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PERSPECTIVE

People are so quick to judge others faults, but never quick to point out their own.

Assam Govt Pumps Rs. 1,000 Crore Into NE Waterways: Sonowal

GUWAHATI
Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal announced on Thursday that Assam's river jetties and terminals, located in Pandu, Jogighopa, Dhubri, Bogibeel, Karimganj, and Badarpur, have emerged as key hubs for cross-border trade.

Speaking at the North East Oil and Gas Conclave 2025, he explained that these waterways now efficiently transport petroleum products and heavy industrial consignments to Bangladesh and other neighbouring regions, significantly reducing travel time, distance, and fuel costs compared to road transport.

Sonowal highlighted that cargo movement on the Sadiya-Dhubri section of the Brahmaputra, designated as National Waterway-2, is approaching six lakh tonnes annually.

He attributed this growth to faster turnaround times and more dependable navigation systems, which have revitalised one of the region's oldest trade routes.

According to him, this progress has reshaped economic activity and contributed to prosperity across the north-eastern hinterland.

Emphasising the central government's focus on Inland Water Transport (IWT), Sonowal credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership for enabling smoother cargo movement across the Brahmaputra and Barak river systems.

He said the push for IWT has not only reduced logistics expenses but also strengthened the multimodal transport network required for moving petroleum and industrial goods.

WHO SAID WHAT

Poverty is an engineering problem
~ Elon Musk, American Entrepreneur

NE Leaders, ABSU Press for Sixth Schedule Reforms Ahead of Winter Session

NEW DELHI
A national seminar organised by the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) at the Constitution Club of India brought together tribal autonomous district councils, constitutional experts, parliamentarians and movement organisations from across the Northeast to place a united appeal before the Union Government ahead of the winter session of Parliament, an official press release said. The programme opened with tributes to Bodofa Upendranath Brahma and introductory remarks by Chairperson Prof. Ramesh Bhargava. The gathering drew leaders including Pramod Boro, former CEM of BTR and signatory of the Bodo Accord; Sukla Charan Noatia, Minister for Tribal Welfare and Minorities, Tripura; Pyniaid Sing Syiem, former CEM, KHADC; Vijay Hansaria, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court; Sabda Ram Rabha, Senior Advocate, Gauhati High Court; Aditya Khakhlari, Secretary General, All Assam Tribal Sangha and Chief Coordinator, CCTOA.

Also present were Gobinda Basumatary; Nilo Kanta Goyary; Manuranjan Basumatary; Bijuel Nelson Daimary; Deputy CEM of BKWAC Romeo P. Narzary; Tamulpur MLA Jalen Daimary; former BTCLA Speaker Katiram Boro; former BTC Executive Member Ranjit Basumatary and Ex-NDFB Welfare

Association President Rujugra Mosahary, along with representatives from BTR, BKWAC, Tripura, Meghalaya, etc.

Speaking on behalf of ABSU and the signatories of the Bodo Accord, President Dipen Boro, in his keynote address, said, "This seminar brings together tribal councils, movement groups and community leaders who have walked through many phases of struggle to secure constitutional safeguards and political rights. The amendments linked to Article 250 and the Sixth Schedule decide how our councils receive funds, exercise powers and plan development. They influence village councils, municipal structures and the responsibilities given to institutions in Bodoland and other Sixth Schedule areas." "The Bodo Accord of 2020 promised a stronger council with wider subjects, improved financial autonomy and clear mechanisms for rehabilitation and development. Some clauses have progressed, while others remain incomplete, including full council restructuring, village bodies, land rights and the use of the Special Development Package. Review meetings have been held several times with senior officials. The next step must now come through Parliament. With this seminar, we place a clear appeal to pass the amendment to Article 250 and the Sixth Schedule in the forthcoming winter session

and complete the Accord within the timeline already committed," he added.

Sharing Tripura's perspective, Minister Sukla Charan Noatia said, "The programme convened by ABSU gives strength to the concerns of tribal regions across the Northeast. In 2019, the Government of Tripura approved and sent a proposal to the Centre for an upgraded Sixth Schedule arrangement. That proposal followed extensive discussion and carried the expectations of our people, yet it remains pending. Our state carries a long history, from the period when it functioned as an independent kingdom to its merger with India in 1948. At that time tribal communities formed a majority." "The latest census records tribal population at around 33%, which increases the need for a stronger council and firm constitutional support. The government of India has a duty to address the issues of the ten autonomous councils in the region. During the COVID-19 period, commitments were made on this subject. States such as Mizoram and Meghalaya have demonstrated how constitutional arrangements can support progress. We look forward to a practical solution for tribal communities and their councils," Minister Noatia added. Highlighting the need for collective assertion from the autonomous councils, former KHADC, MDC,

and opposition leader Titosstarwell Chyne said, "We have continued to pursue the matter of Sixth Schedule reforms. More than a year has passed since the meeting with the Union Home Minister, where a special committee was mentioned and an assurance was given that leaders of the autonomous district councils would be called for further discussions. That commitment brought hope to our councils. However, the absence of visible results has created concern and disappointment.

This is why today's seminar in Delhi carries importance for all of us. It sends a message that the tribal councils of the Northeast remain united on their constitutional demands." "The Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council stands with the demands raised here. Our support goes to the call for meaningful amendments and stronger councils. At times there is a feeling that tribal regions stand away from the core of national decision-making. A common platform for all councils can help address that feeling and present our case in an organised manner before the Union government," Chyne added. Vijay Hansaria, the senior-most advocate of the Supreme Court and constitutional expert, said, "The Bodo Accord cannot stay as a document brought out for display without visible progress on the commitments inside it

KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

IMPHAL: RSS Sarsangchalak Dr Mohan Bhagwat opened his three-day visit to Manipur with an address to a gathering of dignitaries in Imphal, where he focused on social cohesion, civilisational values and the need for patient, collective work to restore lasting peace in the state.

Dr Bhagwat said the RSS remains a subject of daily national debate, shaped as much by perception as by misinformation. He argued that the organisation's work is often judged without first-hand understanding, and urged people to look at ground-level functioning, especially the shakha system, to grasp its intent and methods.

He traced the roots of the Sangh to the vision of its founder Dr K.B. Hedgewar, noting his involvement in the freedom movement and his belief that India needed a united and morally strong society to achieve its potential. Describing the RSS as a "man-making methodology," he said its purpose is to organise Hindu society in its cultural and civilisational sense, not as a religious identity, and not to create a power centre.

Dr Bhagwat referred to early global misconceptions about the Sangh



dating back to the 1930s, saying these stemmed from limited understanding of India's civilisational ethos. He emphasised that unity, quality and shared values such as truth, compassion and austerity remain central to the Hindu worldview. Diversity, he

said, is a reflection of an underlying unity that has shaped India's nationhood since ancient times.

He highlighted concepts like Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and apnan as markers of a civilisational vision that sees humanity as interconnected.

"The world listens when society is strong," he said, adding that the Sangh aims to nurture individuals who contribute to a harmonious and confident nation.

Marking the RSS centenary year, Dr Bhagwat outlined the five ongoing

initiatives: social harmony, family awareness, environmental conservation, self-awareness rooted in swadeshi thought, and civic responsibility.

He praised Manipur's cultural strengths, including its traditional dress and use of local languages, and encouraged efforts to preserve these practices.

On the state's current crisis, Dr Bhagwat said work is underway at multiple levels to rebuild trust and stability. Construction, he noted, always takes longer than destruction, especially when the process is inclusive. He stressed that peace-building demands patience, discipline and shared responsibility. "Everything cannot be left to the government. Society has its own role," he said, calling for self-reliance and stronger social capital.

