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PERSPECTIVE

Over thinking is a special form of fear. This fear becomes worse when adding anticipation, memory, imagination, and emotion together.

Over 7,000 Tonnes of Illegal Coal Seized in Meghalaya After East Jaintia Hills Mine Blast

GUWAHATI
In the wake of a deadly blast at an unauthorised coal mine in East Jaintia Hills, the district administration has intensified its crackdown on illegal mining operations, seizing more than 7,000 metric tonnes of illegally extracted coal across multiple locations. Acting on directions from the Meghalaya High Court, the East Jaintia Hills administration deployed five enforcement teams comprising executive magistrates, police personnel and officials from the Directorate of Mineral Resources. During the operations, nearly 3,197 metric tonnes of illegal coal were confiscated from nine sites in Umhawang, while another 351 metric tonnes were seized from four locations in Umthie. In a separate enforcement drive conducted earlier, authorities seized around 3,356 metric tonnes of coal from eight sites along the Sakhain-Thangsko road. Mining tools and equipment were also recovered during the operation. Officials said explosive materials were found at several locations. Sixty-three detonators were seized from Umpleng Bazar, leading to the arrest of three persons. At Rangad, a carton containing 204 gelatine sticks was recovered. Additional coal stockpiles of about 1534 metric tonnes and 223 metric tonnes were discovered at two separate sites. Temporary shelters believed to have been used by illegal miners were also identified and dismantled. East Jaintia Hills Superintendent of Police Vikash Kumar said 30 cases related to illegal coal extraction, storage and transportation have been registered so far, with further legal proceedings, including the filing of FIRs, underway.

To prevent further risks and aid enforcement, the District Magistrate imposed prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) in affected areas. Similar restrictions have been enforced in neighbouring West Jaintia Hills district, banning illegal rat-hole mining, unauthorised coal movement and related activities.

WHO SAID WHAT

The President of the European Commission said that India's success brings stability, prosperity, and security not just to India, but to the entire world.
~ Amit Shah, Union Home Minister

Militant Groups in Northeast Adopt Drones, Satellite Tech, Forcing Security Rethink

GUWAHATI
Militant groups operating in the Northeast are increasingly acquiring sophisticated technologies such as drones and satellite-based communication systems, prompting security agencies to reassess and upgrade their counter-insurgency strategies.

According to security sources, several insurgent outfits in the region have procured drones for surveillance and logistical purposes, along with advanced communication devices. A Naga militant outfit has reportedly acquired multiple aerial platforms, including two surveillance drones, two quadcopters and two hexacopters, along with a drone jammer, bombs and related accessories. These systems were allegedly sourced from Kachin rebel groups in Myanmar, who are believed to have obtained the equipment from China.

"Some other groups have also procured drones, though at present these are largely being used for surveillance," a source said.

Manipur Police had earlier confirmed that Kuki militant groups were using weaponised drones to drop explosives. In a recent incident, a Kuki militant was arrested near Guwahati with drone-related equipment, underlining the expanding geographical footprint of such technologies.

Security agencies have also raised con-



cerns over the use of satellite internet services by insurgent groups. Sources said a Naga rebel faction is using Starlink satellite communication in border areas along the Indo-Myanmar frontier. A Starlink device was seized by security forces in Manipur about a year ago, reportedly belonging to the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

"One Naga faction is currently using Starlink for communication, possibly accessing satellite connectivity from Myanmar border areas," a source said, adding that the group has operational links with the ULFA (Independent), raising the possibility that the As-

Naga, Kuki houses torched in Manipur's Ukhrul as tension escalates between tribal communities

IMPHAL
Amid escalating tensions between the Tangkhul Naga and Kuki communities in Manipur, several armed militants set fire to houses in the Ukhrul district on Monday.

Houses belonging to both the communities were torched in the Litan Sareikhong village around midnight.

"The damages are being ascertained, and the situation remains tense," a district official was quoted as saying by news agency.

Video footage circulating online shows armed men setting fire to houses and vehicles, and militants wearing camouflage firing sophisticated weapons into the air.

Litan Sareikhong has a dominant Kuki population, while the Ukhrul district has a larger Tangkhul Naga presence. Tangkhul is the largest Naga tribe in Manipur.

Additional security personnel have been deployed at Mahadev, Lambui, Shangkai, and other areas leading to Litan to maintain law and order and prevent the movement of suspicious persons, the official said.

The attacks took place despite a prohibitory order being in force in the district after clashes between the communities on Sunday evening.

A notification issued by the Ukhrul dis-

trict magistrate said there was apprehension of breach of peace and tranquillity at the village due to tension between members of the Tangkhul Naga and Kuki communities.

DM Asish Das said in the notification that the movement of anyone outside their residence is prohibited from 7 pm on Sunday until further orders. The decree shall not apply to government officials and security personnel, it added.

Tension had been simmering between Kuki-Zo and Naga villagers in Litan since Saturday night, after a member of the Tangkhul community was allegedly assaulted by a group of Kuki-Zo tribals. Residents across several Naga villages in the region are now demanding that the perpetrators be brought to book.

The matter was reportedly settled by the victim's side and the chief of Litan Sareikhong, with both parties agreeing to resolve the issue through customary means and a meeting scheduled for Sunday.

However, the meeting did not take place. Instead, a group of villagers from nearby Sikibung allegedly attacked the residence of the chief of Litan Sareikhong. The villagers also reportedly fired seven rounds while passing through the vicinity of the Litan police station.

MANIPUR CM MEETS UKHRUL VIOLENCE VICTIMS Appeals for Calm as Fresh Unrest Triggers Displacement

IMPHAL
Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Monday visited victims injured in the recent violence in Ukhrul district and appealed for restraint, as fresh clashes and reports of displacement heightened concerns over the state's fragile law-and-order situation. The Chief Minister met the injured at the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), where he interacted with patients and enquired about their condition. Calling for peace, Singh urged all communities to avoid further escalation and resolve differences through dialogue. "I urge all sections of society to maintain peace and harmony. Dialogue and restraint are essential to prevent further escalation of tensions," he said.

Earlier in the day, Deputy Chief Minister Losii Dikho, accompanied by Ukhrul MLA Ram Muivah and Saikul MLA Kimneo Hangshing Haokip, visited Litan Sareikhong village, where clashes between

members of the Tangkhul and Kuki communities were reported on Sunday. According to official sources, more than 20 houses were torched during the violence, and three four-wheeler vehicles were set ablaze. In response, security forces were deployed in large numbers in and around the affected areas, while prohibitory orders were imposed to prevent further flare-ups. The unrest has triggered an exodus from the affected villages, with residents from both communities leaving their homes and moving to safer locations amid fears of renewed violence.

Authorities said the situation was under close monitoring and appealed to the public to cooperate with the administration to restore normalcy. The Ukhrul violence comes close on the heels of prolonged clashes between security forces and a mob in Manipur's Tuibong area, which continued for nearly nine hours from Thursday evening until early Friday morning. The incident prompted authorities to impose a total shutdown in the affected areas.

Pawan Khara Calls SIT Report on Gaurav Gogoi 'Politically Motivated', Accuses BJP of Diversion Tactics



GUWAHATI

Senior Congress leader Pawan Khara dismissed the Special Investigation Team (SIT) report on alleged Pakistani links involving Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi as "baseless and diversionary", accusing the BJP-led Assam government of using it to deflect attention from serious land-related allegations involving individuals close to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Addressing the Constitution Rally at Shastri Ghat, Khara alleged that the ruling party had been running a sustained campaign of misinformation for over a year and had now produced a "so-called SIT report" to shift focus away from uncomfortable questions.

"They have been speaking nonsense for the past year and have now produced a so-called SIT report. Serious allegations exist against them, including the transfer of vast tracts of land to people close to the Prime Minister," Khara said, claiming that nearly 1.5 lakh acres of land had allegedly been allotted under questionable circumstances.

