar's people. Security arrangements were tight, with police stationed at key points and the Anti-Romeo Squad patrolling pandal areas. In retrospect, Barak Valley's Durga Puja became a blend of devotion, artistry and resilience; celebrated with umbrellas against the rain and songs in memory of a beloved cultural icon.



Manipur tops northeast in violent crimes, rioting cases in 2023: NCRB



NEW DELHI
Manipur recorded the highest number of violent crimes and rioting cases in the Northeast in 2023, according to data released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). The state, which has been grappling with ethnic violence between the valley-based Meiteis and hill-based Kukis since May 2023, also registered the highest number of crimes and atrocities against Scheduled Tribes in the country last year. The NCRB report said Manipur reported 14,427 violent crimes in 2023,

a steep rise compared to 631 cases in 2022 and 545 in 2021. Assam, with 11,552 incidents, was second in the region. The data further showed that crimes and atrocities against Scheduled Tribes in Manipur surged dramatically, with 3,339 cases reported in 2023, compared to just one in 2022 and none in 2021. Manipur also led in rioting and arson cases in the Northeast, reporting 5,421 incidents of rioting and 6,203 cases of arson. The state recorded 330 robbery cases and 1,213 dacoity cases in the same year. The report highlighted that 151 murders and 818 attempts to commit murder were registered in the state in 2023. It also recorded 89 kidnappings and 27 rapes. Crimes against women showed a slight decline, with 201 cases reported in 2023 compared to 248 in 2022 and 302 in 2021. Since the outbreak of ethnic violence in May 2023, more than 260 people have been killed and thousands displaced in Manipur, underscoring the severity of the crisis reflected in the NCRB data.

during Irawat's time, he faced pressures and adversities that forced him underground, yet his sacrifices as a visionary leader remain an inspiration that should be analysed and carried forward by elected representatives, civil society organisations, and the wider public. Speaking on the current challenges facing Manipur, Biren stressed that the state was at a crucial juncture, particularly for its indigenous communities. He noted that ties between Manipur and the Union government had strengthened, with New Delhi showing greater concern for the state's future. "India government has started border fencing, drug campaigns, removal of the free movement regime, and steps to curb illegal immigration. This shows that the government of India is sincerely taking care of Manipur. Amidst this situation, let the people of the state ponder on building a good future that will ensure a safe and secure environment even for the coming centuries," he said. Biren urged the people of Manipur to follow the legacy of Jana Neta Hijam Irawat to accomplish his vision and dreams for the state, calling it essential to shaping a stronger and more harmonious Manipur. In a social media post on the occasion, the former Chief Minister wrote: "Had the honour of joining the people of Manipur in observing Jana Neta Hijam Irawat Day, a moment to reflect on the enduring legacy of one of our most courageous and progressive leaders. The struggle he waged was not just of his time, it is a continuing call to action for us all. Let us draw inspiration from his vision to build a Manipur that is inclusive, equitable, and united in purpose. Hijam Irawat's life reminds us that transformative change is possible when one stands firm on the side of the people."



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INDIA UNMASKS TERROR EPICENTRE

At the 80th UN General Assembly, India once again unmasked Pakistan's decades-old duplicity on terrorism. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's address was sharp, direct, and unambiguous—India has confronted terrorism since independence, and its neighbour remains the "epicentre of global terrorism". For years, New Delhi has pointed to the same uncomfortable truth: major terror attacks, from Kashmir to Mumbai, bear the footprints of Pakistan-based groups, openly sheltered and sponsored by the Pakistani state apparatus.

The Pahalgam massacre became the latest chapter in this tragic saga. The perpetrators were quickly identified, and the responsibility was traced back to groups with well-established roots in Pakistan. India's retaliation through Operation Sindoor was a significant escalation. It demonstrated New Delhi's resolve and the growing consensus that words and dossiers alone cannot deter terrorism. The strikes crippled multiple Pakistani air bases, inflicted heavy losses on terror complexes in Bahawalpur and Muridke, and exposed once again the hollowness of Pakistan's boasts.

Islamabad's attempt to paint a picture of victory is farcical. The facts tell a different story: it was Pakistan's own military that pleaded for a cessation of fighting after the destruction of its infrastructure. India was clear that the operation was suspended on its own terms, not because of third-party intervention. By insisting there is "no room for any third party" in the India-Pakistan equation, New Delhi reiterated its longstanding position—issues will be settled bilaterally, not at the behest of outside powers.

This pattern of lies and theatrics is not new. For decades, Pakistan has spoken of peace at global forums even as its army and intelligence agencies nurtured the very terror groups that destabilise the region. Hafiz Saeed, Masood Azhar, and countless other UN-designated terrorists have found not only refuge but also reverence on Pakistani soil. Funeral prayers for slain Lashkar-e-Taiba operatives attended by the Pakistan Army are only the latest proof of state complicity. No degree of denial or self-glorification can hide the fact that terrorism remains an instrument of Pakistan's state policy. Pakistan continues to proudly display its hypocrisy. A nation that sheltered Osama bin Laden for years and continues to run terrorist camps lectures the UN about peace—a country whose ministers glorify militants lectures the world on tolerance. And a state whose economy is in shambles proclaims "victory" after massive losses. It is a bizarre theatre of denial that fools no one.

India's counter-terror strategy has fundamentally changed since Uri in 2016. Surgical strikes marked the end of passive responses. Pulwama in 2019 was answered by the Balakot air strike deep inside Pakistani territory, shattering the myth of invulnerability. Pahalgam in 2025 invited Operation Sindoor—a full-fledged military response that left Pakistan's military embarrassed, its air power degraded, and its propaganda machine spinning falsehoods at the UNGA. New Delhi's message could not be clearer: every terror attack will now invite a precision strike. Beyond the battlefield, India has also shown its intent by temporarily suspending provisions of the Indus Waters Treaty and halting Chenab water flows. This was no mere technical action but a geopolitical signal—India is prepared to use all instruments of statecraft to defend its people.

India's efforts to expose these falsehoods at the UN have found wide resonance. Terrorism is no longer a South Asian problem; it is a global scourge that has scarred almost every continent. The world knows the damage caused when states use terror as a tool of foreign policy. What India has done is to remind the international community that coddling such states or soft-peddalling their conduct will only embolden them further. The bottom line is stark: Pakistan must abandon its toxic policy of exporting terror, dismantle terror camps, and hand over wanted criminals.

Unless the world unites against such duplicity, Pakistan will continue to spin its web of lies. But empty rhetoric at the UN will not change facts on the ground. India, for its part, has declared that it will not sit back. Any adventure, any terror attack, will be met with immediate and befitting retribution.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Human life begins on the far side of despair.