He also underlined the importance of skill development for economic empowerment, particularly among the youth.

Dr Bhagwat ended his address by reaffirming the Sangh's long-standing ideal of organising society through collective goodwill. He later interacted with participants on issues including youth engagement and skill development.

Guwahati to Get Visa Facilitation Centre Serving Over 60 Countries



GUWAHATI

Residents of Assam and the wider North East will soon be able to submit biometric data for international visa applications without travelling to Delhi or Mumbai, with VFS Global agreeing in principle to set up a dedicated visa facilitation centre in Guwahati.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced the development on November 20, calling it a major relief for people across the region who currently undertake long and costly journeys to access visa services. "Travelling abroad? Need to submit biometrics for your visa application? That meant a long journey to either Delhi or Mumbai. Soon this will be history for our people

from Assam and the North East," he said in a social media post.

The proposed centre is expected to offer visa processing services for more than 60 countries. However, details on the specific countries to be covered and the timeline for the centre's launch are yet to be finalised. Sarma said additional information would be shared once discussions with VFS Global progress.

VFS Global, which manages visa application centres across the world, has agreed to the plan in principle. The new facility is anticipated to significantly reduce travel time and expenses for applicants from the Northeastern states, who have long faced logistical hurdles due to the centralisation of consular services in major metropolitan cities.

RSS involvement will not resolve Manipur crisis: Congress on Mohan Bhagwat's visit

IMPHAL

Manipur Congress president Keisham Meghachandra Singh on Friday said the involvement of the RSS will solve the crisis in the state, as it requires a government-led political solution and confidence-building measures.

Reacting to the three-day tour of RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, he said any visit that "prioritises strengthening organisational growth" over the suffering of the people sends a wrong message.

"The Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee takes note of the visit of RSS Sarsangchalak Mohan Bhagwat to Manipur. At a time when Manipur is still suffering from unprecedented violence, displacement, social division, and administrative collapse, the people expected the Central Government to send a concrete plan for peace and restoration of normalcy," he said in a post on X.

"However, instead of addressing the humanitarian crisis and the breakdown of governance, the visit appears to be focused primarily on strengthening RSS organisational activities in the State," he added.

Claiming that RSS involvement will not solve the crisis, Singh said the ongoing turmoil requires a government-led political solution, administrative accountability, and confidence-building measures.



"Strengthening ideological organisations will not bring peace," he added.

The Congress leader said if the Centre was serious about solving the ethnic crisis in the state, it should provide a concrete roadmap for peace, a unified command structure, a plan for the safe return of displaced families, and accountability for administrative failures.

"MPCC reiterates that the focus must remain on restoration of normalcy, protection of all communities, and justice for victims. Political or ideological visits cannot substitute real governance," he said.

"Manipur needs healing, not polarisation. Any visit that prioritises organisational growth over people's suffering sends a wrong

message at this critical time," he added.

Bhagwat reached Imphal on Thursday, his first visit since ethnic violence broke out in the state in May 2023.

During his stay, Bhagwat will hold a series of closed-door interactions with RSS members to oversee the functioning of the organisation in the northeastern state. He will also interact with entrepreneurs, tribal leaders from the Manipur hills, prominent citizens and leaders of youth organisations in the state.

Manipur has been under the President's Rule since February after CM N Biren Singh, who led a BJP government, resigned amid criticism of his administration's handling of the ethnic violence, which has claimed over 260 lives.



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PROACTIVE COUNTER- TERRORISM DOCTRINE

Chief of Army Staff's statement on the sharp decline in terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir is more than a situational assessment-it is a reaffirmation of India's evolving and assertive national security doctrine. Over the past decade, India has transformed its approach from reactive diplomacy to proactive, calibrated, and, when required, punitive action against terror networks and their sponsors across the border. The message from New Delhi is unmistakable: terrorism-whether executed by state or non-state actors, proxy groups or their sympathisers-will invite swift and proportionate repercussions. For years, India presented dossier after dossier to Pakistan, exposing the involvement of terror outfits nurtured on its soil. The response was a familiar pattern-denial, deflection, and delay, while the masterminds of major attacks roamed freely under state protection. The world repeatedly heard the rhetoric of "non-state actors," a convenient shield Pakistan used to evade accountability. That era is over. India's position today is clear: there is no distinction between state and non-state actors when terrorist infrastructure continues to thrive under Pakistan's security umbrella.

This shift in doctrine has been demonstrated through decisive action. The Uri attack was followed by surgical strikes targeting terror launch pads across the LoC, signalling that India would no longer absorb blows silently. The Pulwama attack of 2019, which claimed the lives of 40 CRPF personnel, led to the Balakot air strike, destroying a Jaish-e-Mohammed training camp deep inside Pakistan. More recently, the Pahalgam terror attack triggered Operation Sindoor, a coordinated and precise response that inflicted significant damage on Pakistan's military infrastructure, communication grid, and airfields. By all accounts, the operation stunned Pakistan's defence establishment and showcased the operational superiority of Indian forces.

These actions mark a paradigm shift in India's posture: terror will be met with deterrence, and deterrence will be enforced with capability. India today is not vulnerable to nuclear blackmail or coercive diplomacy. The nation's political leadership has shown the resolve to authorise strong retaliatory operations and recalibrate long-standing agreements-including placing the Indus Water Treaty effectively in abeyance-to build strategic pressure.

On the domestic front, the gains are unequivocal. Post-abrogation of Article 370, Jammu and Kashmir has seen a dramatic decline in violence. Separatist networks have collapsed; their leaders are either incarcerated or facing courts. Stone-pelting, once a daily occurrence, has vanished. There are no shut-down calls, no street violence, no grenade attacks, and cross-border infiltration has fallen sharply. This transformation is not incidental-it is the result of meticulous intelligence-based operations, improved coordination among security agencies, and sustained political clarity at the national level.

Yet, as the Army chief cautioned, the shadow of terrorism has not fully lifted. Pakistan-based handlers are resorting to new tactics. The cycle of terrorism has evolved-from mass attacks and grenade lobbing to hybrid terrorism, involving targeted killings using pistols, attacks on tourists, and even white-collar terrorism rooted in radicalisation, financial networks, and ideological influence. The attempt is clear: to indoctrinate local youth and create micro-cells capable of sporadic violence that disrupt peace. But India's counter-terror ecosystem has evolved equally fast. The recent seizure of explosives in multiple cities, disrupted modules in metros, and the arrest of radicalised operatives show that intelligence agencies are not merely monitoring threats-they are pre-empting them. Enhanced inter-agency coordination, strengthened laws, digital surveillance of terror financing, and grassroots policing have formed a robust firewall against Pakistan's attempts to revive militancy by proxy.

The message to Pakistan is sharper than ever: any misadventure will carry consequences far more severe than the provocation. With Pakistan's economy in distress, internal politics fractured, and global credibility diminished, it can ill-afford a confrontation with India. India today is shaping a new counter-terrorism narrative-one that is firm, proactive, and uncompromising. The era of waiting for international mediation or depending solely on diplomacy is over. New Delhi has shown that it will defend its sovereignty with calibrated force and make terrorism a costly proposition for its sponsors. As terrorism mutates, India's security apparatus is already adapting, ensuring that peace in Jammu and Kashmir is sustained and that the nation remains resilient against any future threat.