Khara accused the BJP of deliberately targeting political opponents to distract the public from alleged irregularities related to land allotments and governance. He said the allegations against Gaurav Gogoi were politically motivated and timed to suit the ruling party's electoral interests.

Strongly condemning the allegations made against former Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi and his family, Khara said the move had deeply hurt public sentiment in the state. Describing Tarun Gogoi as the architect of modern Assam, he accused the BJP of attempting to tarnish his legacy for political gain.

"Targeting the late Tarun Gogoi and his family is not just an attack on an individual but an insult to Assam itself. He laid the foundation of modern Assam, and these allegations are deeply hurtful to the Assamese people," Khara said.

Reiterating the Congress party's stand, Khara said the opposition would continue to raise questions over alleged land irregularities and oppose what it sees as the misuse of investigative agencies for political vendetta. He added that the party would not be deterred by what he described as attempts to intimidate or silence political dissent.

Manipur Govt to Operate Special Helicopter Services Between Imphal and Ukhrul

IMPHAL

In a move aimed at improving connectivity and addressing urgent transportation needs, the Manipur government has scheduled special helicopter services between Imphal and Ukhrul, according to an official press release issued by the state Transport Department.

As per the announcement, one special helicopter sortie will operate on the Imphal-Ukhrul-Imphal route on Tuesday, February 10, 2026. The government is also planning to operate two additional special sorties on Wednesday, February 11, 2026, on the same route. These flights will be in addition to the regular helicopter services already in operation.

Passengers have been advised to travel light, as the maximum permissible luggage allowance on the helicopter has been capped at seven kilograms per passenger. For booking-related information and details on flight schedules, travellers have been asked to contact the Nodal Officer (Helicopter Service) at the Office of the Deputy Commissioner, Ukhrul.

The Transport Department said the decision was taken in the interest of public convenience, particularly in view of the prevailing situation and the need for reliable connectivity to Ukhrul district.

The press release was issued by Anurag Bajpai, Additional Chief Secretary (Transport), Government of Manipur, and circulated to senior state authorities for information and necessary follow-up action.



Manipur CM Sees Off MLA Vungzagin Valte to Delhi for Advanced Medical Care



IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Sunday personally saw off Thantlon MLA and Kuki-Zo legislator Vungzagin Valte at Imphal Airport as he was airlifted to New Delhi for advanced medical treatment at Medanta - The Medicity Hospital in Gurugram.

Valte, who sustained grievous injuries during the ethnic violence in May 2023, had been staying in Churachandpur after undergoing prolonged treatment in Delhi. His condition deteriorated on February 7, following which he was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of Churachandpur Medical College Hospital for stabilisation.

Officials said the Chief Minister closely monitored Valte's health through the night and arranged for an advanced life-support ambulance, along with a team of doctors, to be dispatched from Imphal to Churachandpur around midnight. Medical teams in Imphal remained in constant touch with doctors at Churachandpur Medical College Hospital

through teleconferencing to assess his condition.

Taking personal responsibility for the transfer, the Chief Minister arranged an air ambulance to ensure the BJP legislator could receive specialised treatment outside the state. Though Valte's condition remained critical overnight, doctors said it showed signs of improvement on Sunday.

After his condition stabilised, Valte was shifted from Churachandpur Medical College Hospital around 3 pm and was accompanied by the district Deputy Commissioner. He was escorted from Phoujkhai village to Imphal Airport by BJP legislators Tongbram Robindro Singh and Sanasam Premchandra Singh.

At the airport, Chief Minister Khemchand Singh met Valte and wished him a speedy recovery. "Pu Valte, please come back after you have fully recovered. I will wait for your return," the Chief Minister said.

The air ambulance carrying Valte departed Imphal Airport for New Delhi at around 4.30 pm.

BJP Likely to Appoint New Manipur Unit President After Formation of Popular Government

IMPHAL

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is likely to appoint a new president for its Manipur Pradesh unit following the formation of a popular government in the state under Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand and the recent election of Nitin Nabin as the BJP's national president. Party sources said the process of selecting a new state unit chief had been put on hold due to the prolonged ethnic violence that erupted on May 3, 2023. The BJP's central leadership was reportedly waiting for a degree of normalcy to return and for an elected government to be firmly in place before initiating organisational changes in the state. With the popular government now installed, discussions within the party on replacing incumbent BJP Manipur Pradesh president Adhikarimayum Sharda have gathered pace. Sharda has held the post since June 26, 2021.

Although no official announcement has been made, sources indicated that the BJP central leadership is keen to appoint a leader capable of strengthening the party's organisational structure and steering it into the 2027 Ma-

nipur Assembly elections. Speculation over potential candidates is rife within party circles. Among unelected leaders, BJP general secretary L Deven Singh and former general secretary Samualatpam Premananda Sharma are being discussed, given their long association with the party. Among elected representatives, the names of MLAs Sapam Ranjan Singh and Th Basantakumar have also surfaced. Highly placed sources further said that cabinet expansion has emerged as a challenging task despite the formation of the government. However, the exercise is expected to be carried out between February 12 and 15, with BJP central leaders overseeing the process and finalising the allocation of ministerial berths. Meanwhile, lobbying for the post of state unit president has reportedly begun, with several leaders reaching out to the BJP's central leadership. The anticipated leadership change comes amid heightened political activity in Manipur, following the All India Congress Committee's recent appointment of former chief minister and current CJP leader Okram Ibobi Singh as president of the MPCC.



VOLUME:1, ISSUE 699

IMMINENT FINANCIAL COLLAPSE

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is sounding the alarm on U.N. finances, warning that the world body is at risk of “imminent financial collapse” due to unpaid fees and a budget rule that forces it to return unspent funds.

Guterres has repeatedly spoken about the U.N.'s worsening liquidity crisis but this was his starkest warning yet, and it came as the United States, its main contributor – and debtor – is retreating from multilateralism on numerous fronts.

In a letter to member states last week, Guterres said there was a record \$1.57 billion in outstanding dues for the U.N.'s regular budget, without naming the nations that owed them.

U.N. officials say more than 95 percent of what is owed to the regular U.N. budget is owed by the United States – \$2.19 billion by the start of February. The U.S. also owes another \$2.4 billion for current and past peace-keeping missions and \$43.6 million for U.N. tribunals. On December 30, the U.N. General Assembly approved \$3.45 billion for the regular U.N. budget for 2026, following weeks of negotiations. This covers costs of running U.N. offices around the world, including the headquarters in New York, staff salaries, meetings and development and human rights work.

U.N. officials say the U.S. did not pay into the regular budget last year and owes \$827 million for that, as well as \$767 million for 2026. Next in line were Venezuela and Mexico, owing \$38 million and \$20 million respectively.

Contributions depend on economy size. The U.S. accounts for 22% of the regular budget, followed by China with 20%. Fees are officially due by Feb. 8 and so far 41 states have paid for 2026, a U.N. document showed, opens new tab.

Without naming the United States, U.N. spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said this week the U.N.'s “cash-flow problem” could be solved “if member states, who have an obligation to pay, pay.”

The crunch comes at a time when U.S. President Donald Trump has launched a Board of Peace with himself as lifetime chair, which some fear could undermine the United Nations, a body with 193 member states formed in the ashes of World War Two that works to maintain international peace and security.

Under Trump, as well as refusing to make mandatory payments to the U.N.'s regular and peacekeeping budgets, the U.S. has slashed voluntary funding to U.N. agencies with their own budgets, and moved to exit U.N. organizations including the World Health Organization. In December, the U.N. appealed for a 2026 aid budget only half the size of what it had hoped for in 2025, acknowledging a plunge in donor funding at a time when humanitarian needs have never been greater.