- Jean-Paul Sartre

SUPER STAR VIJAY EMBODIES YOUTH ASPIRATIONS



T N ASHOK

The recent stampede at Karur has cast a dark shadow over what was meant to be another triumphant political rally by Tamil cinema's reigning superstar, Vijay. With 39 people dead and dozens injured, the tragedy has raised uncomfortable questions about crowd management, political responsibility, and the unbridled enthusiasm that Vijay commands among his fans. Yet, even as his critics dismiss him as a "one-time sensation," the sheer magnetism that draws lakhs to his rallies suggests a political phenomenon that Tamil Nadu's established parties can no longer ignore.

Joseph Vijay Chandrasekar, known simply as Vijay, represents the latest evolution of Tamil cinema's tryst with politics. Born in 1974 to director S.A. Chandrasekar, Vijay's journey from child actor to political aspirant follows a trajectory that echoes the golden era of Tamil cinema-politics confluence. His father, a filmmaker and former executive in film industry bodies, provided not just cinematic guidance but also the political foundation that would later shape Vijay's worldview.

Born in Madras to director S. A. Chandrasekar, Vijay made his debut as a child actor in the Tamil film Vetri (1984), and played his first lead role in the film Naalaiya Theerpu (1992) at the age of 18. Unlike many contemporary stars who stumbled into politics, Vijay's political consciousness was nurtured over decades. Even from his days as a visual communication student at Chennai's Loyola College, Vijay has been a follower of the Dravidian ideology, but was reluctant to get into politics.

What sets Vijay apart from failed political ventures by actors like Vijayakanth or Arjun is his methodical approach to building a political base. During the early 2000s, actor Vijay had an extensive network of fan clubs across Tamil Nadu. Around 2009, these fan clubs were brought together under a structured "Narpani Iyakkam" (welfare association), aimed at organizing philanthropic and community service activities.

This systematic transformation of fan following into a political machinery mirrors the strategies employed by M.G. Ramachandran and Jayalalithaa, who successfully leveraged their cinematic appeal into electoral victories. However, Vijay's journey hasn't been without internal conflicts. In 2021, Vijay and his father and director SA Chandrasekar had a very public

empowerment and more. Though diverse in their fields of work, they all embody one spirit and one resolve: "Nation First".

From its very inception, the Sangh has devoted itself to nation-building. To achieve this, it chose the path of character-building. Vyakti nirmaan se rashtira nirmaan, nation-building through character-building—this has been the Sangh's path. For this, it created the unique, simple and enduring mechanism of the daily shakha. The shakha is an inspiring place where every swamyasevak begins his journey from 'Me to We' and goes through a process of personal transformation.

The foundation of the Sangh's hundred-year journey has been laid by a great national mission, a path of personal transformation and the practical method of the shakha. Through these, the Sangh has shaped lakhs of swamyasevaks who continue to propel India forward in every sphere of life.

Right from the moment of its founding, the Sangh has considered the nation's priority as its own priority. Param Pujya Dr. Hedgewar Ji and many swamyasevaks participated actively in the freedom struggle. Dr. Hedgewar Ji himself was imprisoned several times. The Sangh also provided support and protection to many freedom fighters. After Independence, the Sangh continued working for the nation.

lic tussle leading to the end of the political association Vijay Makkal Iyakkam (VMI).

The formal launch of Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) on 2 February 2024 marked Vijay's definitive entry into politics. 51-year-old Vijay, who has worked in more than 60 movies, founded the TVK on February 2, 2024, stating that he would contest the 2026 assembly elections in Tamil Nadu.

Vijay's political aspirations are backed by unprecedented commercial success. As Tamil cinema's highest-paid actor, with reported fees ranging between ₹120-150 crores per film, his financial independence provides a crucial advantage over stars dependent on political patronage. His recent blockbusters—Thuppakki, Mersal, Sarkar, Bigil, Master, and Leo—have not only established his box office supremacy but also demonstrated his ability to weave social and political messages into mainstream entertainment.

His dancing style, a unique blend of Western moves with local flavor, has become iconic among youth across Tamil Nadu's social spectrum. This cross-demographic appeal, spanning from urban multiplexes to rural single screens, translates into potential electoral dividends that worry established parties.

The stampede at his Karur rally that killed 39 people and injured over 50 represents a critical juncture in Vijay's political journey. The rally, addressed by popular actor-turned-politician Vijay, who heads the TVK party, drew massive crowds to Velusamy Puram venue, demonstrating both his drawing power and the organizational challenges his movement faces.

Critics have been quick to point fingers. The ruling DMK, while offering condolences, has internally seized upon the incident to question TVK's preparedness for governance. Chief Minister Stalin's reported reluctance to grant permissions for future rallies reflects the establishment's growing unease with Vijay's mobilization capabilities.

Comparisons with Rajinikanth are inevitable but reveal crucial differences. While Rajinikanth flirted with political entry for decades before ultimately stepping back, Vijay has demonstrated unwavering commitment. Encouraged by his father, he began nursing his political dreams, especially after the deaths of AIADMK supremo J. Jayalalithaa and DMK patriarch M. Karunanidhi.

Unlike Rajinikanth's ethereal, almost godlike screen persona, Vijay has cultivated

an everyman image. His simple lifestyle, clean off-screen reputation, and stable family life with wife Sangeetha and their children resonate with middle-class aspirations. Reports suggest he maintains punctual tax payments and avoids the controversies that have derailed other celebrity politicians.

Vijay's emergence poses different threats to different parties. For the DMK, he represents a potential splinter in their youth vote bank, particularly among the educated urban demographic. His secular credentials and Dravidian ideological alignment make him more dangerous to DMK than AIADMK in the long term.

For AIADMK, struggling with leadership issues post-Jayalalithaa, Vijay offers an alternative for those seeking charismatic leadership. His mass appeal could potentially revive the MGR-Jayalalithaa model of cinema-politics synthesis.

The BJP faces perhaps the most complex challenge. While Vijay's Tamil nationalist rhetoric doesn't align with Hindutva politics, his anti-corruption stance and focus on development could attract voters seeking alternatives to Dravidian parties.

Vijay's political success will depend on several factors that differentiate sustainable movements from flash-in-the-pan phenomena: Organizational Depth — Unlike Vijayakanth's DMDK, which remained largely a one-man show, TVK needs robust organizational structures beyond fan clubs. The Karur tragedy has highlighted these gaps. Ideological Consistency — His commitment to Dravidian ideology, while maintaining secular credentials, needs clear policy articulation beyond populist rhetoric. Coalition Building — Tamil Nadu's fragmented political landscape may require strategic alliances, something MGR and Jayalalithaa mastered. Timing — The 2026 assembly elections will test whether his popularity can withstand the grind of electoral politics.