QUOTE OF THE DAY

Time will inevitably uncover dishonesty and lies; history has no place for them. ~ Norodom Sihanouk

THE DONALD TRUMP- MOHAMMED BIN SALMAN GEOPOLITICAL PARTNERSHIP



KISHAN BHAWNANI

The entire world witnessed the embrace between US President Donald Trump and the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia on November 19, 2025. The US President has declared Saudi Arabia a major non-NATO ally and signed several landmark agreements, including the F-35 and nuclear deals. These two countries, which have caused a stir in Middle Eastern politics, also reached a landmark agreement in 1945, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt and modern Saudi King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud met on a warship. This meeting laid the foundation for the Quincy Agreement. Global politics has been driven by the principles of national self-interest and strategic advantage for centuries. Whether it's the expansionist policies of the imperialist era, the bipolar alliances of the Cold War era, or the economic-strategic diplomacy of the 21st century, every single one of these agreements is a matter of national interest and strategic advantage. In this era, superpowers have prioritized their own priorities. The historic agreements and investment promises reached just a day ago between Donald Trump and Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) can be seen in this light. The entire day's White House interaction between the two reinforces the principle that nothing is permanent in politics, only national interests. This article provides an in-depth analysis of the recent White House dialogue between these two leaders, the strategic trade and military agreements associated with it, and the impact on global power dynamics. I, Advocate Kishan Sanmukhdas Bhavnani, Gondia, Maharashtra, believe that the concept of self-interest in politics is not new. According to the realist theory of international relations, every country's ultimate objective is to protect its security, power, and interests. This theory states that any nation, be it the United States, Saudi Arabia, or India, prioritizes decisions on the global stage that safeguard its strategic, economic, or political interests. Donald Trump's America First and MBS's Vision 2030 are two examples of this self-interest-driven strategy. Both leaders adhere to the belief that major decisions are made not based on emotions or collective morality, but on raw realities: money, security, investment, oil, weapons, and global influence.

Friends, if we consider the similar policy styles of two aggressive leaders, Trump and MBS: Donald Trump is known in global politics for his transactional diplomacy. During his tenure, global agreements were based on rigorous assessments of profit and loss. He did not hesitate to reconsider international alliances, demand more funding from NATO countries, impose tariffs on China, and cancel old agreements. Similarly, Mohammed bin Salman pursues a radical reformist policy to transform his coun-

try into a modern economic superpower. He has taken bold steps to diversify Saudi Arabia's oil-dependent economy, attract large-scale foreign investment, and maintain dominance in the Middle East's balance of power. Under his rule, Saudi Arabia has established itself as a decisive power in regional politics through aggressive military and economic interventions. Three key similarities are evident between the two leaders: (1) a nation-first principle; (2) aggressive diplomacy; and (3) an emphasis on large economic and defense deals.

Friends, if we consider the Trump-MBS White House meeting-a center of geopolitical turmoil, MBS's arrival in the US for the first time since 2018 and Trump's historic welcome at the White House became the focus of global media attention. This was not merely a diplomatic meeting, but a moment that redefined global power dynamics. This meeting had several implications: (1) the thaw in relations between Saudi Arabia and the US is now coming to an end. (2) the tensions and mistrust that existed under the Biden administration appear to be history. (3) the US is trying to re-establish its relevance in the Middle East. (4) Trump has re-legitimized MBS's international image, which was tarnished by the Khashoggi affair. Analysts view this move by Trump as a significant step. This is called pragmatic diplomacy, where human rights issues are relegated to the background and trade, arms deals and strategic influence become the priority.

Friends, if we consider Saudi Arabia's Major Non-NATO Ally status and the unprecedented defense deal, the most significant and historic decision of this meeting was the granting of Major Non-NATO Ally status to Saudi Arabia. This status is typically granted to countries that are long-term US defense allies. This will grant Saudi Arabia special access to US technology, weapons, defense cooperation, intelligence, and security partnerships. This move will completely alter the balance of power in the Middle East. Along with this, two major defense agreements were announced: (1) Sale of 48 F-35 stealth fighter jets - The F-35 is the world's most lethal and sophisticated stealth aircraft. This will prove to be a "game-changer" for Saudi Arabia. It will profoundly impact the military dynamics of countries like Israel, Iran, and Turkey. (2) Sale of 300 Abrams tanks - The Abrams M1A2 tank is considered one of the world's most advanced land warfare machines. This will significantly increase the strategic power balance of the Saudi Army. Trump's clear message behind both these deals is: "Business is business, and America's interests are paramount."

Friends, if we consider Saudi Arabia's historic investment in the US, its target of one trillion dollars, MBS created a stir in the global economy by announcing an in-

crease in Saudi Arabia's investment in the US to \$1 trillion. This amount significantly exceeds the previously announced investment of \$600 billion. He described the US as the world's most attractive investment destination, which clearly demonstrates Saudi Arabia's increasing economic trust in the US. This investment serves not only economic but also three major strategic objectives: (1) Saudi Arabia's decisive participation in the US economy; (2) Strengthening bilateral relations on a financial basis; and (3) Obtaining support and security guarantees for the Trump administration. In addition to the F-35 and 300 Abrams tanks, Saudi Arabia's \$88 trillion deal is a major economic boost for American industry. For Trump, this meeting was not only a diplomatic success but also an economic achievement, which will strengthen his image at the National Prosperity Summit (NPS) and in the upcoming elections.

Friends, if we consider the Jamal Khashoggi murder case: Trump's 'clean chit' and the conflict of morality versus interests in world politics, the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Turkey in 2018 severely damaged Saudi Arabia's image in the world community. The CIA clearly stated in its findings that the Saudi regime and MBS were suspected of having approved the assassination. The Biden administration had maintained a distance from MBS on this basis. However, Trump, in this meeting, gave MBS a "clean chit" and stated that he had no knowledge of the matter. This statement was based on strategic and economic interests, not political morality. This move proves that (1) national interest trumps human rights in politics; (2) weapons, investments, and geostrategic cooperation are more powerful than morality; (3) US-Saudi relations are based on pragmatism, not idealism. This decision by Trump is controversial in the eyes of critics, but according to supporters, it represents "real diplomacy based on national interest."

Friends, if we consider its international implications: How will this partnership change global geopolitics? To understand this, the impact of the Trump-MBS meeting on the global landscape is profound. (1) The balance of power in the Middle East will shift-F-35s and Abrams tanks will make Saudi Arabia a regional superpower. This will pose a serious challenge to Iran. (2) Indirect pressure on China and Russia will increase-Saudi Arabia's shift toward the US is a setback for both countries in the energy and investment industries. (3) New possibilities in Israel-Saudi relations-US mediation could pave the way for an Abraham Accord 2.0. (4) Crude oil politics will be affected in Asia, including India-the Saudi-US alliance will impact oil prices and energy supplies. (5) The US will reinvigorate its military presence in the Middle East,

impacting China's Belt and Road strategy. Therefore, if we examine and analyze the entire narrative, we will find that the meeting between Trump and Mohammed bin Salman was not merely a diplomatic event, but a clear message of the new geopolitics of the 21st century: self-interest, strategy, and power. National interest is paramount. This partnership involves economics, weapons, investment, strategic pressure, regional dominance, and, most importantly, an alliance that could reshape the global power structure in the coming decade. Ideals like morality, human rights, and democracy have once again been replaced by realistic power politics. Self-interest-driven politics remains the same; only its form and means have changed. Donald Trump and MBS represent this new world order, where diplomacy is no longer merely a dialogue, but a competition for power, wealth, and national interests.