Guterres launched a reform task force last year, UN80, seeking to cut costs and improve efficiency. The approved 2026 regular budget is roughly \$200 million higher than he proposed, but about 7 per cent lower than the approved 2025 budget.

Guterres warned in his letter that the U.N. could run out of cash by July and cited a “Kafkaesque” requirement for it to credit back hundreds of millions of dollars in unspent dues to states each year even if it never received the money. U.N. officials hope to overhaul this “bizarre” rule, which Guterres has called “a race to bankruptcy.” Speaking to Politico on Sunday, Trump, opens new tab cast himself as the savior of the U.N. but declined to say if the U.S. would pay up. According to Politico, Trump said he was unaware the U.S. was behind in its commitments but was sure he could “solve the problem very easily” and get other countries to pay – if only the U.N. would ask. The White House and State Department did not respond when asked if the U.S. will pay, or if Trump meant that other countries should put up the money instead. A senior State Department official did though say that “the U.N. needs to get back to basics” and accused it of wasting money.

“We have no interest in continuing to spend American tax dollars on such waste, fraud and abuse,” the official said. “The U.N. continues to pay its staff far more than for comparable U.S. government positions, provide unacceptable benefits and pensions, and increase the number of high-level bureaucrats in New York – up over 30% – in the last two years alone. The U.N. also spent \$340 million just on meetings and conferences last year.”

According to a draft U.N. budget document seen by Reuters in September, U.N. cost-savings plans for next year envisaged far smaller cuts to senior staff than to lower ranks. It showed just two of 58 department head posts in the layer of under-secretaries-general beneath Guterres, or 3%, would go, compared to around 19% across the board and up to 28% for one lower-ranking category, according to Reuters calculations. A U.N. official said Guterres aimed to deliver on reform while limiting the impact of cutbacks. If the U.S. did not pay, “at the end of the day, meetings can't be organized, work's not done, staff is not being paid,” the official said.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Nothing is particularly hard if you divide it into small jobs. - Henry Ford

WHAT'S IN THE INDO-US DEAL?

In the blaze of diplomatic theatre that gripped New Delhi and Washington, the India-US trade agreement was unveiled as a geopolitical spectacle destined to reshape global commerce.

President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi projected unstoppable momentum, promising the demolition of punitive barriers and an era of cascading prosperity across the Indo-Pacific. The imagery was potent and cleverly choreographed. Two nationalist leaders forged a bilateral pact through social media posts to unlock hundreds of billions in trade.

Yet, this triumphalist narrative concealed a murkier reality. Its bold declarations were masked by institutional ambiguity, where tariff reductions were announced but not legislated. Its supposed market openings remained theatrical projections rather than negotiated facts.

The truth lies not in sweeping rhetoric of limitless access, but in the grinding bureaucratic calibration that must still unfold to prevent this moment from dissolving into diplomatic mirage. Even a belated joint statement on the deal raised more questions than the answers it was expected to deliver.

The American narrative was audacious. Trump declared that punitive tariffs ratcheted to roughly 50 per cent amid disputes over India's Russian oil purchases would be slashed to an 18 per cent ceiling. In exchange, he claimed India had committed to eliminating tariffs on American goods and services entirely.

He majestically announced that India would grant unfettered access for US agricultural products and move immediately from Russian oil toward US and Venezuelan supplies. India would also purchase over \$500 billion in American products in the coming years.

His postulation, reinforced by the White House and the US secretary of agriculture, painted India as capitulating to American commercial might, transforming its trade surplus into a tributary flow of US exports. It was a narrative designed for domestic consumption, promising to rectify a goods trade deficit that had swollen to approximately \$53.5 billion in 2025, with American exports to India stagnating around \$42 billion while Indian shipments to the US surged past \$95 billion.

The Indian response systematically deflated this hyperbole.

Modi welcomed the agreement as a pathway to new opportunities. But he conspicuously avoided endorsing Trump's specific claims regarding oil embargoes, agricultural access, or blanket tariff abolition. Commerce Min-

ister Piyush Goyal acknowledged only a tentative understanding on the reciprocal 18 per cent tariff ceiling and expressed willingness to increase imports of American energy and advanced technologies over the next decade. However, he differed with the emphatic caveat that India's vulnerable agricultural sector and sensitive industries would remain shielded.

The institutional reality further exposed the gap between announcement and implementation. The Union Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal conceded that no formal, legally binding documentation existed yet to codify the understanding, pointing to structural hurdles that make sudden tariff transformations impossible in the Indian system.

Unlike the American executive, which wields tariff authority with sweeping discretion, any permanent reduction in Indian import duties requires navigation through labyrinthine legal processes, including World Trade Organization notifications and adherence to most-favoured-nation principles mandating equal treatment for all trading partners.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, when pressed in Washington, diplomatically deflected specific questions back to the commerce ministry.

What was celebrated as a historic deal was, in fact, a preliminary framework—a political commitment to de-escalate tariff hostilities rather than a finalised architecture of a bilateral trade edifice.

Nowhere does the chasm between American claims and Indian reality yawn wider than in energy security. Trump's categorical assertion that Modi had agreed to terminate Russian oil imports and reorient supply chains toward American and Venezuelan sources was echoed by senior US officials speaking of rerouted shipping lanes. Yet, Indian officials maintained with quiet firmness that energy procurement decisions would continue to be governed by the immutable calculus of price, supply reliability and strategic diversification, and not by diplomatic pressure from any capital.

Russian diplomats confirmed receiving no formal notification from New Delhi regarding cessation of crude purchases. In practice, India has adjusted the proportion of Russian crude in its import basket, responding to shifting market conditions and sanctions-induced discounts.

Similarly, the agricultural dimension exists more in aspiration than accomplished fact. The American projections imagined transformative penetration of India's agricultural defences, promising American farmers access to a consumer market of

nearly 1.4 billion people and generating billions in new exports across commodities ranging from almonds to dairy.

This illusory construct ignored the political economy of rural India, where agriculture sustains hundreds of millions and foreign encroachment triggers volatile backlash. The notion of India unilaterally eliminating duties on all American agricultural goods, a central plank of Trump's announcement, found no resonance in official Indian communications.

The political choreography reveals divergent national imperatives. For Modi, the deal provides an optic of strength. He was projected as leader who forced an American president to roll back punitive tariffs while extracting praise for India's strategic importance.

Ruling party circles celebrated this as vindication of ‘huglomaticy’, that blend of personal warmth and firm negotiation skills which Modi possesses.

Yet, this celebrity chorus faces ferocious opposition leaders like Rahul Gandhi who decry the agreement as a strategic surrender masquerading as victory. They have demanded parliamentary scrutiny of the full text, warning against mortgaging agricultural and energy security for flattering optics and eroding the Atmanirbhar Bharat ethos of indigenous resilience.

Despite these political crosswinds, Indian equity markets responded with cautious optimism, driving the Sensex and Nifty upwards on expectations that stabilised tariff regimes would benefit export-oriented sectors.

Ultimately, this agreement stands as testament to the Trumpian method of international deal-making: deploy tariffs as instruments of coercion, announce breakthroughs through spectacular media events and delegate complex legal codification to subsequent bureaucratic sessions. Whether this would yield substantive restructuring of India-US trade or merely temporary détente would depend on arduous negotiations still to come.

The potential exists for genuine stabilisation. A reciprocal 18 per cent tariff ceiling could inject predictability into a relationship historically plagued by volatility. Even structured energy cooperation might support India's diversification without rupturing strategic autonomy. Realising this potential demands both nations to move beyond the performative phase towards meticulous legal drafting, transparent parliamentary ratification and systematic protection of vulnerable domestic constituencies.