Perhaps Vijay's greatest asset is his appeal to Tamil Nadu's youth demographic. In an era where social media amplifies political messaging, his fan base's digital sophistication provides unprecedented reach. His ability to mobilize young voters, evidenced by massive turnouts at rallies, represents a generational shift in Tamil politics.

The tragedy at Karur, while casting immediate shadows, may paradoxically demonstrate the intensity of support that established parties struggle to generate. How TVK learns from this crisis—improving

organization while maintaining grassroots enthusiasm—will determine whether Vijay joins the pantheon of successful cinema-politicians or becomes another cautionary tale.

As Tamil Nadu approaches the 2026 elections, the Vijay phenomenon represents more than celebrity politics. It embodies youth aspirations, anti-establishment sentiment, and the enduring power of charismatic leadership in Dravidian politics. Whether this translates into electoral success remains the ultimate test of his political journey from reel hero to potential real-world leader.

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Assam police is strictly monitoring the social media platforms. If anyone is found spreading "fake AI generated pics or fake news" strict legal action will be initiated against them.

@assampolice

@DGPAssamPolice

#beware

#fakenews

#Donotspread

প্রথম ফটো খন সত্য, দ্বিতীয় খন AI ফটো !!



100 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE NATION

empowerment and more. Though diverse in their fields of work, they all embody one spirit and one resolve: "Nation First".

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Along this journey, there were conspiracies and attempts to crush the Sangh. Its second Sarsangchalak, Param Pujya Guruji, was falsely implicated in a case and even imprisoned. But the Sangh never allowed bitterness to take root,

because swamyasevaks believe, "We are not separate from society. Society is formed of us." This feeling of oneness with society and unshakable faith in the Constitution and constitutional institutions gave the swamyasevaks steadiness of mind and kept them sensitive towards society, even in the gravest crises.

The Sangh has always been synonymous with patriotism and service. When Partition left lakhs of families homeless, swamyasevaks came forward to serve refugees. In every disaster, despite limited resources, swamyasevaks are among the first responders and work at the frontlines. For them, this is not just relief work, but the work of strengthening the nation's very soul. Bearing hardships personally while easing the pain of others is the motto of every swamyasevak.

In its journey of a century, the Sangh has awakened self-awareness and self-confidence among various sections of society. It has worked even in the most remote, inaccessible parts of the country. For decades, it has dedicated itself to preserving and nurturing the traditions, customs, and values of tribal communities. Today, institutions such as Sewa Bharati, Vidya Bharati, Ekal Vidyalayas and the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram have become strong pillars of empowerment for tribal communities.

For centuries, social ills such as caste discrimination and untouchability have been challenges for Hindu society. From the time of Dr. Hedgewar Ji until today, every member of the Sangh, every Sarsangchalak, has fought against such discrimination. Param Pujya Guruji constantly carried

forward the spirit of 'Na Hindu Patito Bhavet', meaning 'no Hindu can ever be fallen'. Pujya Balasaheb Deoras Ji declared: "If untouchability is not wrong, nothing else is wrong in the world." Later, Pujya Rajju Bhaiya Ji and Pujya Sudarshan Ji, too, carried this message forward. In the current times, the present Sarsangchalak, respected Mohan Bhagwat Ji, has given a clear call for unity, calling for one well, one temple, one cremation ground for everyone.

When the Sangh was formed a century ago, the needs and struggles of the time were different from those of today. Today, as India advances towards becoming a developed nation, there are newer challenges. Dependence on foreign countries, conspiracies to divide our unity, demographic changes through infiltration and more. Our government is actively countering these. I am glad that the RSS too has prepared a concrete roadmap to face them.

The 'Panch Parivartan' of the Sangh gives every swamyasevak the path to overcome today's challenges.

Sva-Bodh: Self-awareness helps us free ourselves from the colonial mindset, taking pride in our heritage and advancing the principle of Swadeshi.

Samajik Samrasta: Social harmony is brought about by ensuring social justice by prioritising the marginalised. Today, our social harmony faces a grave challenge from demographic imbalances caused by infiltration. To address this, the nation has announced a High-Powered Demography Mission.

Ex-Manipur CM Biren Singh raises concerns over low bids for hill road projects

IMPHAL

Former Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh cautioned against compromising quality in hill road construction, citing unusually low bids for the widening of NH 102A Shangshak-Tengnoup Road.

"Manipur's hill roads demand quality investment, not contracts that compromise standards for the sake of low bidding," Biren Singh said, highlighting the challenges of construction in hilly terrain, including difficult geography, heavy logistics, and unpredictable weather.

He pointed out that several Public Works Department (PWD) tenders for the project received bids far below both the market rate and official



estimates. For instance, Package 1, estimated at ₹281.45 crore, saw the

lowest bid at ₹175.34 crore — nearly 38 percent lower. Package 3, estimated at ₹429.94 crore, received a bid of ₹227.00 crore, 47 percent below the estimate. Other bids ranged between 33 and 43 percent lower than the official estimates.

"Such extreme underquoting raises genuine concerns about quality and transparency," he said. Biren Singh urged the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways to carefully evaluate the bids, conduct proper technical and financial scrutiny, and ensure that public funds are safeguarded.

He stressed that the focus should remain on delivering durable and safe infrastructure that genuinely benefits the people of Manipur.

Justice will prevail: Zubeen Garg's wife on ongoing probe

GUWAHATI

Garima Saikia Garg, wife of late music icon Zubeen Garg, has appealed for restraint and trust in the judicial system as the investigation into her husband's death continues. Speaking to the media, Garima stated that the inquiry is underway and emphasized that it would be premature to make any assumptions or public remarks at this stage. "The investigation process is ongoing, and they are handling it in their own way. Therefore, we should not comment on it right now. I do not have much knowledge about it, so the law will take its own course," she said. Expressing confidence in the process, she added, "I have full faith that we will receive justice through our legal system, and the investigation will be conducted properly. We will soon learn what really happened that day and who is guilty of what we want to know. If anyone is responsible, they will be punished very soon."

Meanwhile, The Special Investigation

Team (SIT) probing the death of singer Zubeen Garg continues its investigation, said MP Gupta, Special DGP and head of the SIT, on Thursday, October 2. "As you are aware, we have arrested Shyamkanu Mahanta and Siddharth Sharma and are interrogating various other persons connected to the case. A new Section 103 under the BNS has been added after the registration of the case," he stated. A team of investigating officers from the SIT including, Moramee Das and Mukhtar Rahman arrived at Zubeen Garg's Kahilipara residence and interrogated Garima Saikia Garg in connection to the case. Although the officials were tight lipped about the interrogation, Garima Saikia Garg abstained from mentioning anything about the autopsy report as received from the authorities today. SIT chief Munna Gupta added that notices have been issued to all those involved with the case, and a deadline of October 6 has been set to appear for questioning.