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

From monthly electricity bills of ₹4,000-₹5,000 to zero - clean energy has transformed a home in Barpeta. Under the PM Surya Ghar Rooftop Solar scheme, families like Shri Subodh Nath's are saving more, embracing sustainability, and powering their future with the sun. Green progress shines brighter! ~ Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM



Nitish Emerges Politically Stronger

RABINDRA NATH SINHA

Several conclusions, interesting and of political import, are instantly possible from an analysis of the Bihar Assembly election results announced on Friday, November 14. The most telling of these inferences is that the Bharatiya Janata Party, despite being for the first time the single largest party with 89 seats in a 243-member House, is not in a position to do a Maharashtra where Eknath Shinde of the Shiv Sena had to step aside for Devendra Fadnis, who had earlier headed a BJP-led ministry. The reason is simple. The imprint of chief minister Nitish Kumar on the Bihar result is so emphatic that despite his party Janata Dal United's tally being four less at 85, BJP has to accept that the strong NDA performance is attributable to the chief minister's widely acknowledged clean image and his drive for the welfare of women, dalits and other extremely backward classes.

Also, the BJP top brass is aware that if circumstances warrant, Nitish can be tough and, therefore, any attempt by them to manoeuvre to get the chief minister's post may backfire. They remember how in June 2010 Nitish had returned a Rs five crore cheque sent by then Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi for relief of the victims of the Kosi river belt floods in 2008. Nitish then had taken strong exception to Modi's publicising his initiative in helping out Bihar's flood victims. There is one more reality. In Bihar, after the demise of party veteran and deputy chief minister Sushil Modi, BJP does not have a presentable CM face in whom the electorate may see an alternative.

The second inference from the outcome is that Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Lalu Prasad Yadav's charisma has faded in the circumstances he has been passing through because of corruption charges, prolonged litigation and his failing health. Moreover, he has been contending with fissures in the family because of the rebellion of his eldest son Tej Pratap who too has been nursing political ambitions and acting against Tejashwi, whom Lalu has been promoting for the chief minister's position. Political watchers whose assessment IPA sought told this correspondent even within the party there are sections who doubt whether the younger son is worthy of being the state's chief minister; an alternative to Nitish. There are also doubts whether RJD's Yadav-Muslim vote bank of RJD is intact.

If the new factor of Assaiddin Owaisi's Hyderabad-based All India Majlis-e-Muttahidul Muslimin (Majlis) is taken into account, lot of traditional Muslim votes have shifted from RJD in 2025 polls to NDA and also to AIMIM. A pertinent question is whether Tejashwi has been able to expand the Yadav vote bank and attract other very backward sections to support RJD. Majlis put up candidates on 15 seats in the Muslim-majority Seemanchal region which has 24 seats. AIMIM has won all the five seats in had bagged in 2020 polls and according to indications available on November 14 evening, its vote share was estimated to have risen to 1.87 per cent from 1.24 per cent in 2020. It is safe to suggest that Majlis and Prashant Kishor's Jan Suraj

Party, which fought on many seats, have dented the vote share of Mahagathbandhan.

The third conclusion is that the Congress, which had put up candidates in 61 constituencies and could win only six seats, continues to be organizationally very weak. The party's district-level outfits are virtually non-functional and serious attempts to activate them have just not been made. Abrupt change of guards at the PCC and DCC levels and virtual absence of serious political activity in the form of agitation programmes and workers' conferences have been costing the party in elections. Organisational elections, which activate party workers and help induction of new faces, do not have any priority in the party's scheme of things, sources told IPA. The practice of 'friendly' contests in about a dozen seats in the absence of compact seat-sharing deals has also cost both the Congress and RJD.

The fourth conclusion is the quiet emergence of Lok Janshakti Party's (Ram Vilas) youth leader Chirag Paswan as a factor to be taken seriously in Bihar's politics. Chirag, who is a Union minister at the Centre and for bringing whom under the NDA fold BJP legitimately can claim credit, has left a mark in the Assembly elections.

He put up candidates on 28 seats and LJP (RV) bagged 19 of them on Friday. It merits to be reckoned as an impressive show, given the fact RJD under Tejashwi's stewardship had contested 143 seats but could bag just 25 of them, down from 75 in 2020 polls. Political observers see in him an aspirant for Bihar's

chief ministership and wonder, given the BJP top brass's soft corner for him, whether he would be drafted as deputy chief minister in the upcoming Nitish-led ministry.

A widely shared view in political quarters is that women-centric schemes greatly helped Nitish, his party and NDA, in general. A one-time financial assistance of Rs 10,000 was extended to 1.21 crore beneficiaries associated with Jeevika. It cost an estimated Rs 12,100 crore. On Nitish's part, it was taking a big risk financially; politically, it was tantamount to a gamble.

The scheme was rolled out on September 26 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The poll schedule was announced by the Election Commission of India on October 6. This particular scheme and other women-centric initiatives taken earlier by the chief minister helped him substantially in mobilizing across caste lines women voters' support. His party, JDU, was able to increase the women vote share to 19.03 per cent from 15.39 per cent in 2020 polls. BJP gained marginally, to 20.42 per cent from 19.46 per cent.

Nitish Kumar's earlier initiatives were reservation for women in panchayats and municipal bodies (2006) and 35 per cent reservation for women in state police (2007). The decision to enforce prohibition was also intended to improve the quality of life of women. Laxity in enforcement and malpractices are there; but one cannot fault the intention of Nitish, said knowledgeable quarters.

Manipur protest turns violent: Case filed for assault, obstruction, security breach

IMPHAL

A criminal case has been registered for offences including assault on a public servant, obstruction of duty, breaching security barricades, use of racial slurs, and unauthorised movement toward a protected premises in Manipur.

According to the Manipur Police morning bulletin issued on Friday, the case was registered at Porompat Police Station under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023.

The case follows a protest by a mob of about 50-60 individuals, identified as volunteers of the Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), a prominent social organisation in the state, which took place on Thursday.

The police reported that the protesters emerged from Govindajee Crossing, carrying placards and shouting slogans opposing the conduct of the Sangai Festival 2025, and proceeded toward Hapta Kanglejumb, in clear violation of prohibitory orders issued by the District Magistrate, Imphal East. Security per-



sonnel made repeated attempts to stop and peacefully disperse the protesters.

Inspector General of Police (Zone-1) Themthing Ngashangva supervised the situation on the scene. Police teams, including women personnel, repeated-

ly attempted to stop and disperse the group. However, the mob turned violent, throwing water bottles and placards at the police.

A woman protester assaulted the IGP and used derogatory racial slurs

while he was performing his duty.

The mob later moved toward the palace premises, where the house guards of the Member of Parliament allowed them inside, hindering police efforts.

The IGP approached the gate to question the action of the house guards, but did not enter the palace premises.

Meanwhile, police stated that efforts are underway to identify the woman protester who assaulted the IGP, using available video footage and witness statements.

However, a video clip uploaded on social media has shown a police officer using his baton to hit a woman protester.

Social media reports also claimed that the protesters were demanding the rights of Manipur IDPs and questioned the role of the Manipur police, asking whether they serve the people or politicians.

The Manipur Police added that personnel on duty acted with restraint and professionalism, and that only the minimum force necessary was used to restore order.

SHILLONG

Challenging the World Happiness Report, acclaimed author Francesc Miralles said at the 5th Shillong Literary Festival on Thursday that he finds "more happy people in India than in Finland." Also Read - Manipur valley flares as COCOMI, IDPs launch massive protests against Sangai Fest Miralles, co-author of the best-selling Ikgai: The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life, said, "I don't believe in this happiness index because they say, for instance, that Finland is the happiest country. I find more happy people in India than Finland."

Highlighting that happiness goes beyond material comforts, he added, "Happiness is not only having money or a good education... it's also the daily vibe of what you are experiencing." Referring to India's strong social connections, he said, "I experienced in India that people are very social and very curious. When you are on a train in India and sitting next to someone, he's

going to ask you where you come from, what you like... That doesn't happen in Europe."

Describing India as "a very interesting place" because of this natural curiosity "to know, to learn from other people," he remarked, "The people are alive here... So I would say Shillong is happier than Helsinki," referring to Finland's capital.