The deal blazoned with such fanfare is neither the miracle of unrestricted commerce Trump

proclaimed, nor the catastrophe of capitulation Indian opposition figures fear. Rather, it's a fragile opening gambit in a longer contest to balance economic integration with sovereign resilience. Whether it becomes the foundation of a transformed bilateral association between two equals or dissolves into footnotes of diplomatic history will be determined not by the enthusiasm of this moment, but by the painstaking integrity of the implementation that would follow.

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

For those unaware, SpaceX has already shifted focus to building a self-growing city on the Moon, as we can potentially achieve that in less than 10 years, whereas Mars would take 20+ years. The mission of SpaceX remains the same: extend consciousness and life as we know it to the stars. It is only possible to travel to Mars when the planets align every 26 months (six month trip time), whereas we can launch to the Moon every 10 days (2 day trip time). This means we can iterate much faster to complete a Moon city than a Mars city. That said, SpaceX will also strive to build a Mars city and begin doing so in about 5 to 7 years, but the overriding priority is securing the future of civilization and the Moon is faster. ~ Elon Musk, American Entrepreneur



'No Evidence, Only Allegations': Gaurav Gogoi Hits Back at CM Himanta Over SIT Briefing

GUWAHATI

The Assam Congress launched a sharp counteroffensive against Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma following his press conference on the Special Investigation Team (SIT) report, alleging that the Chief Minister failed to produce any concrete evidence to substantiate claims of Pakistani links involving Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi and his family.

In a statement, the Assam Congress described the Chief Minister's nearly two-and-a-half-hour-long briefing as a "complete anti-climax", claiming that despite heightened expectations and the presence of national media, no material proof was presented to back the allegations.

Addressing reporters, Assam Congress president Gaurav Gogoi said the



press conference had turned into a "super flop".

"For nearly two and a half hours, the Chief Minister tried to sell his flop film to the people. Even after all this time, he failed to convince journalists. Forget evidence, he could not even an-

swer their questions properly," Gogoi said.

He also questioned the timing of the SIT report's disclosure, noting that the report had been submitted on September 10 but was placed before the Cabinet only on February 7.

"If the issue was so serious, why did the Chief Minister sit on the report for six months? Why was it buried all this time?" Gogoi asked, alleging that the report was brought out only as elections approached and after the Congress raised questions about 12,000 bighas of land allegedly linked to the Chief Minister's family.

Gogoi claimed the Congress had already placed evidence related to the land issue in the public domain. "Within three days, we produced documents related to 3,000 bighas of land. Today's press conference made it clear that the Chief Minister has no information at all," he said, adding that the party possessed documentary evidence regarding the remaining land, details of which were being uploaded by the public on the 'Who is Himanta

Biswa Sarma' website.

All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary in charge of Assam, Jitendra Singh, also criticised the Chief Minister for making allegations against the family of former chief minister Tarun Gogoi, including references to his daughter-in-law and an eight-year-old child.

"Politics is one thing, but making baseless personal allegations against a respected family is deeply reprehensible. Everyone in Assam knows Tarun Gogoi's contribution to Himanta Biswa Sarma's political career," Singh said.

Former Rajya Sabha MP Ripun Bora termed the press conference a "super flop" and questioned the credibility of the SIT. "The Chief Minister himself admit-

ted that the SIT could investigate only about 20 per cent of the alleged Pakistan link. If this was truly a national security issue, why did the government remain silent for six months?" Bora asked.

Leader of Opposition Debabrata Saikia said the press conference had diminished the dignity of the Chief Minister's office, while Assam Pradesh Mahila Congress president Mira Borthakur alleged that the public was "fed up with the Chief Minister's theatrics".

APCC Media and Communications Department chairman Bedabrat Bora described the delayed briefing as an "anti-climax", saying it had undermined the credibility of the state government before the national media.

Booth Vijay Abhiyan Meeting Held at Lakhimpur Assembly Constituency

OUR CORRESPONDENT

LAKHIPUR: A meeting under the Booth Vijay Abhiyan was held on Monday at Booth No. 121 of the Lakhimpur Mandal, under the Lakhimpur Assembly constituency. The meeting was attended by Minister Kaushik Rai, Mandal President Gunjan Kar was also present. Booth President Sarbani Dutta, BJP leader Bijendra Prasad Singh along with Panchayat representatives and party workers, took part in the programme. Speakers discussed strengthening booth-level organisation and reaching out to voters. Party leaders urged workers to stay united and active for the upcoming political activities. The meeting concluded with a call for coordinated efforts to ensure success at the booth level.

Lovlina Borgohain Wins Women's 75 kg Title at Boxam Elite International



GUWAHATI

Assam's star boxer and Tokyo Olympics bronze medallist Lovlina Borgohain added another big title to her career on February 7. She won the Women's 75 kg title at the Boxam Elite International tournament.

Lovlina showed calm and control in the final bout. She defeated England's Mary-Kate Smith by a 4:1 split decision in a close contest. The match saw tough exchanges, but Lovlina

used her experience well.

She read the fight smartly and chose the right moments to attack. Her punches landed clean in key rounds, helping her stay ahead on the judges' scorecards.

The victory once again highlights Lovlina's strong form at the international level. It also gives her confidence ahead of upcoming global competitions and confirms her place among India's top boxers.

'File an FIR, Not Headlines': Congress Slams Assam CM Over SIT Report on Gaurav Gogoi

GUWAHATI

The All India Congress Committee (AICC) on Sunday mounted a sharp counterattack on Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma over his remarks on the Special Investigation Team (SIT) report concerning alleged Pakistani links of Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi, accusing him of conducting a "media trial" instead of following due legal process.

Addressing a press conference at the Sribhumi District Congress office, AICC Media Cell Convenor Nighat Abbas said that if the Chief Minister possessed any concrete evidence against Gogoi, he should approach the courts and file a formal FIR rather than making allegations in public forums.

"If there is proof, the Chief Minister should place it before the judiciary. Matters that fall under the court's jurisdiction should not be discussed casually at press briefings," Abbas said,



alleging that the statements were politically motivated and aimed at maligning the Congress leadership.

Abbas claimed that the Chief Minister's remarks reflected political frustration and

an attempt to divert attention through insinuations aired before the media. She said such conduct undermines institutional processes and weakens democratic norms.

Taking a swipe at both Prime

Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Sarma, Abbas referred to frequent remarks by BJP leaders asking political opponents to "go to Pakistan." "If they are so confident about their claims, they should themselves go to Pakistan, bring back documentary evidence related to Gaurav Gogoi, and present it before the court," she said.

The Congress leader also accused the BJP leadership of being disconnected from ground realities in Assam's Barak Valley, alleging that both the Centre and the state government were prioritising political narratives over addressing the concerns of people in Karimganj and the wider Barak region.

Abbas concluded by asserting that repeated public comments by the Chief Minister on sensitive issues signalled growing impatience and a disregard for established procedures, warning that such actions could erode public trust in democratic institutions.

Manipur CM inspects Rs 3,647 crore road and drainage projects in Imphal markets

IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Sunday reviewed the progress of road development and drainage improvement works worth Rs 3,647.23 crore being implemented across key market areas of Imphal city.

The Chief Minister visited Thangal Bazar in northern Imphal as part of an on-ground inspection of the ongoing infrastructure projects, which aim to modernise urban and suburban road networks while addressing chronic waterlogging issues in the city.

According to officials, the projects involve upgrading nearly 547 kilometres of roads into durable concrete pavements, alongside comprehensive drainage improvements. The initiative also seeks to strengthen the Public Works



Department's institutional capacity for long-term asset management and maintenance.

The works are being carried out under the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)-funded Manipur Urban Road, Drainage and Asset Management Improvement Project (MURDAMP), which is being executed by the Public Works Department (PWD), Government of Manipur.

During the inspection, Chief Minister Khemchand Singh interacted with senior officials from the executing departments and reviewed the pace and quality of construction. He directed the agencies concerned to expedite the remaining works, with particular emphasis on projects aimed at improving the aesthetics and functionality of busy market areas.