Meghalaya's 600-year-old Nartiang Temple draws thousands on Vijaya Dashami

SHILLONG

The 600-year-old Durga temple at Nartiang in Meghalaya's West Jaintia Hills district witnessed a massive gathering of devotees on October 2 as thousands thronged the sacred shrine on the occasion of Vijaya Dashami, the final day of Durga Puja.

The temple, revered as one of the 51 Shakti Peethas, holds a unique place in India's spiritual landscape for its seamless fusion of Hindu traditions with Khasi-Jaintia cultural practices.

"What makes Nartiang special is the organic integration of tribal customs with classical Hindu ritualism, a legacy preserved for centuries," said a priest from the Deshmukh lineage of Maharashtra, which has been serving the temple for generations. "The form may differ, but the devotion remains the same."

Unlike most temples across the country, the Goddess here is represented by a banana plantain trunk, in line with Khasi customs that forbid sculpted deity images. Adorned with marigolds and symbolic decorations, the plantain trunk stood as the living embodiment of the Goddess throughout the festival.

The local chieftain, or Dalloi, serves as the temple's chief patron, highlighting the intertwining of spiritual devotion with the region's indigenous governance systems. On the concluding day, the Dalloi and his entourage performed a traditional dance before ceremonially removing the plantain trunk from the sanctum and immersing it in a nearby river, symbolising the departure of the Goddess.

Devotees from across Meghalaya and beyond joined the celebrations, their chants and drumbeats reverberating through the temple complex.

Shyamkanu Mahanta's wife visits CID office as SIT continues marathon interrogation in Guwahati

GUWAHATI

Shyamkanu Mahanta and Siddharth Sharma, currently held in the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) lockup in connection with Zubeen Garg's death, continue to be under intense scrutiny by the Special Investigation Team (SIT).

Sources said both accused have not been allowed to receive home-cooked meals and are being provided only the food supplied by the authorities. Shyamkanu Mahanta's wife, Anita Deka Mahanta, had visited the CID office carrying parcels of food for her husband but was denied access. She refrained from making any comments to the media.

Meanwhile, Siddharth Sharma, who was present at the location during Zubeen Garg's

death, broke his silence under SIT custody and was interrogated overnight by a Sub-Inspector. Several of Zubeen Garg's belongings, including a sling bag, were recovered from Siddharth Sharma and are now under forensic scrutiny.

Today, Zubeen Garg's brother, Sandipan Garg, again appeared at the CID office, showing the family's continued involvement and interest in the progress of the investigation.

The SIT is investigating key questions, including who triggered the incident at the party and who all were present during the night of the incident.

Both Mahanta and Sharma remain in custody as the investigation into the high-profile case continues, with authorities coordinating further procedures and evidence examination.

IMPHAL

Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla graced International Day of Older Persons (IDOP) 2025 at Imphal Hotel on Wednesday, October 1, highlighting the indispensable role of elders as active contributors to society. This year's theme, "Older Persons Driving Local and Global Action: Our Aspirations, Our Well-Being, Our Rights," underscored the importance of ensuring dignity, inclusion, and respect for the elderly.

During the event, the Governor distributed gifts, aids, and assistive devices to senior citizens, reaffirming the State's commitment to their welfare. The gathering was also attended by the Chief Secretary, Sec-



retary of the Social Welfare Department, senior citizens, NGOs, students, and other stakeholders.

Addressing the occasion, Governor Bhalla emphasized that elders are not merely de-

Manipur Governor underscores role of elderly in nation-building, chairs preparations for Mera Hou Chongba festival

pendents but vital guides whose wisdom, resilience, and lived experiences enrich families and communities. He stressed that the combined energy of youth and the wisdom of the elderly can form a powerful force to tackle both local and global challenges. "Dignity, respect, and inclusion for the elderly must be seen as a matter of justice, not charity," he remarked, calling for greater intergenerational solidarity to build a compassionate and inclusive Manipur.

He further appreciated the sustained efforts of the Social Welfare Department in implementing welfare schemes that have positively impacted senior citizens across the state.

Later in the day, the Governor chaired a high-level meeting at Raj Bhavan, Imphal, to

review preparations for the upcoming Mera Hou Chongba festival, scheduled for October 7, 2025. The traditional festival, celebrated at Kangla in Imphal, symbolizes the unity of Manipur's hill and valley communities through cultural exchange and collective participation.

The meeting, attended by the MP (Rajya Sabha), Chief Secretary, Commissioner (Home), and other senior officials, focused on arrangements related to transportation, accommodation, and logistics. The Governor directed officials to ensure that this year's celebration is conducted seamlessly and on a grander scale, reaffirming the festival's enduring role in strengthening bonds of brotherhood among diverse indigenous groups.

Nagaland records 28% rise in total crimes from 2021 to 2023: NCRB

KOHIMA

Nagaland has recorded a steady rise in total cognizable crimes between 2021 and 2023, largely under Special and Local Laws (SLL), even as cases registered under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) have remained largely unchanged. Also Read - Devotees

throng Meghalaya's 600-year-old Nartiang Temple for Vijaya Dashami rituals According to the Crime in India 2023 report released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), the state registered 1,899 cases in 2023, up from 1,592 in 2022 and 1,478 in 2021—an overall increase of about 28 per cent in three years. Also Read - Centre releases Rs 8,668-Cr tax devolution to Northeast; Assam tops with Rs 3,178-Cr Advertisement IPC crimes in the state have shown little variation: 1,033 cases in 2021, 1,008 in

2022, and 1,050 in 2023. The IPC crime rate per lakh population stands at 47.0, significantly lower than the national average of 270.3.

3 vehicles damaged, no injuries Murder cases in Nagaland have gradually risen from 14 in 2021 to 19 in 2023, while incidents of kidnapping and abduction fell from four in 2021 to just two in 2023. The report also highlighted 138 cases of offences against public tranquillity, including rioting and unlawful assembly, recorded in 2023.

The report shows SLL crimes surged from 445 cases in 2021, 584 in 2022 and 849 cases in 2023, the report said. This represents a 91 per cent increase in just three years. Most of these relate to excise, narcotics, and local administrative laws. The SLL crime rate for Nagaland was 38 per lakh population, still lower than

the national average of 178.0. Crimes against women remain negligible, with the state reporting only two rape cases in 2021, one in 2022, and three rapes along with one trafficking case in 2023. Nagaland's crime rate against women stands at 0.3 per lakh women population, compared to the national rate of 66.2. Crimes against children also remained low, with two cases in 2021, one in 2022, and one IPC case in 2023.

