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**PERSPECTIVE**

The strongest men are gentle. The smartest men are quiet. The wealthiest men are simple. The happiest men are private. Real power doesn't need to prove itself.

**Cachar Police seize heroin worth Rs. 2.20 crore, three arrested**  
SILCHAR

In a major blow to narcotics trafficking, Cachar Police have seized 388 grams of heroin valued at approximately Rs.2.20 crore and arrested three youths in connection with the case, officials said on Wednesday.

The seizure was made during a late-night operation on Tuesday after police intercepted a vehicle entering Cachar district from a neighbouring state. Acting on specific intelligence inputs, the police carried out a detailed search of the car and recovered the contraband concealed inside 30 soap cases hidden in different compartments of the vehicle.

Confirming the development, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Partha Protim Das said the intercepted vehicle, bearing registration number MZ-02C-1553, had a specially designed secret chamber used to stash the heroin.

The arrested persons have been identified as Dildar Hussain (25), Nazrul Hussein (20) and Jasim Uddin (25), all residents of Bhanga Bazar under the Dholai police station area. Preliminary investigations revealed that the consignment was being transported to Guwahati.

Police officials said further investigation is underway to identify and dismantle the wider drug trafficking network linked to the case. Legal proceedings have been initiated against the accused under relevant sections of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act.

**WHO SAID WHAT**



I'm honoured to be conferred with the 'Great Honour Nishan of Ethiopia.' I dedicate it to the 140 crore people of India. ~ Narendra Modi, PM India

**Centre extends deadline for Manipur violence inquiry commission till May 2026**

**GUWAHATI**

The Union government has extended the deadline for the Commission of Inquiry probing the 2023 ethnic violence in Manipur, granting the panel time until May 20, 2026, to submit its report, according to a notification issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs on Tuesday.

The three-member commission, headed by former Gauhati High Court Chief Justice Ajai Lamba, was constituted on June 4, 2023, following a recommendation by the Manipur government. The panel also includes retired IAS officer Himanshu Shekhar Das and retired IPS officer Aloka Prabhakar.

The Home Ministry notification said the commission must submit its findings to the Central government "as soon as possible but not later than May 20, 2026."

The panel was initially



mandated to complete the inquiry within six months of its first sitting. However, the deadline has now been extended for the fifth time. Earlier extensions were granted on September 13, 2024; December 3, 2024; May 20, 2025; and through the latest order. The commission has been tasked with examining the causes and spread of the violence, assessing lapses or negligence by authorities or individuals, and reviewing the adequacy of administrative measures taken to prevent and control the unrest. It is also required to look into complaints and allegations submitted by individuals or organisations.

The Manipur violence erupted on May 3, 2023, following protests by Kuki-Zo tribal groups in the hill districts against a Manipur High Court recommendation to consider granting Scheduled Tribe (ST) status

to members of the Meitei community in the Imphal Valley. The clashes claimed at least 260 lives, destroyed homes and property, and displaced thousands of residents. The Manipur government had recommended the setting up of a judicial commission on May 29, 2023, under the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952, to investigate the circumstances leading to the crisis. Acting on the recommendation, the Centre constituted the present inquiry panel.

Manipur is currently under President's Rule, imposed on February 13, 2025, days after Chief Minister N Biren Singh resigned on February 9. Since assuming charge as Governor on January 3, Ajay Kumar Bhalla has been holding consultations with various stakeholders as part of efforts to restore normalcy in the state.

**ED conducts searches against self-styled 'Chief Minister', 'External Affairs Minister' of Manipur State Council**



**IMPHAL**

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday conducted searches at multiple locations in Imphal against Yambem Biren and Narengbam Samarjit, who have described themselves as the "Chief Minister" and "External Affairs and Defence Minister" respectively of a self-styled Manipur State Council, officials said.

The searches were carried out at five premises linked to the two individuals, who are also key functionaries associated with the Salai Group of Companies.

According to officials, the action is linked to a case stemming from a press conference held in London in 2019, during which Yambem Biren and Narengbam Samarjit allegedly projected themselves as office-bearers of the Manipur State Council and pub-

licly declared the "independence" of Manipur from the Union of India.

Officials said such acts amount to serious offences, including waging war against the state, sedition, and promoting disharmony, enmity and hatred among different groups.

Meanwhile, security forces have intensified operations across Manipur. Officials said a large cache of arms and ammunition was recovered earlier from Moltinchang village under Sognu Police Station in Kakching district.

The seized items included one self-loading rifle (SLR) without a magazine, a locally made bolt-action sniper rifle with an empty magazine, one double-barrelled shotgun, one single-barrelled shotgun, a locally made pistol with an empty magazine, a 36 HE hand grenade without detonator, an empty magazine of a 7.62 LMG, three tube launchers, 15 SLR rounds, five stun shells and one 51 mm HE bomb. The recovery was made as part of heightened security operations aimed at curbing the circulation of illegal arms and improving public safety. In a separate development, Manipur Police detained an alleged active member of the proscribed militant outfit People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK-PRO). The arrested person was identified as Thangjam Priyobarta Singh, also known as Yokkhatpa, aged 35, a resident of Kumbi Mayai Leikai in Bishnupur district.

Officials said investigations are continuing in all cases.

**Peace must come before government formation: Manipur BJP MLA after Delhi talks**



**IMPHAL**

Restoring peace has been identified as the foremost prerequisite for the formation of a new government in Manipur, with BJP legislators underlining the priority after a high-level meeting with the party's central leadership in New Delhi.

Speaking to reporters after returning from the national capital, BJP MLA Tongbram Robindro described the discussions as constructive and focused on public welfare, while stressing that stability must precede any political tran-

sition in the state, which has been under President's Rule for the past 10 months.

"We had a fruitful meeting with the central leadership. The main agenda was the welfare of the people," Robindro said. "The government will and has to come, but there has to be peace first. I cannot say a definite timeline, but the government will be formed."

The meeting, held on Sunday, was attended by BJP national general secretary (organisation) B L Santhosh, the party's Northeast coordinator Sambit Patra, and legislators from Manipur, including

MLAs from both the Meitei and Kuki communities, who have been on opposing sides of the ethnic conflict in the state.

Emphasising the need for reconciliation, Robindro said the people of Manipur must find a way to move forward together. "We are all human beings and have to live together. Whatever mistakes have been committed, we have to forgive each other and forget," he added.

Another BJP MLA, Heikham Dingo, said the discussions remained centred on restoring harmony in the state. "We discussed how to bring peace. Continued dialogue with the Centre will lead to positive outcomes for the people," he said.

Sources said the central leadership urged Meitei and Kuki MLAs to work jointly to bridge differences between the two communities, stressing that lasting peace is essential for Manipur's recovery.

A total of 34 BJP MLAs from Manipur attended the Delhi meeting, including former chief minister N Biren Singh and Assembly Speaker Th Satyabrata Singh. Of the seven BJP MLAs from the Kuki community, four were present, while three were unable to attend due to what were described as "unavoidable reasons".

The talks are being seen as an important step by the BJP to rebuild trust, stabilise the situation in Manipur, and pave the way for the eventual formation of an elected government in the state.

**Prohibitory orders imposed along India-Bangladesh border in Cachar**

**SILCHAR**

Prohibitory orders have been imposed along the India-Bangladesh border in Assam's Cachar district by the administration to prevent illegal movement, an official release said on Wednesday.

Preventive restrictions along sensitive border areas have been imposed due to apprehension over possible movement of extremist elements and unauthorised cross-border activities to disturb peace and stability, it said.

District Magistrate Mridul Yadav, exercising powers under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), issued the order on Tuesday aimed at preventing illegal movement of people, goods and activities.

It has been noted that unchecked movement, particularly during night hours, could facilitate unlawful activities, including unauthorised transportation of essential commodities and cattle, thereby posing serious challenges to law and order, the order stated.

Movement of individuals has been restricted from sunset to sunrise



within a one-kilometre belt along the border of the district.

In addition, movement on the River Surma and along its high banks

within the Indian territory has been prohibited during the night.

The order also places strict controls on boating and fishing activities

on the Surma river.