Speaking on the digital age and its influence on wellbeing, Miralles acknowledged it as "a distraction" but also noted that people are helping and connecting through technology, which contributes to happiness. "We want to do something of value, impact society, help each other... you can do it in the digital world," he said. These values, he added, lead to contentment and purpose, even though "the digital world is affecting us in a way that we are too distracted." Discussing his book Ikgai, Miralles said it was the result of research into the people of Okinawa, Japan, who have among the world's longest lifespans.

Three Killed as Truck Hit by Agartala-Silchar Express at Illegal Railway Crossing

AGARTALA

Three people were killed on November 20 when a goods-laden truck was struck by the Agartala-Silchar Express near Ambasa station after entering the tracks through an illegal railway crossing.

The fatal collision occurred around 1:12 p.m. when the truck suddenly moved onto the line in front of train number DN 15663, which was travelling between Ambasa and Manu. The driver and two passengers died on the spot. Railway staff removed the debris by 1:30 p.m., and the train resumed its journey four minutes later.

The Northeast Frontier Railway confirmed that the point where the accident took place is an unauthorised crossing. Officials said they have made several attempts to close the illegal access route to ensure the safety of both rail passengers and road users, but each effort has been met with resistance from local residents.

The latest attempt to seal the crossing was on October 5, when railway personnel from Agartala were reportedly prevented by locals from blocking entry to the site.

Reiterating safety concerns, railway authorities urged the public to avoid unauthorised track crossings. They noted that trespassing on railway lines is a punishable offence under the Indian Railways Act and poses grave risks to life and property.

Bodoland University Seminar Calls for Action to Save NE Indigenous Heritage

GUWAHATI

A national seminar on "Oral & Written Histories: Indigenous Arts, Weaving, Ecological Crafts, Food Traditions & Languages" was held on November 20 at Bodoland University, bringing together scholars, researchers and cultural practitioners from across India and abroad.

Organised under the EMWS-SAA project of the NEC, Ministry of DoNER, in collaboration with NEIHA, the event underscored the urgent need to document and preserve the Northeast's diverse indigenous heritage. Dr. Zothanchinghi Khiangte, Principal Investigator of the project and Coordinator of the Centre for Women Studies, opened the programme with a welcome address.

Inaugurating the seminar, eminent historian Dr. J. B. Bhattacharjee, Retired Professor of NEHU and former Vice-Chancellor of Assam University, emphasised the importance of safeguarding traditional

knowledge systems in the face of rapid socio-cultural change.

The first academic session, moderated by Prof. Amena Passah, featured presentations by Prof. Sukhendu Debbarma of Tripura University, Pinuel Basumatary of the Boro Diaspora Forum, Dawa Penjor of BIFA, Bhutan, Journalist Preetam Brahma Choudhury, and Advocate Pallavi Basumatary. The second session, chaired by Dr. Zothanchinghi Khiangte, included contributions from Prof. Salam Irene of Manipur University, Dr. Kaburagi Yoshihiro from Japan, Prof. Sarah Hilaly of Rajiv Gandhi University and Damewanni Suchiang from Meghalaya.

In the concluding session, speakers Kishan Bagdi of Royal Global University, author Mayur Bora and researcher Jaiklong Basumatary of Aronai Entertainment shared insights on cultural narratives, creative industries and evolving indigenous identities.

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday issued one of his strongest warnings yet to suspected illegal immigrants, asserting that Bengali-speaking Muslims—locally referred to as Miyas—would find "no peace" in the state as long as he remains in office.

"As long as I am the chief minister, no Miya can rest in peace. That is final," Sarma told reporters, declaring that the community could "attain peace" only by unseating him from the chief minister's post.

His remarks came shortly after eviction operations wrapped up in Goalpara, with similar drives slated for Nagaon in the next two to three days. Sarma said the ongoing crackdown on what his government describes as illegal settlers would only intensify in the face of public criticism.



"It is my job to punish illegal encroachers," he said, adding

that those targeted by eviction drives would "continue to bear the pain and cry in front of the media" because "there is no other way out."

Sarma also cautioned that people attending opposition meetings would be treated no differently. Whether they appear at his gatherings or those of public figures and opposition leaders such as musician Zubeen Garg, Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi or MLA Rakibul Hussain, individuals identified as suspected illegal immigrants "will have no peace," he said.

He suggested that those who "do not speak against the BJP government" might see some respite but maintained that eviction drives would continue irrespective of political affiliations or public sentiment.

"The more they give statements, the more the eviction," Sarma said, directly linking the scale of government action to vocal criticism of his administration's policies.

Assam CM: 'Miyas Will Have Peace Only If I'm Removed'

Manipur Governor Releases Rs. 29.99 Lakh to Support Conservation of Endangered Manipuri Ponies

IMPHAL

Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla on Thursday released ₹29.99 lakh in incentives to pony owners through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), renewing government support for the conservation of the endangered Manipuri Pony after a three-year gap.

According to a Raj Bhavan communiqué, a total of ₹29.99,200 was disbursed under the State Plan fund for 1,150 ponies above six months of age, covering 86 pony owners and clubs across the state. The incentive is intended to help owners supplement feeding and care for their animals during lean periods.

The distribution programme was attended by the Chief Secretary, along with senior officials from the Department of



Veterinary & Animal Husbandry. The Manipuri Pony also known locally as the Meitei Sagol was declared an endangered breed

in 2013 following a sharp and continuing decline in its population. Numbers dropped from 1,898 in 2003 to just 1,089 by 2019, driven

largely by habitat loss and shrinking grazing grounds. Despite a conservation and development policy introduced in 2016, efforts to stabilise the breed have faced persistent challenges.

The pony holds deep cultural significance in Manipur and is central to Sagol Kangjei, the traditional game widely regarded as the precursor to modern polo. British officers stationed in Manipur are believed to have adapted the local sport to create the global game known today.

As part of ongoing conservation initiatives, the state government has allotted 30 acres of grassy fields at Lamphelpat in Imphal West, providing a dedicated habitat where the ponies can roam and graze freely, offering renewed hope for the survival of this iconic breed.

Nagaland: NCPCR deploys AI tools to tackle online child abuse

KOHIMA

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has begun using artificial intelligence to track and prevent the circulation of online child sexual abuse material, marking a major step forward in strengthening digital safety for children, officials said on Thursday.

At a state-level conference on the implementation of key child-rights legislations, NCPCR senior consultant K. P. J. Gerald said integrating AI into the child protection system represents a "significant leap" in safeguarding children in an increasingly digital world.

Gerald stressed that every child-rights case reflects a real child's struggle and urged officials, teachers, parents and citizens to work collectively to ensure that legal protections translate into real-world safety.

He also recalled the Commission's mandate under the CPC Act, 2005, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, noting that all policies must uphold these principles.

Highlighting recent progress, he said coordinated efforts from state and district authorities over the past six months helped NCPCR resolve nearly 26,000 complaints, rescue more than 2,300 children from trafficking and other high-risk situations, and repatriate over 1,000 children to Child Care Institutions in their home districts.

He also noted that the Commission's "Sugar Board" advisory pro-

moting healthy lifestyle values has been adopted by 14 states, covering almost six lakh schools, and was mentioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Mann Ki Baat programme.

Gerald outlined the Commission's priorities for the coming months, including strengthening mental-health support for children, expanding AI-based monitoring of online threats, integrating its 16 digital portals under a unified platform, improving data systems for complaint management, and ensuring stronger implementation of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, and the POCSO Act, 2012.

Commissioner and Secretary for School Education and SCERT Nagaland, Keveleno Angami, emphasised the need for child rights to move from legislation to meaningful action.