However, 2023 also saw 16 cases under the Juvenile Justice Act but no cases under the POCSO Act were recorded during these three years. Nonetheless, technology-linked and financial crimes are on an upward trend in Nagaland with two cyber-crime cases in 2021, four in 2022 and six in 2023. Economic offences (cheating, fraud, forgery) also increased

from 15 in 2021 to 22 in 2022 and 27 in 2023. Property crimes form a significant share of IPC cases with numbers growing from around 1,500 in 2021 to 1,700 in 2022, and further to 1,851 in 2023. Theft and burglary were the leading categories, the report maintained. Nagaland reported a steady decline in arms and explosives-related offences, with three cases in 2021, two in 2022, and one each under the Arms Act and Explosives Act in 2023. The state also reported zero cases across categories such as crimes against senior citizens, atrocities against SCs/STs, environment-related offences, crimes against/by foreigners, and fake currency seizures during 2021-2023. Nagaland's total of 1,899 cases in 2023, with 22.4 lakh mid-year projected population is the lowest in the Northeast.

CID widens probe into Zubeen Garg death case, fresh summons issued to individuals linked to North East Festival

GUWAHATI

The investigation into the circumstances surrounding the death of music icon Zubeen Garg has intensified, with the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) summoning three more individuals linked to the North-East Festival.

According to sources, Nayan Jyoti Das, Dipjyoti Roy, and Raktim Roy have been asked to appear before the CID office for questioning. The three were reportedly close associates of festival organiser Shyamkanu Mahanta, one of the two key figures already under arrest. Among them, Raktim Roy is believed to have closely monitored Mahanta's financial dealings related to the festival.

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) confirmed that the probe is progressing in multiple directions, with investigators examining financial irregularities and personal connections. The case has been registered as Case

No. 18/2025, under Sections 61(2), 105, 106(1), and 103 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). Both Mahanta and Siddhartha Sharma remain in custody, facing intensive interrogation.

In addition, the authorities have filed a separate property-related case against Mahanta, registered as Case No. 19/2025 under Sections 316(5), 336(5), 337, 338, 339, 340(2), 341(1), and 342(1) of BNS.

CID officials have directed other persons of interest to appear for questioning on October 6. "The investigation is ongoing. We have arrested two persons, and their interrogation continues. Others connected with the case will also be investigated," said MP Gupta, a senior officer associated with the SIT.

Meanwhile, authorities await additional forensic and documentary reports from Guwahati and Delhi, which are expected to provide further clarity in the ongoing probe.

Tripura: Agartala witnesses safe and smooth Durga Idol Immersion on Vijayadashmi

AGARTALA

On the occasion of Vijayadashmi, Agartala witnessed the immersion of Goddess Durga at Dashami Ghat, the main immersion site in Agartala, under elaborate safety and security arrangements on Thursday.

Mayor of Agartala Municipal Corporation (AMC) Dipak Majumder stated that the immersion process, which began this morning, will continue until late tomorrow night. The Mayor also emphasises that measures have been taken to ensure safety, security and discipline for a peaceful immersion ceremony.

"All necessary measures have been taken to ensure safety, security and discipline for a peaceful immersion ceremony," the Mayor told.

The Mayor said that the idol immersions will take place over the next three days, specifically on October 2nd, 3rd, and 4th. He noted that in the past, many idols were immersed in Agartala city, but the arrangements were inadequate. Hence, with the formation of the new municipal structure, efforts



have been made to improve these arrangements. The Mayor also stated that Dashami Ghat will become the largest idol immersion site in the entire Northeast.

"First of all, I extend my warm greetings to all the residents of the state on the occasion of Vijayadashmi 2025. After taking charge of the Municipal Corporation, we have completely renovated the area for idol immersion. Earlier, many idols in Agartala city were immersed here, but the arrangements were very poor. Once the new municipal structure was formed, we

focused on improving this. We have made efforts to ensure that those bringing idols can immerse the Goddess comfortably, and the area has been developed accordingly. In the future, this will become the largest idol immersion ghat in the entire Northeast. Seating arrangements have also been made for all visitors to watch comfortably. The idol immersions will take place over the next three days, on the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th of October. Staff from HDRF and NDRF will be present, and all necessary emergency facilities, including ambulances and live support,

are available here," said Majumder.

Meanwhile, Dashami Ghat has been specially equipped with adequate facilities to support the smooth immersion of idols. In this ghat, hundreds of idols from social clubs and private households across the city are being brought for immersion.

According to Dipak Majumder, Agartala witnesses 800 Durga Puja celebrations, out of which 300 idols are immersed at this Dashami ghat. In addition, the city has 13 other immersion ghats.

"In Agartala city, there are approximately 800 Durga Puja celebrations, out of which 300 idols are immersed at this ghat. In addition, the city has 13 other immersion ghats, while the remaining idols are immersed at this newly developed location," added Majumder.

Dussehra, also known as Vijayadashmi, is one of the most significant Hindu festivals in India.

It marks the victory of good over evil and is celebrated in diverse ways across the country. It commemorates Lord Rama's victory over the demon king Ravana, symbolising the triumph of truth and righteousness over arrogance and evil.

The effigy burning of Ravana, Meghnad, and Kumbhakaran is a popular tradition in many parts of India.

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‘India won’t allow humiliation’: Putin’s big praise for PM Modi amid US tariffs



NEW DELHI

Russian President Vladimir Putin has reiterated his strong support for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and stressed the strategic depth of India-Russia relations, even as the US ramps up pressure on New Delhi over its energy ties with Moscow.

President Donald Trump recently slapped 50 per cent tariffs on India, half of them for doing oil trade with Russia.

The move came as a pressure tactic on both India and Russia in a bid to stop the Kremlin’s ongoing military conflict with Ukraine.

Calling Modi a “wise leader who thinks first about his

country,” Putin expressed confidence that India would not yield to Western pressure. He noted that India stands to lose either way, by abandoning Russian oil, it risks losing \$9-10 billion annually, while defying sanctions could lead to similar financial setbacks.

“So why refuse if it also carries domestic political costs? [Indian people] will never allow themselves to be humiliated by anyone. I know Prime Minister [Narendra] Modi, he will also not make any such decisions,” Putin said at the international Valdai discussion forum in South Russia. “The losses faced by India due to punitive US tariffs would be balanced by crude imports from Russia,

plus it will gain prestige as a sovereign nation,” he added.

The Russian President also said measures were being devised to soften the trade imbalance between the two countries over high import of crude by New Delhi. “We are looking at increasing imports of Indian agricultural goods and pharmaceuticals,” he said.

He traced the Indo-Russian partnership back to the Soviet era, calling it a “privileged strategic partnership.” Putin stressed that the mutual respect and historical ties continue to form the bedrock of bilateral cooperation. “In India, they remember this, and we value that deeply,” he said.