"The focus is on timely comple-

tion and ensuring that the upgraded infrastructure effectively addresses traffic congestion and waterlogging while enhancing the overall urban environment," officials said.

The Chief Minister was accompanied by Thangmeiband Assembly Constituency MLA Khumukcham Joykisan and Keishamthong MLA Nishikant Sapam. Senior officials from the Public Works Department, Municipal Administration, Housing and Urban Development (MAHUD), and the Imphal Municipal Corporation were also present during the visit.

The state government has projected the MURDAMP as a key urban infrastructure initiative, aimed at improving mobility, flood resilience, and service delivery in Imphal city through sustainable and long-lasting infrastructure upgrades.

ECI orders special revision of Tadubi electoral roll ahead of Manipur by-election



IMPHAL

The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Saturday ordered a Special Summary Revision (SSR) of the electoral roll for the 49-Tadubi (ST) Assembly constituency in Manipur, setting January 1, 2026, as the qualifying date for voter eligibility. Officials said the exercise is a crucial preparatory step for conducting the pending by-election in the constituency.

The Tadubi seat, located in Senapati district and reserved for Scheduled Tribes, has remained vacant in the 60-member Manipur Legislative Assembly since the death of National People's Party MLA N Kayisii on January 18, 2025, following an illness.

Acting on ECI directives, the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) of Manipur announced the revision schedule under Section 21 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950. The decision follows the recent revocation of President's

Rule in the state, shortly before Y Khemchand Singh assumed office as Chief Minister on February 4, 2026.

As per the schedule, the integrated draft electoral roll will be published on February 9. Claims and objections can be submitted up to February 25, while their disposal will be completed by March 6. The final electoral roll is slated for publication on March 10. The SSR aims to ensure the inclusion of all eligible Indian citizens aged 18 years and above as of January 1, 2026, who are ordinarily resident in the constituency and not disqualified under law. Officials said the revision process will be closely monitored by the CEO of Manipur, along with District Election Officers (DEOs) and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs), to ensure accuracy, transparency and strict adherence to statutory guidelines ahead of the by-election.

Mizoram Achieves 93% Biometric Enrolment of Myanmar Refugees Across 11 Districts

AIZAWL

Mizoram has made significant progress in documenting refugees from Myanmar, completing over 93 per cent of the biometric enrolment exercise across the State, officials from the Home department said on Sunday.

According to official data, Mizoram is currently sheltering 28,355 refugees who have fled political instability and armed conflict in neighbouring Myanmar. Of these, biometric details of 26,381 individuals—representing 93.04 per cent—have been collected by district administrations in all 11 districts.

Champhai district, which shares a long and porous international border with Myanmar and hosts the largest concentration of refugees, continues to lead the exercise. The district administration has completed biometric enrolment of 12,083 refugees. Officials said that despite fresh inflows—231 refugees entering the district towards the end of January and another 137 arrivals last week—Champhai has managed to keep pace with the enrolment process.

Several other districts have already completed biometric registration. Aizawl, Lunglei and Serchhip wrapped up the exercise earlier, aided by relatively smoother administrative conditions and easier access to refugee settlements. In southern Mizoram,



Hnahthial district has also reported near-total coverage, with biometric data collected from 563 of the 591 refugees residing there, achieving 95.26 per cent completion as of Friday.

However, progress has been uneven across the State. Lawngtlai, Mizoram's

southernmost district bordering both Myanmar and Bangladesh, has recorded slower enrolment. Of the 5,094 refugees hosted in the district, only 3,677 have been enrolled so far, translating to 73.04 per cent coverage. The district has also reported a net decline of 983 refugees compared to figures from

late January, though officials said the reasons for the decrease were not immediately known.

Officials acknowledged that the pace of biometric enrolment has varied widely due to multiple challenges. While the exercise was launched simultaneously in all 11 districts in the latter part of July last year, technical issues with enrolment equipment, logistical constraints and difficult terrain in remote border areas have affected uniform progress.

Adding to the concern, biometric enrolment reportedly came to a complete halt in five districts during January. These include Siaha along the Myanmar border, Kolasib bordering Assam, Saitual adjoining Manipur, Mamit bordering Tripura and Bangladesh, and Khawzawl district in northeastern Mizoram.

The Home department said it was yet to receive detailed reports explaining the suspension of enrolment activities in these districts.

The biometric registration drive is viewed as a crucial step for the State administration to accurately document and manage the large refugee population that has taken shelter in Mizoram over the past few years. Officials said efforts were underway to resolve technical and logistical bottlenecks to ensure the remaining enrolment is completed at the earliest.

With cross-border movements continuing intermittently and fresh arrivals reported from time to time, the State faces the twin challenge of completing the existing enrolment while keeping records updated to reflect new inflows.

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Dalai Lama's office says the spiritual leader has never met Epstein



NEW DELHI

The office of the Dalai Lama said on Sunday that he had never met convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, after Chinese media reported the Tibetan Buddhist leader's name was mentioned in a cache of files released by the US government.

The US Justice Department published last month the latest tranche of the Epstein files - more than three million documents, photos and videos related to its investigation into the disgraced financier.

An AFP search of the files found the Dalai Lama's name was mentioned more than 150 times with no mention of him meeting or interacting with Epstein. The mere mention of someone's name in the Epstein files does not in itself imply any wrongdoing by that person.

"Some recent media reports and social media posts concerning the 'Epstein files' are attempting to link His Holiness the Dalai Lama with Jeffrey Epstein," the leader's office said in a statement

posted on X.

"We can unequivocally confirm that His Holiness has never met Jeffrey Epstein or authorised any meeting or interaction with him by anyone on His Holiness's behalf," it added.

On Thursday, state-run broadcaster the China Global Television Network (CGTN) reported that 'Dalai Lama' appeared at least 169 times in the Epstein files and mentioned an email in which an unknown sender told Epstein he was considering going to an event the Dalai Lama was set to attend. The 90-year-old Nobel Peace Prize winner fled the Tibetan capital Lhasa at the age of 23, in fear for his life after Chinese troops crushed an uprising in 1959 following its annexation of Tibet in 1951.

He now lives in exile in the northern Indian town of Dharamsala and leads a push for greater autonomy for Tibetans that China has condemned, calling the spiritual leader a rebel and a separatist.

A search into the Epstein files, released by the US DOJ and accessed by AFP produced 154 results about the Dalai

Lama.

AFP did not identify any mention or suggestion of a meeting between the Dalai Lama and Epstein.

The email mentioned by CGTN and seen by AFP was sent by a person whose name is redacted in which they write to Epstein: "About the event I told u almost a month ago on island that dalai lama is coming and I want to go there to see him. But I can skip this event if u need my help today."

The person writes in a later email: "...go in now to the event w dalai lama".

There is no mention in the emails that the person actually met or saw the Dalai Lama, who over the years has made numerous public appearances across the world. Epstein was convicted in 2008 for soliciting a minor for prostitution. He died by suicide in 2019 while in prison facing sex trafficking charges. Several high-profile public figures have been caught up in the latest US release of the documents linked to the financier, with some resigning from their jobs, facing official inquiries and public questioning.

Don't let Naxals move to new areas: Amit Shah



RAIPUR

Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Sunday that a combination of the government's security-centric strategy, infrastructure development, disruption of Maoist financial networks, and the surrender policy has produced positive results in the fight against Left-wing extremism (LWE).

Reiterating that the Naxal menace will be completely eradicated before March 31, Shah emphasised that the fight against Maoists must not be scattered. Chairing a high-level security meeting in Raipur, he directed Central and state agencies

to maintain a seamless "grid" of intelligence and operations to ensure that Maoists squeezed out of one region cannot find sanctuary in neighbouring states.