Fishing will be permitted only for local residents and for personal consumption, subject to prior authorisation by the Circle Officer, Katigorah, and compliance with lease conditions. Such permissions will be closely monitored, with copies endorsed to the District Magistrate and the Commandant of the 170th Battalion of the Border Security Force (BSF) at Dholchera, ensuring coordination between civil and security agencies. Transportation of essential commodities such as sugar, rice, wheat, edible oil and salt has been restricted during night hours within a five-kilometre belt inside the district boundary along the Bangladesh border. Any relaxation will be granted only after due verification by supply officials and for specific purposes, time and location, reinforcing transparency and accountability, the release added.

State and central government employees who are on official duty in the border areas have been exempted from these restrictions to ensure that essential administrative and security functions remain uninterrupted.

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## POLICY PARALYSIS ONEVS

**T**he prolonged delay in finalising Jammu and Kashmir's Electric Vehicle (EV) Policy has exposed a troubling gap between intent and execution in an area that is no longer optional but essential. Initiated in October 2022, the exercise has now dragged on for more than three years, marked by multiple committees, repeated reviews and fresh terms of reference, yet without a firm policy outcome. In a Union Territory that is both an ecologically fragile region and one of India's most prominent tourism destinations, this delay carries serious environmental, economic and reputational costs. Electric mobility is no longer a futuristic concept. Across India, states have rolled out well-defined EV policies that combine fiscal incentives, charging infrastructure, regulatory clarity and private-sector participation. These policies have accelerated EV adoption, reduced urban pollution and aligned local transport systems with national climate commitments. In contrast, Jammu and Kashmir-despite repeatedly acknowledging the necessity of a structured EV roadmap-continues to operate without a guiding policy framework. The result is policy paralysis at a time when decisive action is most needed.

The urgency of an EV policy in J&K is amplified by its tourism-driven economy. The Union Territory receives massive seasonal inflows of visitors, placing extraordinary pressure on its transport systems. Nearly one crore pilgrims visit Shri Mata Vaishno Devi annually, while Kashmir has witnessed bumper tourist seasons over the last few years. Although a substantial number of tourists arrive by train or air, many rely on road transport for intra-UT travel. This translates into thousands of taxis, buses, private vehicles and commercial fleets operating daily in sensitive ecological zones. J&K's major tourist destinations-whether it is the Trikuta Hills, Gulmarg, Pahalgam, Sonamarg or the Dal Lake area-are environmentally fragile. Vehicular emissions in these areas do not merely degrade air quality; they directly threaten glaciers, forests, water bodies and biodiversity. In such a context, every possible step must be taken to minimise pollution and carbon emissions. Electric vehicles are not a luxury here; they are an environmental necessity.

Importantly, J&K already has proven, local examples demonstrating the effectiveness of electric mobility in eco-sensitive zones. The successful operation of battery-operated vehicles on the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi track for many years stands as a practical and powerful model of how clean transport can safeguard fragile ecosystems without compromising accessibility or efficiency. More recently, the growing acceptance of e-rickshaws and the introduction of e-buses in Jammu and Kashmir have further underlined the utility, reliability and public acceptance of EVs in everyday life. Despite these successes and well-known benefits, the lack of a formal EV policy remains a serious concern. Consequently, charging stations remain sparse, creating complications not only for local EV owners but also for tourists arriving with electric vehicles. This discourages green travel and perpetuates dependence on conventional, polluting transport modes.

The economic and administrative logic for swift action is compelling. A comprehensive EV policy would clarify incentives for vehicle buyers, fleet operators, and charging infrastructure developers. It would enable the planned establishment of charging stations at strategic locations-railway stations, airports, major city parking areas, bus terminals and tourist hubs. Simultaneously, the Government can incentivise the installation of EV chargers at major hotels, especially along highways and popular tourist circuits, through tax rebates or viability gap funding. City parking authorities, too, must be directed to prioritise EV infrastructure to encourage behavioural change among commuters.

Once a robust charging network is in place, J&K can explore progressive measures such as a green tax at major tourist destinations for polluting vehicles. This would not only discourage high-emission transport in sensitive zones but also substantially boost revenue collection, which can be reinvested into sustainable infrastructure. In this sense, EV adoption represents a rare win-win scenario: cleaner and cheaper mobility for citizens and tourists, and new revenue streams alongside environmental protection for the Government. The onus squarely lies on the Government to finalise and notify the Electric Vehicle Policy without further drift. For Jammu and Kashmir, protecting ecology, sustaining tourism and embracing modern mobility are deeply interconnected objectives aligned with EV policy.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

You can, you should, and if you're brave enough to start, you will.

- Stephen King

# Modi's stress on Duties : Can Rights be ignored?



DHURJATI MUKHERJEE

In his letter to the citizens on 'Constitution Day' or 'Samvidhan Divas', Prime Minister Modi waxed eloquently on the citizens' primary responsibility to perform duties without in any way upholding their justiciable fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution or other constitutional rights central to the individuals to lead a dignified life.

The letter referred to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Birsa Munda and Guru Tegh Bahadur and flimsily claimed that they gave primacy to duties which Modi claimed, "the Constitution also emphasises through a dedicated chapter on fundamental duties in Article 51A." These duties, he said "guide us on how to collectively achieve social and economic progress," invoking Mahatma Gandhi who, according to Modi "believed that a duty well performed creates a responding right and that real rights are a result of the performance of duty."

Modi may be right in quoting Gandhi who said rights of individuals flowed from the duties, but the latter was always concerned about the poor and the marginalised getting their due share of rights. Gandhi himself moved a resolution on Fundamental Rights in 1931 in the Karachi session of the Indian National Congress and it, among others, contained, Freedom of Press, Freedom to Profess Religion, equal rights and obligations of all citizens, without any bar on account of sex and above all religious neutrality of the state.

Further, in a letter to M.S. Masani on June 4, 1934, almost three years after he moved the resolution on Fundamental Rights, he wrote, "What is necessary is that labourers or workers should know their rights and should also know how to assert them". While saying so, he also remarked, "And since there never has been any right with-a corresponding duty, in my opinion a manifesto is incomplete without emphasising the necessity of performance of duty and showing what that duty is."

The manner in which Modi has been asking citizens to carry out their duties without any obligation of the State to ensure basic rights

to the citizens, which have been eroded in recent years, is no doubt a subject of concern. With widening inequality and disparity in wages as well as the fact that the lowest 20 percent of the population are in a pitiable condition, there is a need for the State to think about ensuring a decent livelihood to all citizens.

Authentic democracy requires transcending this situation and that can be achieved with the institution of a set of constitutionally guaranteed fundamental economic rights on a par with civil and political rights we already have. Though we are rightly proud of our Constitution, it needs to be stated that it does not contain a chapter on fundamental economic rights. Such rights would have made democracy more meaningful and placed India ahead of most countries. However, it needs to be stated that mere institution of such rights is no guarantee that these would be realised.

Tragically, Modi or his government is little concerned about rights, which are not being enjoyed by a large section which includes unorganised workers, farm labourers, child workers, bonded labourers etc. Though education is a fundamental right, very few have access to quality education up to the higher secondary levels. Health is greatly neglected and every Block does not have even a wellness centre with adequate doctors and other medical staff.

It has been seen that there is always a discrepancy between promises made by politicians and its implementation. The execution today is riding roughshod over the existing fundamental rights of citizens, and the judiciary is too intimidated to defend these rights consistently. For example, the popular MGNREGS, which conferred a right of sorts on rural households of enjoying 100 days of work, stands violated due to lack of adequate funds. It is indeed surprising that in a country where unemployment and underemployment is a critical problem, the government cannot find the necessary funds to ensure there is work for continuous 100 days a year. Political analysts have found all types of rights are always there for the privileged sections.

It is only when the average Indian experiences a democratisation of privilege and law, where he no longer sees a distinction between his rights, opportunities and that of those in power, that the seismic shift as envisioned by the Prime Minister will become a reality. It is difficult to presume that this will happen shortly as it would be extremely difficult to strip the powerful from the extra power and VIP culture enjoyed by them. Wealth, political clout and power should not be allowed to buy immunity, and such people ought to face public scrutiny.