Rajnath’s warning to Pak: any misadventure in Sir Creek will invite decisive response

NEW DELHI/BHUUJ

In a stern warning to Pakistan, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday said any misadventure by Islamabad in the Sir Creek sector will invite a “decisive response” that could be strong enough to change both “history and geography”.

He also said the Indian military successfully achieved all the objectives of Operation Sindoor and that starting a war with Pakistan by escalating the situation was not its intention.

The operation “exposed” Pakistan’s air defence and proved India’s “decisive capability”, Singh said. Click here to watch video

However, his comments on the disputed Sir Creek sector drew much attention.

“If Pakistan dares to act in the Sir Creek sector, the reply will be so strong that it will change both history and geography,” the Defence Minister said.

“In 1965, the Indian Army showed courage by reaching Lahore and in 2025, Pakistan must remember that the road to Karachi also passes through the creek,” he said.

Sir Creek is a 96-km-long tidal estuary between Gujarat’s Rann of Kutch and Pakistan and is considered a disputed region due to varying interpretations of maritime-boundary lines by both sides. Singh drew attention to the fact that even after 78 years of independence, Pakistan “continues to create disputes” over the Sir Creek sector, despite India’s repeated efforts to resolve the issue through dialogue.

The neighbouring country’s recent expansion of military infrastructure in the Sir Creek sector reflects its ill intention, he said.

“Any misadventure by Pakistan in the Sir Creek sector will invite a decisive response,” Singh said, adding, “The recent expansion of its (Pakistan’s) military infrastructure in the areas adjacent to Sir Creek reveals its intentions.”

The Defence Minister also virtually inaugurated a tidal-berthing facility and a Joint Control Centre (JCC) in



the strategic Sir Creek sector.

The facilities will act as major enablers for integrated coastal operations, while significantly enhancing joint operational capability, coastal-security coordination and rapid response to any threats, according to the defence ministry. In his remarks, Singh lauded the armed forces for “successfully thwarting” Pakistan’s attempts to breach India’s defence network during Operation Sindoor.

“Pakistan tried to penetrate India’s defences from Leh to the Sir Creek sector, but the swift and effective counter-action of the Indian forces not only exposed the weaknesses of Pakistan’s air-defence system, but also sent out a clear message to the world that India can inflict heavy damage at a time, place and manner of its choosing,” he said. Singh underlined that despite hav-

ing the capability, India demonstrated restraint as Operation Sindoor was aimed at countering terrorism, not provoking a wider conflict.

He expressed satisfaction that all military objectives of Operation Sindoor were successfully achieved and reaffirmed that India’s fight against terrorism will continue with full resolve. “Escalating it and starting a war was not the objective of Operation Sindoor. I am happy that Indian forces have successfully achieved all the military objectives of Operation Sindoor. But our fight against terrorism continues,” he said.

In response to the April 22 Pahalgam attack, India launched Operation Sindoor on May 7, targeting terror infrastructure in territories controlled by Pakistan.

The strikes triggered four days of

intense clashes that ended with an understanding on stopping the military actions on May 10.

Lauding the success of Operation Sindoor in “record time”, Singh said it was possible due to the seamless jointness of the armed forces.

He congratulated the soldiers and officers for their strategy, courage and capability that proved India’s ability to defeat its adversaries under any circumstances.

“It was the jointness of our armed forces that executed Operation Sindoor in record time. On this occasion today, I also want to extend special congratulations to our brave soldiers and officers for the success of Operation Sindoor,” Singh said.

“Your strategy, your courage and your capability have proven that India is capable of defeating the enemy in every situation. I am fully confident that the courage of all of you, the valour of all of you will continue to protect India’s sovereignty and integrity,” he added.

The Defence Minister described the Army, the Air Force and the Navy as “three pillars” India’s strength.

“When these three services work together, only then can we effectively face every challenge,” he said.

Extending greetings on the occasion of Vijaya Dashami, the senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader said the festival reminds people that no matter how powerful evil may appear to be, it is righteousness that ultimately prevails. The worship of weapons on this day is deeply connected with India’s national life, as it represents respect for the country’s collective strength, security and freedom,” he added. The Defence Minister also paid tributes to Mahatma Gandhi on his birth anniversary, describing him as a shining example of moral courage.

He said Gandhiji, with the power of his spirit alone, compelled the strongest empire of the time to bow down.

“Our soldiers possess both morale and weapons and therefore, no challenge can withstand their resolve,” he said.

INTERNATIONAL

Japan’s governing party to choose its new leader on September 4 to succeed Ishiba

TOKYO

Japan’s long-governing Liberal Democratic Party will choose a new leader Saturday to replace Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, but the winner must quickly restore political stability and regain public support for the struggling party to stay in power.

Three of the five candidates in Saturday’s intraparty vote are seen as the favorites. They include a woman who could become Japan’s first female prime minister, the son of a former prime minister and a veteran moderate.

The winner must act quickly to address rising prices if the party is to have any chance of winning back support after election losses to the LDP and its junior partner Komeito in the past year cost their coalition a majority in both houses of parliament.

The new party president is still likely to become prime minister because the LDP still has the most seats in the lower house, which chooses the prime minister, and opposition groups are splintered.

The winner will immediately face a big test — hosting a possible summit with U.S. President Donald Trump. A meeting is reported to be in the works as Trump travels to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in South Korea that starts Oct. 31.

Whoever becomes the LDP leader must also gain cooperation from main opposition parties or risk a cycle of short-lived leadership.

The vote is being held within the LDP — its 295 parliamentarians and 1 million dues-paying grassroots party members. That’s less than 1% of Japan’s eligible voters.

If no one wins a majority in the first vote Saturday, a runoff will quickly follow between the top two vote-getters.

The lower house will then choose



a new prime minister in a leadership vote expected in mid-October. The new LDP leader will need votes from some opposition lawmakers to take office.

All five candidates are incumbent and former Cabinet ministers who have emphasised their willingness to work with opposition groups that are more centrist politically.

Surveys have suggested the front-runners are Sanae Takaichi, who could become the first female prime minister, Shinjiro Koizumi, who would be the youngest in more than a century, and Yoshimasa Hayashi, a veteran all-rounder.

Sanae Takaichi, 64, admires former British Prime Minister Margaret

Thatcher and is a protégée of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. She is a wartime history revisionist and China hawk. She regularly visits Yasukuni Shrine seen as a symbol of militarism. Takaichi has vowed toughness on immigration, a major issue in the race. Her staunch ultra-conservative stance is considered a major risk to Japan’s relations with Asian neighbors.

Shinjiro Koizumi, 44, is the son of a popular former prime minister, Junichiro Koizumi, and seeks to be the youngest prime minister in Japan’s modern history. As agriculture minister for Ishiba, Koizumi released an emergency rice stockpile to lower prices and stabilize supply as he promoted a

reformist stance. Koizumi has made rebuilding his party a priority and pledges to listen to the people’s voices closely to address their concerns, such as rising prices, growing foreign population and public safety.