She said that while India clearly defines 10 fundamental rights for children, the challenge lies in ensuring these rights are upheld in classrooms, homes and communities.

She stressed that child protection cannot rest with the government alone, urging parents, communities, teachers and local institutions to actively participate.

NCPCR Chairperson Alun Hangsing cautioned that rapid technological advances influence children both positively and negatively, placing greater responsibility on educators—whom she described as "nation builders"—to instill values, ethics and social awareness.

IIT Guwahati Pioneer Eco-Friendly Solution for Lead Removal Using Microorganisms

GUWAHATI

Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati researchers have developed a natural method to remove lead from contaminated water using cyanobacteria, microorganisms that are related to bacteria but are capable of photosynthesis. The developed method offers a sustainable and low-cost solution to one of the world's most persistent environmental threats.

The findings of this research have been published in the prestigious Journal of Hazardous Materials, in a paper co-authored by Prof. Debasish Das, Professor, Dept. of Bioscience and Bioengineering, along with his postdoctoral fellow, Dr. Abhijeet Mahana, and Prof. Tapas K. Mandal, Dept. of Chemical Engineering, IIT Guwahati.

On a global level, lead is one of the most toxic pollutants, affecting over 800 million children, with approximately 275 million in India. It commonly enters water through industrial discharge, agricultural runoff, and old water pipelines. Once a water resource is contaminated with lead, it remains for decades, accumulating in living organisms and causing severe



(Towards Right) Prof. Debasish Das, Professor, Dept. of Bioscience and Bioengineering, along with his research scholar, Mr. Abhijeet Mahana

neurological, cardiovascular, kidney, and developmental problems. Conventional methods, such as chemical treatment and synthetic adsorbents used for removing lead, are generally expensive and often generate secondary pollutants.

To address these challenges, the research team at IIT Guwahati has used bioremediation, a natural process in which microorganisms clean contaminated environments. These microorganisms naturally exist in soil and water and help in restoring ecological balance. To achieve this, the

research team employed a light-dependent lead-bonding cyanobacterial species, "Phormidium corium NRMC-50". The team researched the different parts of the cyanobacterium to examine which of the components were the most efficient to absorb and remove the lead contaminants.

As a result, the study found that exopolysaccharides, or EPS, a part of the cyanobacterium, exhibited the highest lead removal efficiency of 92.5% from contaminated water.

Speaking about the findings of the re-

search, Prof. Debasish Das, Dept. of Biosciences and Bioengineering, IIT Guwahati, said, "These cyanobacterial biosorbents require minimal energy input and can be scaled without sophisticated infrastructure, making them more affordable for widespread application. Preliminary estimates suggest that the overall cost of treatment using our method is approximately 40-60% lower than that of conventional techniques, while maintaining comparable or even superior efficiency in metal removal. This economic advantage, coupled with its eco-friendly nature, positions our approach as a sustainable alternative for industries and municipalities seeking affordable solutions to contamination."

The researchers also demonstrated that cyanobacteria offer multiple environmental benefits such as absorbing pesticides, herbicides, hydrocarbons, synthetic dyes, and industrial chemicals, among others. The metals absorbed by the microorganisms can be recovered and converted into valuable products such as biochar, bioplastics, or biofuels.

Considering these organisms are self-replicating, low-cost, and require only sunlight, carbon dioxide, and minimal nutrients, they offer a sustainable alternative to synthetic adsorbents currently being used globally. As the next step, the research team is targeting scaling the process from laboratory setup to a pilot-scale treatment system and testing it in real wastewater streams.

Quest!

The sentence "A nut for a jar of tuna." is the same when read backwards.

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PM Modi embarks on visit to South Africa to attend G20 summit



NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday embarked on a three-day visit to South Africa to attend the first G20 summit being held in Africa.

Modi will attend the summit from November 21 to 23, marking a significant milestone as the first G20 summit held on the African continent. This will be PM Modi's fourth official visit to South Africa, following his bilateral visit in 2016 and his attendance at the two BRICS summits in 2018 and 2023.

During his stay in Johannesburg, the prime minister will also attend the sixth IBSA Summit on the sidelines of the G20.

"I will present India's perspective at the Summit in line with our vision of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' and 'One earth, One Family and One future',"

Modi said in his departure statement. The prime minister will also interact with the Indian diaspora in South Africa, which is one of the largest outside India. The G20 comprises major economies representing 85% of global GDP and 75% of international trade. The forum has identified priority areas under South Africa's presidency theme of 'Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability'.

Notably, this is the fourth consecutive G20 meeting hosted by the Global South, following Indonesia, India, and Brazil's presidencies. Prior to South Africa, the G20 presidencies were held by Brazil (2024), India (2023) and Indonesia (2022).

According to the Secretary (ER) of the Ministry of External Affairs, Sudhakar Dalela, G20 is an important forum, with countries in previous sessions agreeing to have a consensus

declaration, pilot, and take new initiatives on several themes that impact the Global South.

"We are very happy that these discussions have carried forward under the presidency of Brazil and, of course, in South Africa under four verticles that South Africa has outlined for their own presidency. A number of achievements have been made throughout the year across various tracks in these areas. So we are very happy that the issues of importance to the Global South are at the centre of discussion and are being highlighted," Secretary added.

Regarding the bilateral meetings to be held on the sidelines of the G20, Secretary Dalela said they are in the process of organising them. He added that India and South Africa are democracies and that their cooperation has three pillars, one of which is political cooperation.

UN remains indispensable; needs to be more representative, responsive: Shashi Tharoor

NEW DELHI

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor has said the UN remains indispensable even in the face of its "failures" over Gaza and Ukraine, asserting that the world body's challenge is to become more representative and responsive in a world that needs principled global cooperation more than ever.

Tharoor, who has served as the UN under secretary general in the past, said on Thursday that to abandon the United Nations would be to abandon the very idea of common humanity.

"We need to recommit ourselves to the UN. As someone who served the UN for three decades from 1978-2007, I witnessed first-hand its evolution from a Cold War battleground to a post-Cold War laboratory of global cooperation," the MP from Thiruvananthapuram said, delivering the 15th Desmond Tutu International Peace Lecture in Cape Town, South Africa. "I was part of its efforts to protect refugees and its struggles to build peace.

I saw the UN falter in Rwanda, rise to the occasion in Timor-Leste and Namibia. I saw it struggle with bureaucracy and politics, yet persist in its mission to feed the hungry, shelter the displaced and give voice to the voiceless," Tharoor said.

"Today, when people decry its failures over Gaza and Ukraine, I acknowledge again that the UN is not perfect nor was it ever meant to be, and yet it remains indispensable," he said.

As someone who spent much of his adult life in its service, Tharoor said he remains convinced that the UN matters.

It matters to the refugees seeking shelter, to the peacekeepers standing guard, and to the diplomat negotiating a fragile truce, the former Minister of State for External Affairs said. "It matters to all of us who



believe that cooperation is not weakness and that justice is not luxury.

The UN remains an indispensable symbol of not perfection but of possibility, as (former UN Secretary General) Dag Hammarskjöld so memorably said, 'it was not meant to take mankind to heaven but to save humanity from hell,' Tharoor stated. In the aftermath of its 80th anniversary last month, the UN's challenge is to become more representative, more responsive and resilient in a world that needs principled global cooperation more than ever, he said.

"To abandon it would be to abandon the very idea of our common humanity.

Our own survival and that of the only universal world organisation we have - the UN - depends not on nostalgia but on renewal, and that renewal begins with the recognition that in an interconnected world, no nation is truly sovereign unless all are," Tharoor said.