The sermon about duties may sound somewhat authoritarian, given the fact that a democratic State has the dual responsibility to ensure that duties are performed by its citizens while also seeing to it that they are not deprived of their rights. But unfortunately, the dispossessed and the marginalised are deprived of their rights. How can this happen in a State which talks of democracy, pluralism and inclusiveness? In talking about duties, Modi has generated a debate where political analysts have raised the question of deprivation of rights.

While there is much talk of the economy moving fast in terms of GDP growth, there is no analysis of how much money is allocated for the welfare of the lowest 20 percent, who are not only poor and marginalised but are also victims to environmental hazards like floods, cyclones and sea-level rise, almost every year. The reason for this is obvious as those who formulate government strategy - whether politicians, bureaucrats or technocrats - have little knowledge and concern about how the poorer sections have to struggle for earning their livelihood. Added to this is the oppression of lower castes and even today, we hear of bonded labour, and the dispensation is virtually not quite conscious of such things being existent even today in the country.

It goes without saying that basic rights must be ensured to all sections of the population to ensure that happiness and justice prevail in society. When we hear politicians talking frequently of the country's endeavour of ushering in

Viksit Bharat, is it not our duty and responsibility to provide a dignified existence to all our fellow citizens? The parliamentarians as well as academics should consider framing a policy guideline for both the Centre and the states. Meanwhile, budgetary allocations towards ensuring people's rights are urgently called for.

Finally, we may refer to Gandhi who had cautioned in the late 30s of the previous century - "...there are no such two classes here that one of them should exercise only rights and the other discharge only duties". He remarked: "If a ruler shirks his duties while the people do theirs then the people become the ruler." A ruler by doing his duty and considering himself as the trustee of his people would survive, he observed, but cautioned "if he becomes authoritarian, he cannot survive in this age."

### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

**The controversy over renaming MGNREGA in the Govt's proposed new G-RAM-G Bill is unfortunate. The concept of Gram Swaraj and the ideal of Ram Rajya were never competing forces; they were the twin pillars of Gandhiji's consciousness. Replacing the Mahatma's name in a scheme for the rural poor ignores this profound symbiosis. His final breath was a testament to 'Ram'; let us not dishonour his legacy by creating a division where none existed.**  
~ Shashi Tharoor, MP, INC



## WAVE OF RADICALISATION, GOVTS MUST COUNTER WISELY

DHURJATI MUKHERJEE

A new wave of radicalization amongst people, mostly the young generation, frustrated and outraged by current trends in politics and society is raising its ugly head. India's phase of counter terror strategy must shift from containment to prevention. According to political analysts, radicals must be treated as a strategic priority and their movements and operations watched carefully. The recent blast near the Red Fort in capital Delhi is a testimony. Even the G-20 summit at Johannesburg, South Africa has condemned terror in all its forms and manifestations.

The term 'white-collar terrorism' has suddenly burst into the national consciousness amid charges of a Kashmiri doctor's involvement in the blast and the arrests of two of his peers in connection with an inter-state and transnational terror module. Some have cautioned against a knee-jerk attribution of the trend to the hold-all phenomenon of radicalisation and stressed the feeling of stage and subjugation many Kashmiris feel.

But the display of radicalism is not limited to India. Following crackdown on student-led protests, former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was recently sentenced to death by the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) there without even hearing her, making a mockery of justice.

Delving into the aspect of terror, it may be mentioned that UAPA is India's third terror statute. India enacted its first anti-terror law called the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act in 1987 to counter the Punjab insurgency.

It soon became a machinery for abuse - torture, coerced confessions and endless pre-trial detentions. Its successor, Prevention of Terrorism Act (2002) repeated the pattern until the UPA-I government repealed it, condemning it as "a slur on democracy".

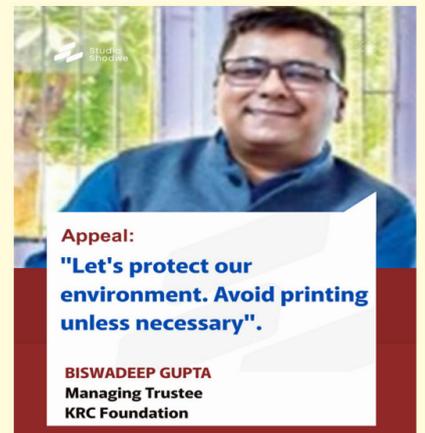
The Supreme Court once pruned TADA and POTA by reading in procedural safeguards. Yet it has never constitutionally reviewed the UAPA. The court stated in February 2025 that petitions challenging the 2019 UAPA amendment, which gives the Centre powers to label people as terrorists, must first be heard by the high courts.

The experience of anti-terror laws in India also demonstrates an inherent linguistic challenge. UAPA's unlawful activity criminalises any act intended to disrupt the 'sovereignty and integrity' of India.

It empowers the executive to label its enemies as terrorists. Analysts are of the opinion that UAPA stands today as a case study in how legal measures taken in the name of national security can curdle into perpetual exception. The real courage of a free nation lies not in how harshly it punishes its enemies but in how faithfully it restrains them through proper counselling.



### Message



NEIR 2026

# Himanta Biswa Sarma flags anti-India rhetoric in Bangladesh, warns against targeting Northeast

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday voiced serious concern over what he described as a rise in anti-India rhetoric in Bangladesh, particularly narratives allegedly questioning India's sovereignty over the Northeast. Terming such discussions "dangerous and unacceptable," Sarma said India cannot remain indifferent to repeated statements that challenge its territorial integrity.

Speaking to reporters, the Chief Minister claimed that for more than a year, certain quarters in Bangladesh have been engaged in discussions about separating the Northeast from India. Such ideas, he said, pose a direct threat to national sovereignty



and would invite a firm response from New Delhi if allowed to persist.

Emphasising India's strategic and economic standing, Sarma noted that India is a nuclear power and the world's fourth-largest economy, and cannot be intimidated by hostile rhetoric. He added that India may need to reassess the level of support extended to Bangladesh if anti-India sentiments continue to surface.

"India will not remain silent if such behaviour continues. Repeated talk of detaching the Northeast from the country is unacceptable and must be dealt with decisively," Sarma said.

The Chief Minister's remarks come amid reports of anti-India content circulating on social media platforms in Bangladesh.

Tensions were further heightened in October 2025 after a distorted map of India's Northeast was allegedly displayed during a meeting involving Bangladesh's Chief Adviser, Professor Muhammad Yunus, and Pakistan's top military leadership.

Pakistan's Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, had paid a courtesy call on Professor Yunus at the State Guest House Jamuna. While an official statement said the meeting focused on bilateral cooperation in trade, investment and defence, the circulation of the altered map triggered concern in India.

New Delhi has previously raised objections over similar incidents. Last year, India strongly protested a social media post

by senior Bangladeshi leader Mahfuz Alam that inaccurately depicted parts of Assam, Tripura and West Bengal as Bangladeshi territory. The post was later deleted, with India urging responsible conduct in public communications.

Meanwhile, during a visit to Hojai district, Sarma also launched the distribution of financial assistance to women entrepreneurs under the Mukhyamantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan, a flagship scheme to promote self-employment among women. In Lumding, over 27,000 women received seed capital cheques, while more than 20,000 women benefited in Barpeta district, underscoring the state government's focus on women-led economic empowerment.

## Mizoram to sign \$108 million ADB loan to strengthen public healthcare system

AIZAWL

The Mizoram government will soon sign a \$108 million loan agreement with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to strengthen and expand public healthcare schemes in the state, Health Minister Lalrinpui said on Tuesday. The ADB approved the loan, estimated at around Rs 980 crore, on December 5 under the project titled 'Supporting Public Healthcare System Strengthening to Achieve Universal Health Care for Mizoram'. Lalrinpui said the Centre will repay 90 per cent of the loan, with the state government bearing the remaining 10 per cent, to be repaid over a 15-year period. "Although the ADB has approved the loan, the formal agreement will be signed once the Ministry of Finance (Department of Economic Affairs) fixes the date. Since the Centre will repay 90 per cent of the amount, it will significantly reduce the state's financial burden in implementing the Mizoram Universal Health Care Scheme," the minister told a press conference. She said that once the loan agreement is signed, Rs 21 crore will be released within a month based on the existing Disbursement Linked Indicator (DLI).

The Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) government, led by Chief Minister Lalduhoma, launched the Mizoram Universal Health Care Scheme (MUHCS) in March to provide annual cashless health coverage of up to Rs 5 lakh at government hospitals as well as empanelled private and church-run institutions. The scheme became operational in April. Mizoram Health Care Society Chief Executive Officer Lalhriatzaali Ralte said that 65,193 families have registered under MUHCS in the current financial year, including 36,323 families of government employees and 8,733 families of civil pensioners.

She added that more than 2.20 lakh families registered under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY) are also eligible to avail benefits under the scheme.

## Zubeen Garg death case: Hearing begins, all seven accused appear virtually before court

GUWAHATI

The trial process in the death case of late singer Zubeen Garg formally commenced on Tuesday, with all seven accused appearing virtually before the Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM) Court of Kamrup (Metro) district in Guwahati.

The development comes days after the Assam Police's Special Investigation Team (SIT) filed a chargesheet on December 12 against the accused under multiple provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). The court has fixed December 22 as the next date of hearing.

According to officials, the main chargesheet runs into nearly 2,500 pages, while supporting documents, including technical and electronic evidence, comprise around 12,000 pages. The chargesheet was submitted by an SIT led by Rosie Kalita.

Seven persons have been chargesheeted in the case, including main event organiser Shyamkanu Mahanta, Zubeen Garg's manager Siddharth Sharma, bandmate Shekhar Jyoti Goswami,

co-singer Amritprava Mahanta, the singer's cousin Sandipan Garg, and his two personal security officers (PSOs), Nandeswar Bora and Paresh Baishya. All the accused are currently in judicial custody.

The SIT has invoked murder charges under Section 103 of the BNS against four accused - Shyamkanu Mahanta, Siddharth Sharma, Shekhar Jyoti Goswami and Amritprava Mahanta. Other sections of the BNS have been applied against the accused based on their alleged roles, including provisions related to criminal conspiracy, destruction of evidence and other offences.

Special Director General of Police (CID) and SIT chief Munna Prasad Gupta said the investigation involved extensive documentation and witness examination. "The main chargesheet is around 2,500 pages, and with annexures and other documents, it totals nearly 12,000 pages," he said, adding that statements of around 300 individuals were recorded during the probe.

IMPHAL

The Kuki-Zo Council (KZC) on Tuesday raised alarm over a fresh incident reported late on December 16 in the highly sensitive Torbung buffer zone, warning that recent administrative actions could reignite violence in what it described as the epicentre of the Manipur conflict.

In a press statement, the KZC recalled that the ethnic violence of May 3, 2023, began in Torbung in Churachandpur district-an area that was once jointly inhabited by Kuki-Zo and Meitei communities. The council said Torbung witnessed the first fatality of the conflict, alleging that Pastor Sekhono-hao Kipgen was beaten to death in public view. According to the KZC, at least 45 members of the Kuki-Zo community were killed within the first two days of the unrest.

Against this backdrop, the council described the decision by the Bishnupur Deputy Commissioner to initiate the resettlement of Meitei internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Torbung buffer zone as "deeply irresponsible and provocative."



It said a conflict-sensitive administration should have avoided resettlement in such a volatile area, cautioning that the

move risks undoing fragile peace arrangements and triggering fresh confrontation.

The KZC also referred to earlier attempts by Meitei IDPs to breach the Torbung buffer zone during the Sangai Festival, describing them as part of a pattern of provocation. It demanded that the Bishnupur Deputy Commissioner take responsibility for the latest developments and immediately halt and roll back the resettlement process to prevent escalation.

Questioning intent and accountability, the council highlighted a series of events preceding Monday night's incident, including visits by leaders of the Coordination Committee on Manipur Integrity (COMI) to Meitei IDPs at Torbung Mamang Leikai, followed by a public meeting reportedly organised by Arambai Tenggol, and subsequent firing incidents later that night.

Reiterating its position, the KZC said the Kuki-Zo community has consistently exercised restraint and adhered strictly to buffer-zone

protocols to prevent further bloodshed. It rejected any attempt to blame the Kuki-Zo people for rising tensions, asserting that the current situation is the result of unilateral administrative decisions and violations of established buffer-zone arrangements.

The council further condemned what it termed "deliberate provocations" during the Christmas season, saying such actions were aimed at disturbing peace and undermining the spiritual sanctity of the Kuki-Zo community.

Placing the developments in a broader context, the KZC maintained that the Manipur crisis is not merely a law-and-order issue but a political problem rooted in what it described as ethnic cleansing. It said lasting peace would require a political resolution and urged the Government of India to recognise what it called the de facto separation of the Kuki-Zo people from Manipur, reiterating its demand for a separate administrative arrangement.

## Manipur: KZC flags resettlement move in Torbung buffer zone, warns of renewed violence

## 'No alliance with AIUDF under any circumstances': Gaurav Gogoi

GUWAHATI

Assam Congress president Gaurav Gogoi on Monday categorically ruled out any alliance with the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) for the 2026 Assam Assembly elections, drawing a firm line on opposition strategy and branding the party as "communal".

"There will be no alliance with the AIUDF under any circumstances. It is a communal party, just like the ruling BJP. We cannot join hands with one communal force to defeat another communal force," Gogoi told reporters.

His remarks come at a time when eight opposition parties have already come together on a common platform to challenge the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the next Assembly elections. The grouping includes the Congress, CPI(M), Rajiv Dal, Assam

Jatiya Parishad (AJP), CPI, CPI(ML), Jatiya Dal-Asom (JDA) and the Karbi Anglong-based All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC).

The AIUDF had earlier been part of the Congress-led grand alliance in the 2021 Assembly elections. However, the partnership was discontinued after Bhupen Kumar Borah took charge as Assam Congress president.

On broader opposition unity, Gogoi said alliance-related discussions are conducted discreetly and not debated in the public domain. "Such matters are discussed off camera. Only after discussions are finalised can anything be said officially. The upcoming elections will not be easy for the BJP," he added.

The 126-member Assam Assembly is expected to go to polls in March-April 2026. At present, the BJP holds 64 seats, while its allies-Asom Gana

Parishad (AGP), United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) and Bodoland People's Front (BPF)-together account for 19 seats. The opposition comprises 26 Congress MLAs, 15 from AIUDF, one CPI(M) MLA and one Independent.

Gogoi also launched a sharp attack on the BJP's leadership in the state, alleging growing dissatisfaction within party ranks. "The BJP has realised that under the present leadership, its prospects are not very good," he said, claiming that while ministers and a few close associates have benefited, grassroots workers have been neglected.

He alleged that roads near BJP workers' homes remain incomplete, access to drinking water is lacking in areas dominated by BJP supporters, and government schools in such localities are in a "deplorable condition".

"BJP workers have also realised

that Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is running the party according to his own interests along with a few close associates," said Gogoi, who is also the Deputy Leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha.

Responding to allegations that the Congress is "pro-Miya", Gogoi dismissed the charge as politically motivated. He said people who genuinely love Assam and value its land, air and water have been joining the Congress in large numbers since April. "A look at the kind of people who have joined the Congress during this period clearly exposes such allegations as baseless and ridiculous," he said.

The term 'Miya' has historically been used as a slur against Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam, often labelled as Bangladeshi immigrants, though sections of the community have reclaimed the term in recent

## AIUDF eyes over 17 seats in 2026 Assam polls, steps up focus on Lumding

HOJAI

With the Election Commission yet to announce the schedule for the 2026 Assam Assembly elections, political activity across the state has begun to gather pace, with parties and aspirants stepping up early preparations. The All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) is among those intensifying its groundwork, with sources indicating that the party plans to contest in more than 17 constituencies in the upcoming polls.

According to party sources, AIUDF chief Maulana Badruddin Ajmal and MLA Sirajuddin Ajmal have taken a preliminary decision to expand the party's electoral footprint, with the Lumding Assembly constituency emerging as one of the key targets.