Yoshimasa Hayashi, 64, is the chief Cabinet secretary in Ishiba’s government. He is a moderate who promises steady wage increases, a strong economy and defense. He also advocates a universal credit system to provide assistance to low-income families for basic goods. Hayashi is a pragmatic, pro-China veteran with a reputation for being capable at damage control. He has also served as foreign, defense and education minister.

Toshimitsu Motegi, 69, has served in key posts including foreign and trade ministers and is known as a tough trade negotiator.

Takayuki Kobayashi, 50. The ultra-conservative former economic security minister promises strong growth, defence and national unity. He calls for tougher restrictions on foreigners.

Cooperation with opposition parties is vital but risky

The new LDP leader and prime minister will need help from either or both of the center-right opposition groups, the Japan Innovation Party, or Ishin, and the Democratic Party for the People, with which the LDP has collaborated on budget bills.

While it’s still uncertain, cooperation or even expanding the coalition might contribute to political stability.

Koizumi has approached Ishin and in August visited Osaka Expo, where he was escorted by party leader and Osaka Gov. Hirofumi Yoshimura. Hayashi reportedly met with a senior Ishin lawmaker over dinner recently, while Motegi announced his willingness to form a coalition with the two parties.

Zelenskyy warns that Russian drones endanger Chernobyl, other nuclear plants in Ukraine

KYIV

Russia’s sustained bombardment of Ukraine’s power grid is deepening concerns about the safety of the country’s nuclear facilities after a drone knocked out power for more than three hours to the site of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster in northern Ukraine, officials said Thursday.

The drone strike adds to concerns raised more than a week ago when the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in southeastern Ukraine became disconnected from the power grid following attacks that each side has blamed on the other.

Both Chernobyl nor Zaporizhzhia are not currently operational, but they require a constant power supply to run crucial cooling systems for spent fuel rods in order to avoid a potential nuclear incident.

A blackout also could blind radiation monitoring systems installed to boost security at Chernobyl and operated by the U.N.’s International Atomic Energy Agency.

“Russia is deliberately creating the threat of radiation incidents,” Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said late Wednesday, criticizing the U.N. nuclear watchdog and its chief Rafael Mariano Grossi for what he described as weak responses to the danger.

“Every day of Russia’s war, every strike on our energy facilities, including those connected to nuclear safety, is a global threat,” he said. “Weak and half-measures will not work. Strong action is needed.”

Russian President Vladimir Putin rejected Ukrainian claims that Russia has been shelling the power lines around the Zaporizhzhia plant as “nonsense” and blamed Ukraine for attacking the Moscow-controlled plant, warning that Russia could respond in kind.

The war that followed Russia’s all-out invasion of

its neighbor more than three years ago appears no closer to ending, despite months of U.S.-led peace efforts.

Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address that Russia launched over 20 Shahed drones against energy infrastructure in Slavutych, the city whose power supply services Chernobyl, the site of the world’s worst nuclear accident.

A wave of drones overwhelmed defenses and caused a blackout Wednesday, he said, affecting the sarcophagus that prevents radioactive dust from escaping the destroyed fourth reactor and storage housing more than 3,000 tons of spent fuel. He did not provide details of how it was affected.

“The Russians could not have been unaware that a strike on Slavutych would have such consequences for Chernobyl,” Zelenskyy said.

Last February, a drone armed with a warhead hit Chernobyl’s protective outer shell, briefly starting a fire. Radiation levels there did not increase, officials said.

The Zaporizhzhia plant, which is Europe’s biggest and one of the 10 biggest nuclear facilities in the world, has been disconnected from the grid for over a week.

It has repeatedly been caught in the crossfire during the war. Zelenskyy blamed Russian artillery for cutting the power line to the plant, but Putin mocked the claim, saying: “are we striking ourselves?”

He accused Ukraine of “playing a dangerous game” by attacking the plant, adding ominously: “People on the other side must understand that if they continue this dangerous game, they also have functioning nuclear power plants.” “What would prevent us from responding in kind?” he added. “Let them think about it.” The facility is using emergency diesel generators to run cooling systems for its six shutdown reactors and spent fuel.

The IAEA says the plant is not in immediate danger but wants it swiftly reconnected to the grid.

Ukraine’s Energy Ministry said the situation is unprecedented. “No nuclear power plant in the world has ever operated under such conditions, and it is impossible to make any reliable forecasts,” it said in a statement to The Associated Press.

Edwin Lyman, director of nuclear power safety at the Union of Concerned Scientists, an American nonprofit organization, said no nuclear plant was designed to be able to function safely for an extended period without access to stable off-site power.

“The situation at Zaporizhzhia is indeed extremely fragile and increasingly dire,” he told AP.

If power for cooling were disrupted to one or more of the units, it would be “several days or longer” before the reactor cores or spent fuel pools might start to release significant quantities of radioactive material, he said.

The U.S.-based Institute for the Study of War said Russia’s occupation of Zaporizhzhia has “significantly degraded” the security of the plant.

It claimed Wednesday that Moscow wants to integrate the plant into the Russian grid — a move that will “exacerbate security risks, degrade Ukraine’s future power generation capacity, and serve as a tool that Russia can use to legitimize its occupation of Ukraine.”

Russia and Ukraine exchanged hundreds of prisoners of war Thursday.

Zelenskyy said 185 military personnel, most of whom had been in Russian captivity since 2022, and 20 civilians were returned home.

Since the war began, more than 7,000 Ukrainians have returned, Zelenskyy said on Telegram.

Russia’s Defense Ministry said 185 of its soldiers and 20 civilians returned.

From Legislature to Fish Farm: The Rs 29-Crore Scam Rocking Manipur Assembly

The Manipur Legislative Assembly has long been considered the most sacred space in the state's democratic life—an institution where laws are framed, policies debated, and the aspirations of citizens articulated. Yet in a shocking revelation that has left the public stunned, the Assembly itself has now been implicated in what may be one of the most bizarre and grotesque financial scandals in the state's history.

At the heart of the controversy lies an astonishing set of invoices that collectively amount to a staggering Rs 29 crore, submitted for supplies ranging from fish feed and manures to disposable plates and flower plants. The Assembly, which has barely functioned since the outbreak of ethnic violence on May 3, 2023, appears at least on paper to have transformed into a sprawling fishery, horticultural estate, and banquet hall.

The timing of the scandal could not be more damning. As Manipur prepares to commemorate the birth anniversary of Lamyamba Hijam Irabot, a towering figure of justice and equality in the state's history, the Assembly's descent into financial farce stands as a mockery of the very ideals he fought for.