Addressing the meeting, Shah said, "Chhattisgarh was once a stronghold of Naxal violence, but it has now become a symbol of development in the double-engine government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi." He said youths of Chhattisgarh have been progressing in sports, forensic science, and technical education while preserving their culture and traditions.

He said Naxalism has pushed

many generations into the darkness of poverty and illiteracy. "The double-engine government has been leaving no stone unturned to completely eradicate the menace of Naxalism from the country, and it has reached the verge of its end," Shah said.

He added that Chhattisgarh has made remarkable progress on both the security and development fronts, emphasising equal developmental opportunities for people living in Naxal-affected areas. Shah also chaired a review meeting regarding various development works in Chhattisgarh, the release said. "In the Modi government, the focus is equal on security and opportunity,"

Shah stated, reiterating that people in Naxal-affected zones must have the same access to progress as the rest of the country.

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma, the Union Home Secretary, the Director of the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and Special Secretary (Internal Security) in the Ministry of Home Affairs attended the meeting, a government statement said. Directors general of the CRPF, BSF, Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and National Investigation Agency (NIA), as well as DGPs of Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Telangana, and senior officers also attended.

CM Sai said the 'double-engine' government's integrated strategy—combining precise security operations with infrastructure expansion and a crackdown on Maoist financial networks—is yielding visible results. Sai said Chhattisgarh is moving rapidly to achieve the Naxal-free target by March 31 under the leadership of PM Modi and guidance of Shah.

Chhattisgarh's Bastar region, comprising seven districts, shares borders with Maharashtra, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, and has long been considered the strongest bastion of Maoists. However, the region has witnessed intensified anti-Naxal operations over the past few years, considerably weakening the extremist movement.

Since January 2024, more than 500 Naxalites, including top cadres such as CPI (Maoist) general secretary Nambala Keshava Rao alias Basavaraju, have been killed in encounters in Chhattisgarh, while around 1,900 Naxalites were arrested and over 2,500 surrendered during the same period in the state, according to police.

Vijay Sharma stated, "Sunday meeting was the last crucial review amid the presence of top officials (Home/DGP) from different states in Raipur to decide future strategy."

On Monday, Shah will attend the conclusion ceremony of the three-day cultural extravaganza, 'Bastar Pandum Mahotsav', at Jagdalpur, south Chhattisgarh.

INTERNATIONAL

FBI concludes Jeffrey Epstein wasn't running a sex trafficking ring for powerful men

NEW YORK

The FBI pored over Jeffrey Epstein's bank records and emails. It searched his homes. It spent years interviewing his victims and examining his connections to some of the world's most influential people.

But while investigators collected ample proof that Epstein sexually abused underage girls, they found scant evidence the well-connected financier led a sex trafficking ring serving powerful men, an Associated Press review of internal Justice Department records shows.

Videos and photos seized from Epstein's homes in New York, Florida and the Virgin Islands didn't depict victims being abused or implicate anyone else in his crimes, a prosecutor wrote in one 2025 memo.

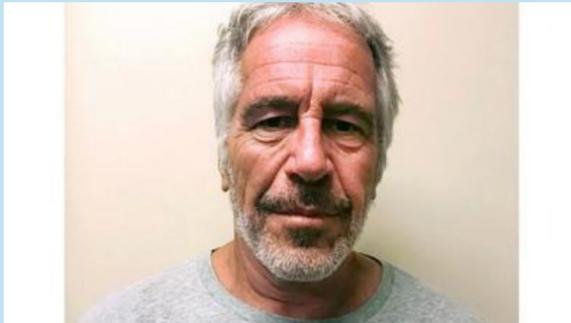
An examination of Epstein's financial records, including payments he made to entities linked to influential figures in academia, finance and global diplomacy, found no connection to criminal activity, said another internal memo in 2019.

While one Epstein victim made highly public claims that he "lent her" to his rich friends, agents couldn't confirm that and found no other victims telling a similar story, the records said.

Summarizing the investigation in an email last July, agents said "four or five" Epstein accusers claimed other men or women had sexually abused them. But, the agents said, there "was not enough evidence to federally charge these individuals, so the cases were referred to local law enforcement."

The AP and other media organizations are still reviewing millions of pages of documents, many of them previously confidential, that the Justice Department released under the Epstein Files Transparency Act and it is possible those records contain evidence overlooked by investigators.

But the documents, which include police reports, FBI interview notes and



prosecutor emails, provide the clearest picture to date of the investigation—and why U.S. authorities ultimately decided to close it without additional charges.

The Epstein investigation began in 2005, when the parents of a 14-year-old girl reported she had been molested at the millionaire's home in Palm Beach, Florida. Police would identify at least 35 girls with similar stories: Epstein was paying high school age students USD 200 or USD 300 to give him sexualized massages. After the FBI joined the probe, federal prosecutors drafted indictments to charge Epstein and some personal assistants who had arranged the girls' visits and payments. But instead, then-Miami U.S. attorney Alexander Acosta struck a deal letting Epstein plead guilty to state charges of soliciting prostitution from an underage girl. Sentenced to 18 months in jail, Epstein was free by mid-2009.

In 2018, a series of Miami Herald stories about the plea deal prompted New York federal prosecutors to take a fresh look at the accusations.

Epstein was arrested in July 2019. One month later, he killed himself in his jail cell.

A year later, prosecutors charged Epstein's longtime confidant, Ghislaine Maxwell, saying she'd recruited several of his victims and sometimes joined the

sexual abuse. Convicted in 2021, Maxwell is serving a 20-year prison term.

Prosecution memos, case summaries and other documents made public in the department's latest release of Epstein-related records show that FBI agents and federal prosecutors diligently pursued potential co-conspirators. Even seemingly outlandish and incomprehensible claims, called in to tip lines, were examined.

Some allegations couldn't be verified, investigators wrote.

In 2011 and again in 2019, investigators interviewed Virginia Roberts Giuffre, who in lawsuits and news interviews had accused Epstein of arranging for her to have sexual encounters with numerous men, including Britain's former Prince Andrew.

Investigators said they confirmed that Giuffre had been sexually abused by Epstein. But other parts of her story were problematic.

Two other Epstein victims who Giuffre had claimed were also "lent out" to powerful men told investigators they had no such experience, prosecutors wrote in a 2019 internal memo.

"No other victim has described being expressly directed by either Maxwell or Epstein to engage in sexual activity with other men," the memo said.

Giuffre acknowledged writing a partly fictionalized memoir of her time with Epstein containing descriptions of things that didn't take place. She had also offered shifting accounts in interviews with investigators, they wrote, and had "engaged in a continuous stream of public interviews about her allegations, many of which have included sensationalized if not demonstrably inaccurate characterizations of her experiences." Those inaccuracies included false accounts of her interactions with the FBI, they said.

Still, U.S. prosecutors attempted to arrange an interview with Andrew, now known as Andrew Mounbatten-Windsor. He refused to make himself available. Giuffre settled a lawsuit with Mounbatten-Windsor in which she had accused him of sexual misconduct.

In a memoir published after she killed herself last year, Giuffre wrote that prosecutors told her they didn't include her in the case against Maxwell because they didn't want her allegations to distract the jury. She insisted her accounts of being trafficked to elite men were true.

Investigators seized a multitude of videos and photos from Epstein's electronic devices and homes in New York, Florida and the U.S. Virgin Islands. They found CDs, hard copy photographs and at least one videotape containing nude images of females, some of whom seemed as if they might be minors.

One device contained 15 to 20 images depicting commercial child sex abuse material—pictures investigators said Epstein obtained on the internet.

No videos or photos showed Epstein victims being sexually abused, none showed any males with any of the nude females, and none contained evidence implicating anyone other than Epstein and Maxwell, then-Assistant U.S. Attorney Maureen Comey wrote in an email for FBI officials last year.