It is time for that moral reimagination of the UN, he added. Tharoor also called for replacing tolerance with acceptance and cited the words and vision of Swami Vivekananda.

"I am a Hindu and I learn from the great preacher Swami Vivekananda, who took

Hinduism to the world of the late 19th century, that Hinduism stands for both tolerance and universal acceptance.

We believe not only in universal tolerance, he (Vivekananda) spoke but we also accept all religions as true.

This was a profound insight, and that too in the late Victorian era," Tharoor said.

"I, after all, went to school in India, studied history, and learnt that tolerance is a virtue, that a tolerant king is a good king because he allows you to believe what he doesn't believe in. But in fact, Vivekananda was telling us that tolerance is a patronising idea. It is saying that 'I have the truth', but I will magnanimously indulge in your right to be wrong," he said.

What Vivekananda taught Hindus is that we must replace tolerance with acceptance, Tharoor said.

"That is, we must say, 'I believe I have the truth, you believe you have the truth.'

I will respect your truth, please respect my truth," he said.

In that, there is a great recipe for human and inter-religious co-existence, Tharoor said.

"His (Vivekananda's) vision was summarised in the credo 'Sarva dharma sambhav'. All religions are equal. Yet too often

religion is reduced to boundary-making, to identity politics, to tribalism. We forget that the word religion comes from the word religare - to bound together," he said.

Tharoor said the vision of Archbishop Tutu demands that people reject the false choice between peace and justice and insist on both, recognising that healing requires truth and that truth requires courage.

He said the vision demands that "we listen to the silenced, listen to the stories of survivors, listen to the victims of terror and not those who clamour their cause in its name, that we dismantle the systems - legal economic, ideological - that perpetuate inequality and exclusions, that we challenge the structures that exclude and clamour to change them into places of inclusion, and above all it demands that we reclaim hope.

"In a world driven by war and terrorism, by climate collapse and mass displacement, by rising authoritarianism, hostility and xenophobia, it is easy to despair, but despair is a luxury we cannot afford, Tharoor asserted. Ending with a call to action, he said, "Let us be the generation that refused to be divided by fear or hatred, let us be the citizens who speak truth even when it trembles in our throats, the believers of every faith and those who chose love over hatred, justice over vengeance, courage over comfort, principles over the uneasy compromises of pragmatism."

"Let us be the builders of bridges, the architects of inclusiveness, the healers of wounds, the promoters of hope, the ones that held aloft the flickering flame of hope and faith even in the midst of intensifying darkness, for the world does not need more cynics, it needs more Tutus and more Tutu-like souls," Tharoor said.

INTERNATIONAL

Trump's draft peace plan for Ukraine cedes land to Russia, limits Kyiv's military capacity

WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump's plan for ending the war in Ukraine would cede land to Russia and limit the size of Kyiv's military, according to a draft obtained Thursday by The Associated Press.

The proposal, originating from negotiations between Washington and Moscow, appeared decidedly favorable to Russia, which started the war nearly four years ago by invading its neighbor. If past is prologue, it would seem untenable for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who has opposed Trump's previous calls for territorial concessions.

A side agreement aims to satisfy Ukrainian security concerns by saying a future "significant, deliberate and sustained armed attack" by Russia would be viewed as "threatening the peace and security of the transatlantic community."

The agreement, which was detailed by a senior US official who was not authorized to publicly discuss the matter, does not obligate the United States or European allies to intervene on Ukraine's behalf, although it says they would "determine the measures necessary to restore security."

Trump's push to end the war could drive a wedge between himself and European leaders, who are likely to oppose any agreement that could be seen as rewarding Russian President Vladimir Putin for his aggression, leaving him emboldened rather than defeated.

For example, the proposal would not only bar Ukraine from joining NATO but would also prevent the alliance's future expansion. Such a step would be a significant victory for Moscow, which views NATO as a threat.

Putin would also gain ground he has been unable to win on the battlefield. Under the draft, Moscow would hold all the eastern Donbas region, even though approximately 14% still remains in Ukrainian hands. Ukraine's military, currently at roughly 880,000 troops, would be reduced to 600,000.

The proposal opens the door to lifting sanctions on Russia and returning it to what

was formerly known as the Group of Eight, which includes many of the world's biggest economies.

Russia was suspended from the annual gathering in 2014 following its annexation of Crimea, a strategically important peninsula on the northern coast of the Black Sea that is internationally recognized as part of Ukraine.

The US team began drawing up the plan soon after US special envoy Steve Witkoff held talks with Rustem Umerov, a top adviser to Zelenskyy, according to a senior administration official who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity. The official added that Umerov agreed to the majority of the plan, after making several modifications, and then presented it to Zelenskyy.

US Army Secretary Dan Driscoll was also in Kyiv on Thursday and discussed the latest draft with Zelenskyy, according to a senior administration official. Zelenskyy offered a measured statement on social media about it but did not directly speak to the substance of the proposal.

"Our teams — of Ukraine and the United States — will work on the provisions of the plan to end the war. We are ready for constructive, honest and swift work," he wrote.

Meanwhile, Trump's special envoy to Ukraine, Keith Kellogg, has informed the White House he'll leave his post in January, according to two senior administration officials.

Kellogg was initially named special envoy for Ukraine and Russia during Trump's presidential transition. But his role shrunk as Witkoff, a real estate developer-turned diplomat, emerged as the president's chief interlocutor with Putin and his advisers.

Under the proposal, Russia would commit to making no future attacks, something the White House views as a concession. In addition, \$100 billion in frozen Russian assets would be dedicated to rebuilding Ukraine.

However, handing over territory to Russia would be deeply unpopular in Ukraine. It also would be illegal under

Ukraine's constitution. Zelenskyy has repeatedly ruled out such a possibility.

Russia would also be allowed to keep half of the power generated by Europe's largest nuclear power plant, Zaporizhzhia, which it captured from Ukraine early during the war.

The draft calls for a "Peace Council" that Trump will oversee. The council is an idea that Trump snatched from his lengthy peace plan aimed at bringing about a permanent end to war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza.

If either Ukraine or Russia violated the truce once enacted, it would face sanctions.

US Rep. Don Bacon, R-Neb., an Air Force veteran, rejected the emerging plan. "Unacceptable," he posted on social media. "It is a 1938 Munich," referring to a diplomatic agreement aimed at securing peace with Nazi Germany but widely viewed as paving the way for World War II.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Witkoff have been quietly working on the peace plan for a month, receiving input from both Ukrainians and Russians on terms that are acceptable to each side, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Thursday. Witkoff and Kirill Dmitriev, a close adviser to Putin, have been key to drafting the proposal.

As reports about the draft emerged, blindsided European diplomats insisted they and Ukraine must be consulted.

European leaders have already been alarmed this year by indications that Trump's administration might be sidelining them and Zelenskyy in its push to stop the fighting.

Trump's at-times conciliatory approach to Putin has fueled those concerns, but Trump adopted a tougher line last month when he announced heavy sanctions on Russia's vital oil sector that come into force Friday.

"For any plan to work, it needs Ukrainians and Europeans on board," European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said at the start of a meeting in Brussels of the 27-nation bloc's foreign ministers. She also suggested that the draft

would be too favorable toward Moscow.

German Foreign Minister Johannes Wadepuhl said he talked by phone Thursday with Witkoff and Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan to discuss "our various current efforts to end Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and thus finally put an end to the immeasurable human suffering."

Ukraine's deputy UN Ambassador Khrystyna Hayovvshyn told the UN Security Council that Kyiv has officially received Trump's draft peace plan and is ready "to work constructively," but she stressed Ukraine's "red lines."

"There will never be any recognition, formal or otherwise, of Ukrainian territory temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation as Russian," she said. "Our land is not for sale."