- The Invoices That Shocked Manipur
- A trail of 152 invoices, dated between July 2 and July 28, 2025, reveals what seems like a surreal tale of financial mismanagement.
- Fish feed: Rs 2.88 crore
- Manures and plants, including phumdis: Rs 4.85 crore
- Seasonal flower plants: Rs 3 crore
- Drinking water: Rs 2.7 crore
- Land scraping and clearing: Rs 1.2 crore
- Stationery: Rs 2.4 crore
- Committee functions and meetings: Rs 1.9 crore
- Refreshments: Rs 1.77 crore
- Condiments (spices, sauces, pickles): Rs 62 lakh
- Toiletries (soap, tissue paper, etc.): Rs 98 lakh
- Disposable items (cups, plates, cutlery): Rs 2.7 crore

Each line item raises questions bordering on the absurd. Why would a legislative assembly—a building without fishponds, without vast agricultural fields, without a commercial kitchen or dining hall—require crores worth of fish feed, manures, condiments, and disposable plates?

If taken at face value, these bills suggest that the Assembly complex was no longer a site of governance but a bizarre mix of a fish farm, botanical garden, and catering facility.

The Web of Firms and Overlapping Supplies

The scam cannot be understood without looking at the network of six local firms implicated in the affair:

1. AI Enterprises - Rs 6.98 crore billed for stationery, refreshments, committee functions, and fish feed.
2. Indira Enterprises - Rs 6.37 crore for disposables, condiments, and manures.
3. DE Agency - Rs 5.76 crore for land scraping, renovations, electrical items, and plants.
4. WDS Agency - Rs 4.36 crore for fish feed, toiletries, and manures.
5. Leishangthem Enterprises - Rs 3.27 crore for seasonal flowers.
6. Servo Business Centre - Rs 2.48 crore for drinking water.

A closer look reveals serious overlaps: multiple firms supplied the same categories of goods—fish feed, manures, plants—suggesting an orchestrated attempt to inflate bills and siphon funds.

For instance, both AI Enterprises and WDS Agency billed for fish feed. Multiple vendors supplied plants and manures, despite the Assembly having no extensive gardens. Several firms also claimed to provide refreshments and condiments.

This kind of duplication is a red flag in procurement processes, often indicating collusion or deliberate manipulation of tenders.

The Bigger Context: Violence and Displacement

The scandal becomes even more outrageous when set against Manipur's current backdrop. Since ethnic violence broke out in May 2023, the state has endured:

Over 28 months of turmoil, leaving thousands displaced.

Relief camps struggling with poor sanitation, inadequate rations, and insufficient medical facilities.

A fragile law-and-order situation where Assembly sessions have been either suspended or conducted in severely restricted form.

Against this grim reality, the revelation that crores were spent on items like condiments and disposable plates—while relief camps reportedly strug-



gled to even provide adequate salt—has fueled public anger.

A recent RTI investigation into Moirang relief camps had already exposed how inflated bills were passed off in the name of relief supplies. The Assembly scam now appears to be an extension of this broader culture of financial mismanagement.

Inside the Finance Department: Pressure and a Sudden Transfer

The submission of the controversial invoices to the Finance Department sparked a storm of internal dissent. Insiders allege that the then Additional Chief Secretary (Finance), Vivek Kumar Dewangan (IAS), came under immense pressure to approve the bills.

Instead of rubber-stamping them, Dewangan reportedly resisted. Within weeks, on September 15, 2025, he was abruptly transferred to the Tribal Affairs & Hills/Agriculture Department. His exit left the Finance Department without a clear replacement—an unusual move that only deepened suspicions.

Was Dewangan punished for his reluctance to comply? Was his transfer engineered to make way for an officer more willing to sign off on dubious bills? The opacity surrounding the decision has led many to believe that the transfer was a political maneuver designed to smoothen the scam's approval.

Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla now faces growing calls to step in and order an independent probe.

The Symbolic Betrayal

The Assembly is supposed to embody transparency, accountability, and democratic governance. Its transformation into a paper fishery and garden is not just a misuse of funds but a symbolic betrayal of its constitutional role.

In a state where thousands of families are still living in relief camps, where schools remain disrupted, and where healthcare services are stretched thin, the idea of crores being squandered on manures, disposable cups, and condiments is nothing short of obscene.

If fish farming investment was truly needed, it should have been directed to the state-owned lakes and fisheries. If horticultural development was a priority, Kangla Fort or Loktak Lake could have been the sites. The Assembly, however, has no justification for such spending.

The Question of Accountability

This scandal raises urgent questions:

1. Who approved the invoices? Were they vetted by financial officers, or pushed through by political pressure?
2. Why multiple vendors for identical items? Was this a strategy to distribute kickbacks across firms with political ties?
3. Who benefits? Did any real goods ever reach the Assembly, or were these merely "ghost supplies" backed by paper invoices?
4. Why was Vivek Kumar Dewangan transferred? Was his resistance the reason behind his abrupt reassignment?

The absence of transparency only worsens public distrust.

A Pattern of Corruption?

The Assembly scam is not an isolated incident. Manipur has witnessed multiple instances of inflated or fictitious bills in recent years:

Relief camp supplies showing in-

flated figures for salt and rice.

The Way Forward

Manipur now stands at a crossroads. If this scandal is swept under the carpet, it will cement the public's belief that the Assembly itself is complicit in corruption. To restore faith, several steps are essential:

1. A judicial or CBI probe into the scam, independent of political interference.
2. Publication of all invoices related to Assembly expenses from 2023 onwards, in the public domain.
3. Accountability of firms implicated in the scam, including blacklisting from future contracts.
4. Reinforcement of financial checks, ensuring no single officer can be pressured into approving dubious bills.
5. Restoration of Assembly credibility by focusing funds on urgent needs—rehabilitation of displaced families, rebuilding schools, and strengthening law-and-order.

A Crisis of Democracy

As Manipur remembers Lamyamba Hijam Irabot, a leader who stood for justice, equality, and the upliftment of the poor, the contrast with today's Assembly could not be starker. Instead of being a temple of democracy, it now resembles a temple of corruption, where invoices replace debates and siphoned funds replace policies.

Conclusion: Restoring Faith

The people of Manipur, battered by violence and displacement, deserve an Assembly that listens to their pain and addresses their needs. They do not deserve an institution that mocks their suffering by billing crores for fish feed and manures. Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla and the state government now have a historic responsibility: to investigate transparently, punish those responsible, and restore the Assembly's dignity. Anything less will be a betrayal not only of the people but also of the very idea of democracy in Manipur.

As the dust settles on this shocking revelation, one truth stands clear: Manipur's future depends on whether its leaders choose accountability over corruption, transparency over secrecy, and justice over betrayal. The Assembly must be reclaimed—not as a fish farm or flower garden, but as the true seat of democracy.

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