In Lumding, Sabir Ahmed, an AIUDF ticket aspirant, has already launched an extensive public outreach campaign. He has been touring areas such as Udali, Nakhuti and Lumding town, interacting with local residents and party workers. Sources said Ahmed has begun working on constituency-specific strategies aimed at



dislodging the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the seat.

Speaking to journalists, Ahmed asserted that the AIUDF has no alliance with the BJP and ruled out any future tie-up, stating that the two parties stand on "completely opposite ideological poles". He also pointed out that

nearly 56 per cent of voters in the Lumding constituency belong to religious minority communities.

Referring to the previous Assembly elections, Ahmed admitted that the AIUDF's decision to leave the Lumding seat to the Congress as part of an alliance proved to be a strategic mistake.

He said sections of voters, particularly from the Muslim community, lack confidence in national parties, which adversely affected the AIUDF's prospects despite its secular positioning.

"The party is determined not to repeat the same mistake in 2026," Ahmed said, adding that AIUDF is carefully assessing the ground situation before finalising candidates. Projecting a weak or relatively unknown candidate, he noted, could cost the party the seat, while a strong candidate could make victory almost certain.

Meanwhile, sources said the AIUDF has stepped up preparations in several other constituencies as well. It is learnt that party chief Badruddin Ajmal may contest from the Binnakandi constituency. Other names reportedly under discussion include Hafiz Rafiqul Islam from Mandia, Aminul Islam from Rupohihat, Karimuddin from Sonai, Mizanur Rahman from Gauripur, Nazrul Haque from Dhuri, Aminul Islam from Mankachar, Ashraf Islam from Chenga, Minaki Rahman from Pakabetbari, Mujibur Rahman from Dalgaw, Matiur Rahman from the Bih (Bing) constituency, Abdul Hai from Goalpara, Imdad Hussain from Chhamaria and Siddique Ahmed from Lahorighat.

However, party leaders have not officially confirmed any candidate names so far, with AIUDF expected to take a final call closer to the elections.

## Mizoram to sign \$108 million ADB loan to strengthen public healthcare system

AIZAWL

The Mizoram government will soon sign a \$108 million loan agreement with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to strengthen and expand public healthcare schemes in the state, Health Minister Lalrinpui said on Tuesday.

The ADB approved the loan, estimated at around Rs 980 crore, on December 5 under the project titled 'Supporting Public Healthcare System Strengthening to Achieve Universal Health Care for Mizoram'. Lalrinpui said the Centre will repay 90 per cent of the loan, with the state government bearing the remaining 10 per cent, to be repaid over a 15-year period.

"Although the ADB has approved the loan, the formal agreement will be signed once the Ministry of Finance (Department of Economic Affairs) fixes the date. Since the Centre will repay 90 per cent of the amount, it will significantly reduce the state's financial burden in implementing the Mizoram Universal Health Care Scheme," the minister told a press conference.

She said that once the loan agreement is signed, Rs 21 crore will be released within a month based on the existing Disbursement Linked Indicator (DLI).

The Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) government, led by Chief Minister Lalduhoma, launched the Mizoram Universal Health

Care Scheme (MUHCS) in March to provide annual cashless health coverage of up to Rs 5 lakh at government hospitals as well as empanelled private and church-run institutions. The scheme became operational in April.

Mizoram Health Care Society Chief Executive Officer Lalhriatzaali Ralte said that 65,193 families have registered under MUHCS in the current financial year, including 36,323 families of government employees and 8,733 families of civil pensioners.

She added that more than 2.20 lakh families registered under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY) are also eligible to avail benefits under the scheme.

According to Lalrinpui, 59,602 beneficiaries have so far availed treatment under MUHCS, with the government spending over Rs 100 crore on healthcare expenses. State-run hospitals treated 68.56 per cent of beneficiaries and accounted for 43.47 per cent of the total expenditure, she said.

The minister said the state government is undertaking measures to strengthen healthcare infrastructure and manpower. Zoram Medical College and Hospital (ZMCH) has been upgraded to 520 beds with 40 cabins, while the number of intensive care units has been increased from 13 to 26.

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## TMC for door-to-door scrutiny after 45,000 voters deleted from Mamata's assembly seat



KOLKATA

The TMC leadership has decided to instruct its booth-level agents to carry out fresh, door-to-door scrutiny of deleted voters' names in Bhabanipur, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's assembly constituency, after nearly 45,000 electors were struck off from the draft rolls under the SIR exercise, party sources said.

According to Election Commission data, Bhabanipur had 2,06,295 voters as of January 2025. The draft rolls now carry 1,61,509 names, indicating that 44,787 voters, nearly 21.7 per cent of the electorate, have been deleted.

The Commission on Tuesday published West Bengal's draft electoral rolls following the special intensive revision (SIR), deleting the names of more than 58 lakh voters on various grounds, including

death and migration, and redrawing voter profiles across districts and border belts ahead of the 2026 assembly polls.

The TMC is miffed over a large number of voters being marked "dead", "shifted" or "absent" by the poll panel. "The party leadership made it clear that no valid voter's name should be deleted under any circumstances. Every deleted name must be physically verified," a TMC source said.

Bhabanipur comprises Kolkata Municipal Corporation wards 63, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 77 and 82.

The sources said wards 70, 72 and 77 recorded particularly high deletions, with ward 77, a minority-dominated area, flagged for special attention during the scrutiny.

Bhabanipur, a dense urban constituency, has a sizeable population of residents originally from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Odisha.

With the hearing process on claims and objections expected to begin shortly, the party has directed local leadership to stand by affected voters during verification.

The TMC asked local units to continue running the neighbourhood-level 'May I Help You' camps to assist people with documentation, form-filling and hearings, and said volunteers should visit homes if required.

The developments in Bhabanipur come amid widespread deletions across south Kolkata.

Draft rolls show that four politically high-profile assembly segments — Bhabanipur, Kolkata Port, Ballygunge and Rashbehari — together recorded over 2.16 lakh deletions, nearly 24 per cent of their combined electorate.

When the SIR process began, these seats together had around 9.07 lakh voters.

## India, Ethiopia elevate bilateral ties to strategic partnership after Modi-Abiy talks

NEW DELHI

India and Ethiopia on Tuesday elevated their bilateral relationship to a strategic partnership following wide-ranging talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Ethiopian counterpart Abiy Ahmed Ali in Addis Ababa.

Notably, he was conferred Ethiopia's highest civilian honour, the Great Honour of the Nishan of Ethiopia, by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali. The award was presented during a special ceremony held at the Addis International Convention Centre.

The honour recognises Prime Minister Modi's exceptional contribution to strengthening the India-Ethiopia partnership and his visionary leadership.

Prime Minister Modi, who arrived in Ethiopia on his maiden bilateral visit to the country, was accorded a ceremonial welcome at the National Palace ahead of the talks.

Modi said the elevation of ties would provide "new energy, new momentum and new depth" to India-Ethiopia relations. He thanked the Ethiopian leadership for its support to India in the fight against terrorism, underlining the importance of cooperation among friendly nations on the issue.

The two leaders discussed collaboration in areas including trade and investment, innovation, technology, defence, health, capacity building and multilateral engagement. Modi announced that India would double the number of scholarships offered to Ethiopian students for higher education in India. He also highlighted the long history of people-to-people contacts between the two countries, describing them as democratic partners committed to peace and development in the Global South.

Modi noted Ethiopia's central role in African diplomacy as the host of the African Union headquarters and recalled India's role during its G20 presidency in 2023 in securing perma-



nent membership of the African Union in the grouping. He said that although this was his first visit to Ethiopia, he felt a strong sense of warmth reflecting the centuries-old ties between the two nations.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said India and Ethiopia share thousands of years of connection through trade, culture, education and diplomacy, which continue to shape a relationship based on mutual respect. He welcomed India's emphasis on Africa-led development partnerships, noting that this approach aligned with Ethiopia's development vision of being African-owned and African-defined.

Highlighting economic ties, Abiy Ahmed said Ethiopia's economy had grown by 9.2 per cent last year and was expected to grow by 10.3 per cent this year. He noted that India is the leading source of foreign direct investment into Ethiopia, with more than 615 Indian companies operating in the country. The decision to elevate ties to

a strategic partnership, he said, was built on a strong foundation of trust.