Thailand's Anutin rides wave of nationalism to election victory



BANGKOK

Thailand's caretaker premier Anutin Charnvirakul was preparing for coalition talks Monday after his conservative Bhumjaithai Party surged to a stunning election victory on a wave of nationalism.

The pro-military and pro-monarchy party had its best electoral performance ever in polls that took place after border clashes with Cambodia during two rounds of deadly fighting last year.

But Anutin, the scion of a construction dynasty, will need to tackle anaemic economic growth and manage fallout over multibillion-dollar cyberscam networks operating from the region.

"Thailand will move like it moved in the past three months. We will see nationalism, a strong position on Cambodia and economic policies. Nothing changes," said Viroit Ali, politics lecturer at Thammasat University.

Bhumjaithai was forecast by local media to have won almost 200 seats in Sunday's vote, well ahead of others but short of an outright majority in the 500-member lower house.

The reformist People's Party trailed with around 120 seats, while Pheu Thai—the

party of jailed former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra—came in third.

Voters appeared to turn their backs on the two parties, with their vote shares diving compared to the last poll in 2023, according to preliminary results from the election commission. Pheu Thai had its worst showing since Thaksin founded his political dynasty, after his daughter Paetongtarn was felled as prime minister over her handling of the Cambodia border dispute.

Thaksin is serving a one-year prison sentence for corruption in office, but many observers expect him to be released earlier than scheduled alongside a political agreement. Paul Chambers, an associate senior fellow at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore, told AFP that Bhumjaithai achieved victory by "emphasizing its commitment to nationalism and the king".

The conservatives also benefitted from the "continuing unpopularity of Pheu Thai" following a leaked phone call in which Paetongtarn referred to Cambodia's former leader Hun Sen as "uncle" and described a Thai military commander as her "opponent".

The leak sparked public and political backlash, and she

was later dismissed from office by the constitutional court on an ethics complaint.

Still, Pheu Thai is seen as a likely coalition partner for Anutin, as they were allies until Bhumjaithai pulled out over the border dispute scandal.

Anutin, who took office in September, declined to be drawn Sunday on potential coalition talks, noting the election results remained unofficial.

"We will wait until it's more clear, and every party has to meet their executive board to discuss the position," he said.

Political analyst Napon Jatusripitak expected Bhumjaithai to "move quickly" to form a government in which its interests would prevail.

The conflict with Cambodia, which killed scores of people on both sides and displaced around a million altogether, was top of mind for voters.

Soon after becoming premier following Paetongtarn's removal, Anutin authorised the armed forces to take whatever action they saw fit on the border.

Thailand's military took control of several disputed areas in the latest fighting in December, and a fragile cease-fire remains in place.

The Southeast Asian nation's political history is replete with military coups, bloody street protests and judicial intervention.

Its constitution, drafted under military rule following the last coup in 2014, gives significant power to institutions appointed by the senate, which is not directly elected.

Around 60 percent of voters were projected to have backed constitutional reform in principle in a referendum on Sunday, albeit with no specific measures on the table.

But Bhumjaithai will now be in a position to guide the reform process, and its conservative instincts make radical change less likely.

Where Eight States Spoke as One



Umtrew village was calm. Hills stood still. But for two days, the silence broke into music, talk, colour, and hope. The 8isOne-Meghalaya Chapter cultural festival came alive at Mebaai Resort. It ended not like an event, but like a promise.

Organised by the Mebaai Group and shaped by the Northeast Integration Rally, the festival brought together people from all eight Northeastern states. Artists, students, writers, entrepreneurs, and thinkers shared one space. Different tongues. One feeling.

From the first day, the mood was warm. People met not as strangers, but as neighbours. There were smiles, handshakes, quiet chats, and loud applause. Culture flowed through dance, music, stories, and ideas.

Day II turned the spotlight on dialogue. A key session focused on entrepreneurship in Meghalaya and the Northeast. The panel discussion, moderated by 4Front Media editor Ibankyntiew Mawrie, asked hard questions. How do young people build businesses here? What holds them back? And what can move them forward?

Entrepreneurs and academics spoke with honesty. Zorba Z Laloo Kolkoni and Gerald Duia shared ground stories. Dr Benjamin Lyngdoh from NEHU added an academic lens. Vicky Lanong from PRIME-Meghalaya spoke of support systems.

Journalist

Biswadeep Gupta connected the dots between economy, society, and unity. The message was simple but strong. Success needs patience. It needs discipline. And it needs people standing together. Speakers stressed mentorship, internships, and family support. They said small local ideas can grow big if minds look beyond borders.

"Grow together," was the clear call. No one state can move alone. The Northeast must rise as one.

Culture stayed at the heart of the festival. Artists spoke of youth as keepers of memory. They urged young people to record stories, revive old songs, and reshape tradition for today. One artist said events like this give courage to protect culture. A participant from Tripura spoke of unity. A folk artist from West Khasi Hills reminded everyone that village wisdom must reach public stages.

Mebaai Group founder and MLA AL Hek said culture and politics must walk side by side. Biswadeep Gupta spoke of unity over identity. His words stayed with many. This, he said, is a mass movement.

Youth energy lit up the stage through cosplay. Young participants dressed as heroes and cultural icons from the Northeast. It was playful, proud, and powerful. Alongside came folk dances, songs, and modern takes on tradition. The crowd watched. The hills listened.

By the end, organisers said the goal was dialogue, cultural tourism, and strong creative networks. But what truly happened was deeper. People felt seen. Heard. Connected.

The 8isOne-Meghalaya Chapter festival was not just a celebration. It was a reminder.

Diversity is not a divide. It is the bond. And in the quiet village of Umtrew, the Northeast spoke in one voice.

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“Chitrangada of Manipur and Arjuna: A Forgotten Mahabharata Chapter”



ASHK MACHHANVI

This article examines the lesser-studied episode of Arjuna's sojourn in Manipur and his marriage to Princess Chitrangada as narrated in the Mahabharata. Moving beyond romanticised retellings, the study situates the episode within the ethical framework of dharma, political sovereignty, and cultural integration in ancient India. Through close reading of relevant Puranas and interpretive scholarship, the paper argues that the Arjuna - Chitrangada narrative offers enduring insights into restraint, partnership, lineage, and India's plural civilisational structure insights that remain relevant in contemporary cultural discourse.

(i) Mahabharata, Chitrangada, Arjuna, Manipur, Dharma, Cultural Integration.

The Mahabharata is not merely an epic of war but a compendium of ethical dilemmas, social norms, and civilisational memory. While the Kuruketra war dominates popular and scholarly attention, several peripheral episodes reveal equally significant dimensions of dharma and polity. Among these is Arjuna's encounter with Princess Chitrangada of Manipur, an episode dispersed across Puranas and often treated as marginal. This paper revisits the narrative to demonstrate its importance for understanding ancient India's cultural plurality and ethical imagination.

(ii) Arjuna's Exile and the Ethics of Self-Imposed Austerity

Arjuna's journey to Manipur begins with his voluntary exile following his inadvertent intrusion upon Yudhihira and Draupadi. Although absolved by his elder brother, Arjuna insists on adhering to the agreed condition of exile, reflecting a profound commitment to personal accountability (svadharma) rather than juridical punishment.^[1] The exile thus functions as a *tritha-yatra*—a pilgrimage of self-discipline and ethical refinement.

(iii) Manipur in the Epic Imagination.

In the Mahabharata, Manipur (Manipura) appears as a sovereign eastern kingdom, governed by King Chitravahana. Its inclusion within Arjuna's travels underscores the epic's awareness of India's geographic and cultural expanse. Far from being portrayed as peripheral, Manipur is shown as politically autonomous and culturally integrated into the broader dharmic world. This challenges later notions that position the northeastern regions outside the core of ancient Indian civilisation.