"Ukraine will not accept any limits on its right to self-defense or on the size and capabilities of our armed forces, nor will we tolerate any infringement on our sovereignty, including our sovereign right to choose the alliances we want to join," Hayovvshyn added.

It was not clear whether European foreign ministers had seen the peace plan, which was first reported by Axios.

Although they appeared caught by surprise, some elements of the plan were not new. Trump said last month that the Donbas region should be "cut up," leaving most of it in Russian hands.

However, the administration's previous diplomatic efforts this year to stop the fighting have so far come to nothing. A summit between Trump and Putin in Alaska did not result in a breakthrough over the summer, and plans for them to meet again in Budapest, Hungary, did not come to fruition.

Trump frequently complained that the negotiations involving Ukraine were taking longer than other conflicts where he helped mediate.

"I thought that was going to be my easy one because I have a good relationship with President Putin," he said this week. "But I'm a little disappointed in President Putin right now."

Three killed in Dhaka as 5.7 quake jolts Bangladesh; tremors felt across Bengal, Northeast



Tremors were felt across West Bengal, including Kolkata, and parts of the Northeast on Friday morning after a 5.7-magnitude earthquake struck Bangladesh's Narsingdi district, the IMD reported. The quake occurred at 10:08 am, with its epicentre about 13 km south-southwest of Narsingdi at a depth of 10 km.

People in Kolkata, Guwahati and other parts

of the region rushed out of homes and offices as a precaution. No damage has been reported from India so far.

In Bangladesh, three pedestrians were killed in Dhaka's Bongshal area when the railing of a five-storey building collapsed during the tremor, according to a Dhaka Tribune report. Bongshal police duty officer Ashish Kumar Ghosh confirmed that the victims were taken to hospital, where two were declared dead on the spot and the third succumbed later at Mitford Hospital.

Locals told the Dhaka Tribune that the railing suddenly gave way as the quake struck, killing the pedestrians who were walking past the building.

Bangladesh Meteorological Department officials said the earthquake, which shook Dhaka measured 5.7 on the Richter scale with its epicentre in Madhabdi, Narsingdi. Tremors were also felt across Chandpur, Nilphamari, Sitakunda, Sirajganj, Narayanganj, Patuakhali, Bogura, Barisal and Moulvibazar, the Dhaka Tribune reported.

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KOLKATA:

In a heartfelt gathering organised by the *Kolkata Assamese Cultural Association (KACA)*, a leading social and cultural organisation of the city, the birthday of late singer *Zubeen Garg* was celebrated with warmth and remembrance at Assam Bhawan. Admirers from across Kolkata, including those speaking Assamese and Bengali, came together to honour the legendary artist, marking the first birthday celebration in the city without his presence. The sense of loss and grief among the attendees was clearly felt throughout the event.

The programme was inaugurated with a lamp-lighting ceremony led by Tapas Deb, Joint Resident Commissioner, Assam Bhawan; Prof. Dr. Khanindra Pathak, President of the Kolkata Assamese Cultural Association; and Hiten Hatkhowa, Working President of the Association. The gathering paid homage to the beloved icon of Assam with deep respect.

The evening featured a captivating medley of Zubeen Garg's ever-green songs. With vocals in more than 35,000 songs, Zubeen Garg was cherished not only by the people of Assam but also held a special place in the hearts of Bengalis in Kolkata. Several eminent personalities



Never underestimate the power of dressing well.

from Kolkata's music and film fraternity, who had collaborated closely with Zubeen Garg,

graced the occasion. Among them were noted lyricist Priyo Chattopadhyay and music director Akash Sen. Celebrated actress Jaya Seal Ghosh was also present. Every distinguished guest and each participant of the cultural performances received a *sapling of Nahar* as a token of love and appreciation from the Association. The gathering collectively pledged to carry forward Zubeen Garg's progressive ideals and his deep love for nature, symbolised through the blossoming of the nahar flower in Kolkata.

The cultural segment featured soulful musical performances by emerging artists Abhipriya Goswami, Sujata Pal, Kanushree Baruah, Priyambada Hazarika, Indira Deka Roy, and Harsh Reev Shandilya. Dance performances were presented by Mayurakshi Bora, Ishani Dutta Roy, and Swachhata Chakravarty.

Sanghati Das, who had performed alongside Zubeen Garg on several stages in Kolkata, shared her cherished experiences with the iconic singer. Her rendition of songs associated with him left the audience deeply moved.

In the concluding segment of the evening, conducted by the Association's Vice President Anuj Gogoi, the audience stood together in an emotional moment as they sang *"Mayabini Raatir Bukut,"* accompanied by Abhi Kashyap on flute and Imon Borah on piano.

Attendees widely appreciated the Association's efforts in organising the birthday celebration, as well as the five-day public condolence programme held earlier in Kolkata following Zubeen Garg's untimely passing.

NEIR 2026 to traverse through beautiful Bagdogra



The NEIR 2026 has Bagdogra to traverse. Bagdogra rarely announces itself. It isn't a city people dream about or a destination that inspires early-morning plans. Yet anyone who has travelled to the eastern Himalayas knows this place, even if only from an airport tarmac, a tea-fringed highway, or a fog-laden morning when flights seem to hang in limbo. Bagdogra is a threshold. It's the moment where the plains loosen their grip and the hills start calling.

Here's what matters. When you look past the idea of Bagdogra as just a transit point, you find a landscape where the region's stories mingle and collide. Soldiers, tea workers, students, pilgrims, backpackers, traders, and truckers all pass through the same roads. The result is a place shaped less by permanence and more by movement. That's its character. Bagdogra grows around moments of arrival and departure.

Start with geography. Bagdogra lies at the foothills of the Darjeeling Himalayas,

just outside Siliguri, where the plains begin tilting upward. The Teesta and Mahananda rivers carve through the region, shaping not just the soil but the rhythm of life. Drive a few minutes in any direction, and the scenery shifts. On one side, tea gardens unroll in long green corridors. On the other hand, the land leads toward the Dooars, with forests that still feel ancient. Keep going north, and the hills start climbing toward Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and Sikkim. Bagdogra sits at the hinge of all these different worlds.

The airport is where most people meet. Unlike big metros, Bagdogra Airport isn't overwhelmed by glass, steel, or noise.

It's practical, busy, and surprisingly human. You can stand outside arrivals and watch the story of the region unfold in a single frame. Families waiting for sons returning from army duty. Hoteliers from Darjeeling with placards. Taxi operators negotiate rates in Nepali, Hindi, and Bangla without missing a beat. Tourists try to figure out whether they want the hills or the forests first. For a

small town, it handles a lot of ambition.

But Bagdogra is more than a gateway. The tea gardens around it shape both its landscape and its economy. These estates are older than the airport, older than most

of the town's residential clusters. Walk through them, and the air changes. There's a quietness that doesn't belong to highways or markets. Workers move with a steady pace, plucking leaves with a rhythm that feels learned

over generations. The gardens treat time differently. They slow it down, stretch it, and give it space to breathe. That calm sits in sharp contrast to the frantic energy of travellers hurrying between flights and taxis.





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JANUARY 10-12, 2025

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11 JAN
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11 JAN
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 Potential Issues and Challenges of Barak Valley to be discussed by stakeholders.
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JAN'25
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10 JAN
Media Conclave
 Media Conclave: Media Conclave, Workshops, and the Fund, Talks and Conferences are part of the 'Barak Festival 2025'. Theme: 'One for All, All for One'.
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DEC'24-JAN'25
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Barak Festival

Band Night | 10 JAN
 Musical Night | 11 JAN



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10-12 JAN
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11 JAN
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