When he arrived in Addis Ababa, PM Modi was received at the airport by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in a warm and unusual gesture and accorded a colourful ceremonial welcome. Soon after his arrival, Modi highlighted the historical depth of ties between the two countries. "Landed in Addis Ababa a short while ago. Honoured by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali's gesture of welcoming me at the airport. Ethiopia is a nation with great history and vibrant culture," Modi said in a post on X.

He added, "India and Ethiopia share deep civilisational ties. I look forward to engaging with the Ethiopian leadership to further strengthen our partnership in diverse areas."

During informal interactions at the airport, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed briefed Modi on the different varieties of Ethiopian coffee. Modi

later said he participated in a traditional coffee ceremony, calling it a reflection of Ethiopia's cultural heritage. "At Addis Ababa airport, took part in a traditional Coffee Ceremony with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali. The ceremony beautifully highlights Ethiopia's rich heritage," Modi said.

In another notable gesture, Abiy Ahmed personally drove Modi to his hotel. En route, the Ethiopian leader took him to the Science Museum and Friendship Park in Addis Ababa, sites that were not part of the official itinerary. PM Modi later interacted with members of the Indian community in Addis Ababa.

"After welcoming me at Addis Ababa airport, Prime Minister Dr Abiy Ahmed Ali drove me to the Science Museum in the city. This Museum showcases different aspects of science and innovation and how they can be harnessed for Ethiopia's progress," Modi said. Official sources said the gestures by the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Ethiopian Prime Minister underscored the warmth of bilateral ties. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said the reception reflected the importance both countries attach to each other as partners in the Global South.

"India and Ethiopia share historical relations anchored in strong people-to-people ties. The special gesture by the Ethiopian leadership is reflective of the importance the two countries attach to each other as Global South partners," the MEA said in a statement.

During the two-day visit, Modi will hold wide-ranging discussions with Abiy Ahmed on all aspects of India-Ethiopia relations. He will also address a joint session of the Ethiopian Parliament, where he is expected to speak on India's journey as the "Mother of Democracy" and the contribution the India-Ethiopia partnership can make to the Global South. Addis Ababa hosts the headquarters of the African Union, which was admitted as a permanent member of the G20 during India's G20 presidency in 2023.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Trump 'not in Epstein files doing anything awful', says his chief of staff Susie Wiles

WASHINGTON

Susie Wiles, President Donald Trump's understated but influential chief of staff, criticized Attorney General Pam Bondi's handling of the Jeffrey Epstein case and offered an unvarnished take on her boss and those in his orbit in a series of observations that were published Tuesday in Vanity Fair. The magazine's two-part profile of Wiles immediately sent shock waves through Washington while sending the West Wing into damage control.

The first woman to ever hold her current post, Wiles pushed back on what she described as a "hit piece" that lacked context. But neither she, nor other West Wing officials who came to her defense, disputed any details in the profile—a wide-ranging narrative that included Wiles' assessments of the teetotaling Trump as having "an alcoholic's personality," Vice President JD Vance as a calculating "conspiracy theorist" and Health Secretary Robert Kennedy Jr. as "quirky Bobby."

On Epstein, Wiles told the magazine that she underestimated the scandal involving the disgraced financier, but she sharply criticized how Bondi managed the case and the public's expectations. She said at one point that Trump's tariffs had been more painful than expected. She conceded some mistakes in Trump's mass deportation program and suggested that the president's retribution campaign against his perceived political enemies has gone beyond what she initially wanted.

But Wiles, who managed Trump's 2024 comeback campaign, broadly defended the president's aggressive second term agenda, including affirming that Trump wants to keep bombing alleged drug boats in the waters off the coast of Venezuela until that country's leader, Nicolas Maduro, "cries uncle." After the comments were pub-

lished, Wiles disparaged it as a "disingenuously framed hit piece on me and the finest President, White House staff, and Cabinet in history."

"Significant context was disregarded and much of what I, and others, said about the team and the President was left out of the story," she wrote in a social media post. "I assume, after reading it, that this was done to paint an overwhelmingly chaotic and negative narrative about the President and our team." Wiles did not deny the comments that were attributed to her.

Press secretary Karoline Leavitt also rose to Wiles' defense, writing on the X platform that, "President Trump has no greater or more loyal advisor than Susie. The entire Administration is grateful for her steady leadership and united fully behind her."

White House budget chief Russell Vought added his praise as well, posting on social media that Trump's West Wing through two presidencies has "never worked this well or been more oriented towards accomplishing what he wants to." In her interviews, Wiles praised Vought while describing him as "right-wing absolute zealot."

Trump tapped Wiles after she managed his 2024 campaign. She is known for shunning the spotlight, so it is rare for her to speak as extensively and openly as she did about the president to the magazine, which published its lengthy interview with her—and other members of the White House staff and the Cabinet. Wiles has been speaking to Vanity Fair since just before Trump took office last January.

Asked about Epstein, Wiles said she hadn't tracked the public focus on "whether all these rich, important men went to that nasty island and did unforgivable things to young girls." She said she has read the Epstein file and that Trump is "not in the file doing

anything awful." He and Epstein were friends before they had a falling out. The Justice Department is facing a Friday deadline to release everything it has on Epstein after Trump, who had objected to the release, signed legislation requiring that the papers be made public. Wiles criticized Bondi's handling of the case, going back to earlier in the year when she distributed binders to a group of social media influencers that included no new information about Epstein. That led to even more calls from Trump's base for the files to be released.

"I think she completely whiffed on appreciating that that was the very targeted group that cared about this," Wiles said of Bondi. "First she gave them binders full of nothingness. And then she said that the witness list, or the client list, was on her desk. There is no client list, and it sure as hell wasn't on her desk." Wiles, over the series of interviews, described the president behind the scenes very much as he presents himself in public: an intense figure who thinks in broad strokes yet is often not concerned with the details of process and policy. She added, though, that he has not been as angry or temperamental as is often suggested, even as she affirmed his ruthlessness and determination to achieve retribution against those he considers his political enemies.

Trump, she said, has "an alcoholic's personality," even though the president does not drink. But the personality trait is something she recognizes from her father, the famous sports broadcaster Pat Summerall.

"High-functioning alcoholics or alcoholics in general, their personalities are exaggerated when they drink. And so I'm a little bit of an expert in big personalities," she said, adding that Trump has "a view that there's nothing

he can't do. Nothing, zero, nothing."

On Venezuela, Wiles said Trump wants to keep the pressure on Maduro.

"He wants to keep on blowing boats up until Maduro cries uncle. And people way smarter than me on that say that he will." Her comment, though, seemed to contradict the administration's position that the strikes are about stopping drugs and saving American lives, not regime change. She said the administration is "very sure we know who we're blowing up." The continued strikes and mounting death toll have drawn scrutiny from Congress, which has pushed back and opened investigations.

Wiles described much of her job as channeling Trump's energy, whims and desired policy outcomes—including managing his desire for vengeance against his political opponents, anyone he blames for his 2020 electoral defeat and those who pursued criminal cases against him after his first term.

"We have a loose agreement that the score settling will end before the first 90 days are over," Wiles said early in his administration, telling Vanity Fair that she does try to tamp down Trump's penchant for retribution. Later in 2025, she pushed back. "I don't think he's on a retribution tour," she said, arguing he was operating on a different principle: "I don't want what happened to me to happen to somebody else." And so people that have done bad things need to get out of the government. In some cases, it may look like retribution.

And there may be an element of that from time to time. Who would blame him? Not me."

Asked about the prosecution of New York Attorney General Letitia James for mortgage fraud, Wiles allowed: "Well, that might be the one retribution."

UKHUYA

In moments when she is alone, when there is a break in the beatings from her husband, the girl cries for the school that was once her place of peace in a world that has otherwise offered her none.

Ever since the military in her homeland of Myanmar killed her father in 2017, forcing her to flee to neighboring Bangladesh with her mother and little sisters, the school had protected Hasina from the predators who prowl her refugee camp, home to 1.2 million members of Myanmar's persecuted Rohingya minority.