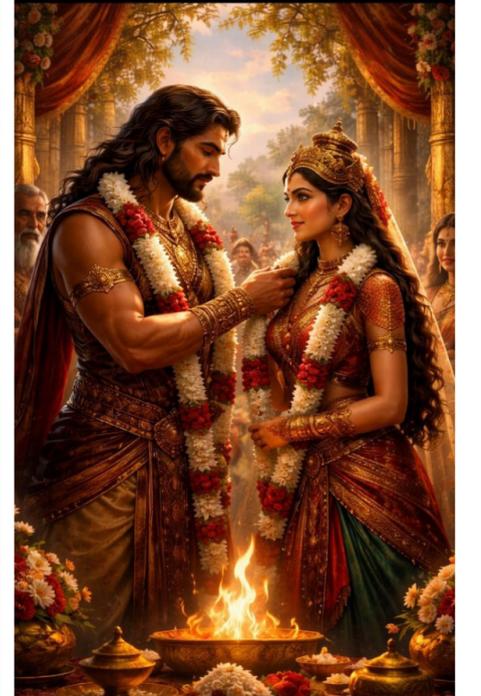
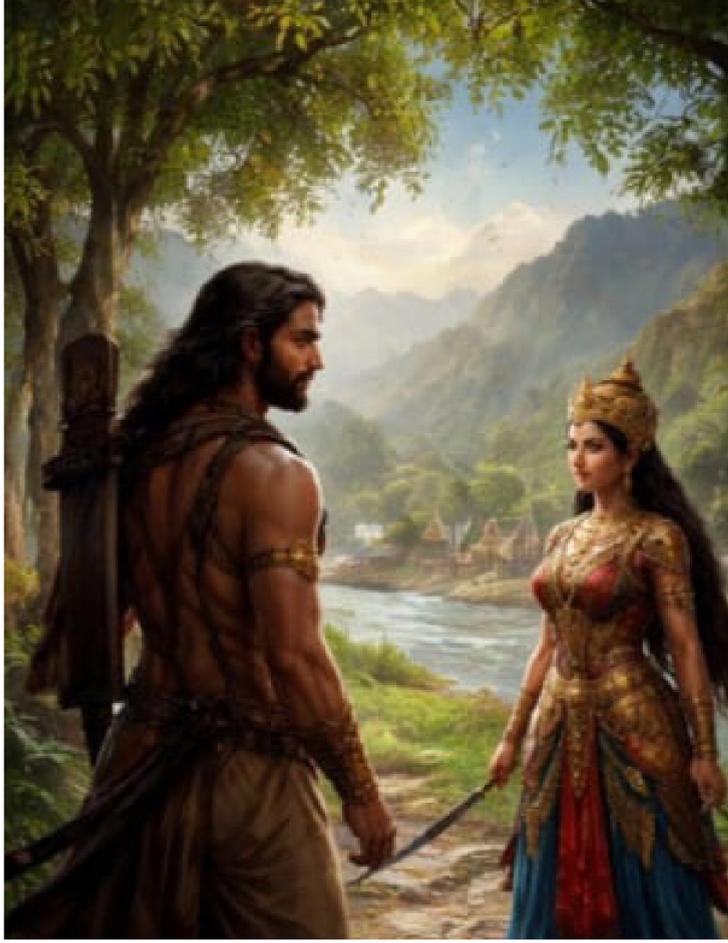
(iv) Chitrangada: Sovereignty and Womanhood.

Princess Chitrangada is introduced as a warrior-trained heir, raised to rule in the absence of a male successor. Unlike stereotypical portrayals of royal women as passive figures, Chitrangada embodies political authority and martial competence. Her agency complicates modern assumptions regarding gender roles in ancient Indian society and invites a re-evaluation of women's sovereignty within epic traditions.

(v) Marriage as Dharma Without Possession.

The marriage between Arjuna and Chitrangada is formalised under a critical condition set by King Chitravahana, the son born of the union shall inherit Manipur, and Arjuna shall claim no dynastic or territorial rights. Arjuna's acceptance of this condition represents an ethic of restraint and non-possession, aligning with the Katriya ideal of responsibility without annexation. This model of marital alliance stands in contrast to conquest-driven unions and offers an alternative paradigm of partnership.

(vi) Babruvahana and the Question of Lin-



age.

From this union is born Babruvahana, destined to rule Manipur. Arjuna's departure without asserting paternal authority underscores a crucial ethical stance, lineage does not necessitate control. The epic thus distinguishes between biological legacy and ethical responsibility, a distinction often overlooked in dynastic narratives.

(vii) The Ashvamedha Episode: Karma and Reckoning.

The narrative reaches its culmination during Yudhihira's Ashvamedha Yajna, when Arjuna enters Manipur and is challenged by Babruvahana, who remains unaware of their kinship. Arjuna's defeat and death at his son's hands, followed by revival through divine intervention symbolise the inescapability of karma. The episode reinforces the Mahabharata's central thesis, no individual, however heroic, stands above ethical causality.

(viii) Contemporary Cultural Relevance

The Arjuna-Chitrangada episode holds significant implications for contemporary India. First, it affirms the historical integration of the Northeast within India's civilisational narrative. Second, it presents a model of gendered sovereignty grounded in dharma rather than antagonism. Third, it offers a critique of unrestrained power, advocating leadership tempered by self-limitation. In an era marked by cultural fragmentation, these insights warrant renewed engagement.

To conclude Chitrangada's story is not a marginal footnote but a vital thread in the Mahabharata's ethical tapestry. Through restraint, partnership, and respect for sov-

ereignty, the Manipur episode exemplifies a plural and humane vision of civilisation. Reclaiming this narrative enables a deeper appreciation of India's epic heritage and its relevance for present cultural and ethical debates.

Author's Note

This study is informed by a combination of textual engagement with the Mahabharata and long-term professional exposure to India's eastern regions. Experience gained through service in the Northeast provided especially Manipur sustained opportunities to observe local cultures, social structures, and historical consciousness as they exist beyond textual representations.

Such exposure underscores that Manipur and the wider Northeast are not merely strategic or administrative spaces, but regions possessing deep civilisational continuity. Indigenous traditions, oral histories, and lived cultural practices encountered in the region resonate strongly with themes preserved in Itihasa, particularly those related to sovereignty, duty, and cultural integration.

The present work adopts a cultural historical approach, seeking to situate Manipur firmly within the epic imagination of ancient India. The intention is to restore scholarly attention to a narrative that reflects India's plural civilisational structure and ethical depth. By revisiting the Arjuna Chitrangada episode, the study contributes to a more integrated understanding of epic tradition and regional history.

About author:

Ashk Machhanvi is a retired Indian Army officer and cultural historian whose schol-

arship engages with epic historiography, regional studies, and lived civilisational experience. His academic interest in Manipur is informed by professional service in Nagaland and Manipur, complemented by repeated visits to the region for the study of local cultural practices, oral traditions, and historical memory. This sustained engagement has enabled him to examine Manipuri society not only through textual sources but also through direct cultural observation.

His work adopts a cultural-historical approach to the Mahabharata, particularly in reading the Arjuna - Chitrangada episode in dialogue with Manipuri traditions, indigenous narratives, and social structures. Service in the region provided longitudinal exposure to the rhythms of everyday life, community institutions, and the ethical codes that continue to shape local identity. Such familiarity lends clarity and contextual depth to his interpretation, allowing readers to perceive the epic narrative as embedded within a living cultural landscape rather than as an abstract literary motif.

Positioned within epic historiography and Manipur studies, Machhanvi's writing seeks to restore scholarly attention to the Northeast as an integral participant in India's civilisational imagination. All references to professional experience are reflective and non-operational in nature, intended solely to enhance cultural understanding and historical interpretation.

Disclaimer:

The views expressed are personal and based on open-source historical and traditional narratives.



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