It had also protected her from being forced into marriage. And then one day in June, when Hasina was 16 years old, her teacher announced that the school's funding had been taken away. The school was closing. In a blink, Hasina's education was over, and so, too, was her childhood.

With her learning opportunities gone, and her family worried that foreign aid cuts would make their fight for survival in the camps even more perilous, Hasina—along with hundreds of other girls under the age of 18—was quickly married off. And, just like Hasina, many of the girls are now trapped in marriages with men who abuse them.

"I dreamed of being something, of working for the community," Hasina, now 17, says softly. The Associated Press is withholding her full name to protect her from retaliation by her husband. "My life is destroyed."

The sudden and severe foreign aid cuts imposed this year by US President Donald Trump, along with funding reductions from other countries, shuttered thousands of the camps' schools and youth training centers and crippled child protection programs.

Beyond unwanted marriages, scores of children as young as

10 were forced into backbreaking manual labor, and girls as young as 12 were forced into prostitution. With no safe space to play or learn, children were left to wander the labyrinthine camps, making them increasingly easy targets for kidnapers. And the young and desperate were picked off by traffickers who promised to restore what the children had lost: Hope.

In a sweltering building not far from the cramped shelter where her husband tortures her, Hasina plays nervously with the strap of her pink mobile phone case, emblazoned with the words "Forever Young."

She is still young, she says. But the aid cuts forced her into womanhood and into a nightmare. Not long after marrying her husband, she says, he isolated her from her family and began to beat and sexually abuse her. She daydreams daily of school, where she was a whiz at English and hoped to become a teacher. Now, she is confined largely to her shelter, cooking and cleaning and waiting with dread for the next beating.

If she had any way to escape, she says, she would. But there is nowhere to go. She cannot return to Myanmar, where the military that killed thousands of Rohingya in 2017 during what the US declared a genocide remains in charge of her homeland.

Now, her husband is in charge of her future, though she no longer sees one. "If the school hadn't closed," she says, "I wouldn't be trapped in this life."

Life has always been dangerous for the 600,000 children languishing in these chaotic, overcrowded camps, where a squalid jumble of bamboo and tarpaulin shelters are jammed onto landslide-prone hills. But Trump's decision in January to dismantle the US Agency for International Development has made it even more so, the

AP found in interviews with 37 children, family members, teachers, community leaders and aid workers.

Violations against children in the camps have risen sharply this year, according to UNICEF, the United Nations' children's agency. Between January and mid-November, reported cases of abduction and kidnapping more than quadrupled over the same time period last year, to 560 children. And there has been an eightfold increase in reports of armed groups' recruitment and use of children for training and support roles in the camps, with 817 children affected.

Many members of the armed groups are battling a powerful ethnic militia across the border in Myanmar.

The actual number of cases is likely higher due to underreporting, according to UNICEF, which lost 27% of its funding due to the US aid cuts and subsequently shuttered nearly 2,800 schools.

"The armed groups, with their roots in Myanmar, are operating in the camps, using the camps as a fertile ground for recruiting young people," says Patrick Halton, a child protection manager for UNICEF. "Obviously, if children are not in learning centers and not in multipurpose centers, then they're more vulnerable to this."

Verified cases of child marriage, which the UN defines as the union of children under age 18, rose by 21% and verified child labor cases by 17% in the year to September, compared to the same time period last year. Those statistics are likely to be a significant undercount, says Halton.

"With the funding cuts, we had to downscale a lot in terms of the education," Halton says. "It's meant that children have not necessarily had things to do, and we've therefore seen this rise in children being married, children being in child labor."

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function as a live learning environment, allowing students to engage directly with real operational and clinical challenges.

ISIC COO Dr Ashish Chandra pointed to demographic changes driving demand for specialised healthcare services. He said the partnership would help develop courses in areas such as geriatrics, chronic disease management, and personalised care, preparing a workforce capable of meeting future healthcare needs.

DSEU Vice-Chancellor Prof Ashok Nagawat described the collaboration as a key step towards building a future-ready workforce. He said the integration of ISIC's healthcare expertise with DSEU's skill-based education model would help learners become both job-ready professionals and potential job creators.

Dean and Registrar Prof Gagan Dhawan said the partnership would ensure that academic programmes are closely aligned with industry standards, improving the employability of students and the value of DSEU certifications.

The initiative is expected to strengthen healthcare skill development while supporting national efforts to build a skilled workforce and promote innovation-driven growth in the sector.

li Ahluwalia said the partnership reflects ISIC's commitment to building future healthcare leaders.

She said the collaboration would allow both institutions to create curricula that respond to the changing needs of the healthcare sector and support entrepreneurs looking to build scalable solutions.

Sugandh Ahluwalia highlighted the gap between classroom learning and the realities of modern healthcare. She said ISIC would

**KRC TIMES NEWS DESK**

Delhi Skill and Entrepreneurship University and ISIC Multispecialty Hospital have entered into a strategic partnership to strengthen skill development and entrepreneurship in the healthcare sector.

The two institutions signed a Memorandum of Understanding on December 16 at the ISIC premises in New Delhi, marking the start of a joint effort to design and deliver industry-focused courses for students and healthcare professionals. The collaboration is aimed at addressing skill gaps and aligning academic



Making money is a skill, maintaining money is a discipline, multiplying money is an art.

ment, DSEU and ISIC will jointly develop programs in healthcare management, hospital operations, medical technology innovation, allied health skills, and health-tech entrepreneurship. The idea is simple. Combine DSEU's focus on skill education and entrepreneurship with ISIC's on-ground experience in healthcare delivery.

The MoU was signed in the presence of senior leadership from both sides. ISIC was represented by Chairperson Bholi Ahluwalia, Chief Operating Officer Dr Ashish Chandra, Chief Strategy Officer and Board Director Sugandh Ahluwalia, Chief Medical Superintendent Dr Prashant Kulshreshtha, and Senior Manager Operations Dr Rimsha Siddiqui. DSEU was represented by Vice-Chancellor Prof Ashok Kumar Nagawat and Dean and Registrar Prof Gagan Dhawan.

Speaking at the event, Bho-

# Meghalaya: Abode of Clouds



ADVOCATE POULOMI NAG

The quiet North-Eastern part of India can never cease to amaze anyone from any part of the world and in this magical part of India lies beautiful Meghalaya, which will make you feel like the earth has draped mist and drifting clouds just like a Silk Saree, perfumed herself with earthy smell of rain, writing poetry in every leaf, river singing whistling sound of breeze, detouring towards slow life, connecting to nature from that fast, tedious, mundane, cacophonous life, where you can breathe healthy, pure air leaving a smile in any traveler's face.

The name of the state has been coined by Geographer S.P.Chatterjee named Meghalaya for the first time in 1936 and is a portmanteau of two Sanskrit Words "Megh" which means Clouds and "Alay" which means House, hence Meghalaya.

To journey through Meghalaya is to witness poetry sculpted by nature — a slow, unfolding epic written in rivers, forests, hills, and endlessly roaming skies.

The moment you step into Meghalaya, you witness the symphony of hills, wearing lush green tapestry. Her green color is so layered that it makes you realize how many shades of green this earth has. This just feels so alive.

The Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia Hills rise and fall like the soft rhythm of a lullaby. Wrapped in velvety green, they ripple across the landscape in waves of serenity. Each twist of the road reveals a new canvas — terraced fields arranged like quiet puzzles, pine forests whispering ancient secrets, and valleys so deep they seem to hold the dreams of the earth itself.

Not just velvety lush green hillocks. The Jugalbandi of misty, breezy weather and waterfalls creates a Raga.

The Nohkalikai Falls will steal your breath and make your mind linger in her thoughts. The water plunges from a steep cliff so high that it seems to fall from the sky itself, landing into a pool of impossible turquoise colour. However, the sad story of a mother losing her child, thereafter taking life will make you ponder over the motherly love. Legend and nature meet here — a fusion of tragedy and beauty, myth and mist.

The Graceful, Seven Sisters Falls descending in seven slender veils over a moss-covered cliff. During monsoon, the seven streams multiply into dozens, creating a shimmering white orchestra.

The three tiered waterfalls that cascades down on the rocks and ferns makes it look like an Elephant hence the name Elephant falls or Ka Kshaid Lai Pateng Khohsiew as local people call this beautiful waterfall.

The Um Dawai spring water is straight from some magical world as it is believed by the locals to cure illness.

The blue water lagoon of Labong makes it look so ethereal that you feel like you are in some magical fairy tale world.

The ribbon of emerald water — Wari Chora, a canyon that cuts deep into the heart of stone, sings the song sung by seven giant serpent spirits. The smell of moss and the scent of rain is like nature wearing some perfume that will take you to a trance. This is a hidden jewel. Similarly, there are many offbeat places in Meghalaya that are going to create magical alchemy in your heart and soul. You can do trekking, kayaking or bold hearts can do cliff jumping. In the GenZ language "it's aesthetic! you know"

The magical root bridge is a sangam of creativity of humans with the help of nature. The magical collaboration shows that if we respect nature, nature will show love and care which is beyond our expectation. The concrete bridges collapse while the natural Living Root Bridge grows stronger and mightier. Found deep within the forests of Cherrapunji and Mawlynnong, these bridges are grown, not built. For gener-

ations, the Khasi people have guided the roots of rubber fig trees across streams and ravines, patiently shaping them into sturdy pathways.

The double-decker root bridge at Nongriat is nature's crown jewel — two living bridges stacked like twin lines of poetry. Walking across it feels like stepping into a myth, where nature is both engineer and muse.

Sohra (Cherrapunji) where the rain isn't a weather but a way of life. A land where the sky bends so low to kiss the earth. The cloud, magical mist becomes a cute clingy companion holding you that you don't want to complain about but love the companionship. Sohra (Cherrapunji) and Mawsynram, where the rain reigns sovereign, holds the title of "wettest place of the Mother Earth". Here rain feels like nature singing a beautiful song through rain. Here the valleys are sculpted into dramatic silhouettes and the cliffs are crafted by the rainfalls. The limestone caves, river canyons, and rolling plateaus carry the signature of Miss Rainfall.

cluster of clouds of Nongjrong that steals the heart of innumerable tourists praising the beauty of nature.

Just outside Shillong lies the Mawphlang Sacred Forest, preserved for centuries under traditional Khasi laws, reminding why the 6th Schedule is an important part of our Indian Constitution. This bio-diverse forest is an ethereal cathedral by trees — ancient trees, covered in molds, fungi, orchids, home to innumerable animals and birds. Beautiful rocks, the faint glowing sun rays will sweep your heart away. But wait! It's blasphemous to take a dead leaf with you as it is believed that you will face the wrath of Khasi Gods. You can just watch the beauty but not carry it to your home.

The stunning panoramic view of Laitlum Canyon in East Khasi Hills is marvelous as it feels like the world just ended there. The cliffs and deep valleys. The silence is vast but the view is infinite.

The Bamboo Trek of Wakhren, situated



The majestic Wah Rilang view point situated 82 km from Shillong will remind you of the line "Dil bhi kahi hain pahaadon mein; thoda sa kahi hain kinaron mein. Phir ke le chali hai thandi hawayein" from Lucky Ali's Kitni Hasen Zindagi.

In fact, your mundane, monotonous life looks beautiful and colourful. This viewpoint looks dreamy especially during monsoons, where the rolling lush green valleys, mist floating above the ridges and sound of rain, makes everything cynically magical.

Heard of River that looks like glass? Worry not just come to Umngot River, in Dawki where the water looks so pristine and crystal clear that the boats seem like floating.

This place reveals a different facet of Meghalaya where water is calmer, beneath the green surface lie smooth pebbles arranged like mosaics. The river will take you to a place which was a part of India that got separated in 1947. Yes, it is Bangladesh. You can wave 'Hi' but you cannot cross unless you did your documentation right.

When the sun rises, the sky unravels in waves of peach and golden sunrays amidst a

around 40 to 50km from Shillong is a narrow path woven from hand-tied bamboo, stretching over the ancient Khasi hills, as though nature herself woven a skywalk, isn't a place for a faint heart.

The valleys, the Umrew river woven in glistening silver and emerald threads, wind humming archaic songs. Step on the river you can get a free foot-spa by the tiny friendly fishes, but wait do not get carried away, there is more to discover, you again walk through the tiny caves, smell the earthy smell, feel the trail winds through the bamboo woven skywalks and when you finally reach the tip, panting, tired, your heart will be filled with exhilaration, wonder because you just discovered something profound, not just the nature but YOU yourself, as you came out of your comfort zone, did something amazing.

Mawlynnong Village is not just clean; it is soulful — a village where community and nature coexist with gentle pride. Where globally people complain about Indian people having no civic-sense, this village is known as the cleanest village of Asia. Bamboo pathways, manicured gardens, spotless lanes, and warm

smiles greet every traveller. This reminds us that nature and community can co-exist proudly together.

Amazing Kongthong village is strangely beautiful because that village sings because this is a place where people are called not by names, but by melodies — unique musical tunes are assigned to each person at birth.

Nongriat — The Village of the Living Bridges is challenging, unforgettable — it is reached by descending 3,500 steps through forest and gorge.

These villages are not tourist attractions; they are living stories.

I have been mentioning Shillong but never really described it. The old city needs no description. Known as the Scotland of the East, it is situated 99.8 kms from Guwahati, or a 2-3 hours drive from Guwahati. It is a land where pine trees touch the sky, their needles whispering stories to the drifting clouds. Every turn of the road opens into a view—a valley dipped in mist, a lake framed by forest. The city sings a rhythmic song of working people, bustling Police Bazar, laughter of students and young hearts, aroma of Jadoh, pork and chicken barbecue, delightful momos and yummy local foods with juicy berries grown and found in Meghalaya herself, guitar strumming from the café corners. Wards lake, Laitlum Canyon, Elephant falls, Shillong View Point, Polo Grounds are like a tapestry of landscapes. Cathedral Mary Help of Christians, talks about the modern-gothic architectures, stained-glass windows imported from Grenoble, France, Grotto Chapel carved into the hill below the main building, dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes. All Saints' Church, Shillong, one of the oldest churches in Shillong, built in the 19th century will make you feel like time-travel is real. Beautiful timber architecture, pine trees that are more than 150 years old, will literally make you feel like you have stepped into the Victorian age.

Shillong is known as the Rock Capital of India. Where the rest of Indian politicians appear boring, Conrad Sangma, the Chief Minister of Meghalaya has gone viral in this era of social-media, stealing the hearts of millions, with his amazing strumming of guitar. Ed Sheeran, Jason Derulo, Tyga, The Script, Aqua, Diplo, Alan Walker, legendary Bryan Adams, Hoobastank, Farhan Akhtar (who even made the movie Rock On 2 in Meghalaya), Raja Kumari, Akon, MLTR, Boney M, R3HAB, The Midnight they all showed their amazing performances here. According to multiple sources, Ed Sheeran said that Shillong is his favourite city in India. Even old Shillong buses, Bus Smit, featured in his video song 'Sapphire'. Oh! The video song also

featured the football culture of Meghalaya.

Nature indeed will not cease to amaze you. Just like the exquisite nature of Meghalaya, the people of Meghalaya are amazing as well. Where the females in mainland India have lots of restrictions, the matrilineal society in Meghalaya will amaze you as the beautiful sweet ladies contribute majorly in the economy of Meghalaya. With matrilineal traditions, vibrant festivals, handwoven textiles, bamboo craftsmanship, and music that echoes through hills, the state's cultural tapestry is rich and welcoming.

Meghalaya is not just a beautiful state, every nook and corner, offbeat places will amaze you. This is a land where beauty becomes breath, scenic beauty isn't something you merely see — it is something you feel, inhale, and carry home in the folds of your spirit. The hills, waterfalls, clouds, rivers, forests, art and culture with warm, never-fading smiles of locals together compose a landscape that feels like a living poem. Meghalaya is not just a destination — it is an invitation to slow down, to listen, to wander, and to be transformed.



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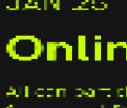
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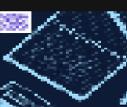
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 Media Conclave: Workshops, Seminars, and Conferences for students, parents, teachers, members & corporate bodies, sponsors, guests, speakers, members.



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