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PERSPECTIVE
One of the hardest tasks for the human mind is convincing yourself that you no longer care.

Mizoram reiterates opposition to Indo-Myanmar border fencing, cites cultural concerns

AIZAWL
The Mizoram Government on Wednesday reiterated its opposition to the proposed fencing of the Indo-Myanmar border, while acknowledging that the matter falls under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Centre and is beyond the State's Constitutional authority.

The issue was taken up for detailed discussion at a meeting of the Mizoram Council of Ministers chaired by Chief Minister Lalduhoma. According to an official release, the Cabinet reaffirmed the State's long-standing concerns over the proposed fencing along the international boundary.

The agenda placed before the Cabinet by the Home Department was titled 'Proposal for deliberation and formulation of the State Government's opinion on the intention of the Government of India to fence the Indo-Myanmar border'. After deliberations, the Council noted that the Mizoram Government had already conveyed its opposition to the proposal through a resolution passed by the State Legislative Assembly, with particular emphasis on the Mizoram stretch of the border.

Ministers reiterated that the proposed fencing could have serious social and cultural implications for border communities, given the region's unique ethnic and historical context. Mizoram shares a 404-km porous international border with Myanmar's Chin State, where a majority of the population comprises ethnic Mizos who share common ancestry, language, culture, traditions and religious ties with people living on the Indian side.

WHO SAID WHAT



PM Narendra Modi: Congratulations to Shri Yumnam Khemchand Singh Ji on taking oath as the Chief Minister of Manipur. I would like to congratulate Smt. Nemcha Kipgen Ji and Shri Losii Dikho Ji on taking oath as the Deputy Chief Ministers of the state and Shri Konthoujam Govindas Singh Ji as well as Shri Khuraijam Loken Singh Ji on being sworn in as Ministers in the Manipur Government. I'm confident they will work diligently towards furthering development and prosperity for my sisters and brothers of Manipur.

- Narendra Modi, PM

Yumnam Khemchand Singh Takes Oath as Manipur Chief Minister, Calls for Unity

New Manipur CM Yumnam Khemchand Singh chairs first Cabinet meet

BISWADEEP GUPTA
IMPHAL: Yumnam Khemchand Singh of the BJP was sworn in as the new Chief Minister of Manipur on Wednesday. BJP leaders Nemcha Kipgen and Losii Dikho took oath as Deputy Chief Ministers. The oath ceremony was held virtually, with Kipgen taking oath from Manipur Bhavan in New Delhi.

Speaking to Eastern Chronicle, the new Chief Minister said he has been given a big responsibility and he will carry it out with full sincerity. He thanked the party leadership and said he is hopeful that all 36 communities in Manipur will come together to work for the state's development.

Khemchand said peace and development will guide the new government. He added that the journey towards Viksit Bharat and Viksit Manipur will have challenges, but the government will stay focused on



its goals. Khemchand is a long-time RSS worker and a senior organisational leader. He has held several key positions in the state. Apart from politics, he is also known for his work in sports. A black belt in Taekwondo, he is a former vice-pres-

ident of the Taekwondo Federation of India and has helped promote the sport in the Northeast.

He first entered electoral politics in 2012 on an All India Trinamool Congress ticket but lost. He joined the BJP in 2013.

Born in Singjamei Yumnam Leikai, he passed his HSLC in 1978 from Ram Lal Paul High School in Imphal. He is married and has a son.

The Chief Minister said the BJP leadership has trusted him with the task of bringing development to Manipur and assured that the aspirations of all communities will be respected. While Khemchand belongs to the Meitei community, his deputies Nemcha Kipgen and Losii Dikho represent the Kuki and Naga tribes, respectively, reflecting social balance in the new government.

Senior legislators Nemcha Kipgen and Losii Dikho were sworn in as Deputy Chief Ministers, a move

widely seen as an effort to ensure broader representation and administrative balance in the state's leadership. Kipgen represents the Kuki community, while Dikho hails from the Naga community.

The swearing-in ceremony also saw Konthoujam Govindas Singh take oath as Home Minister, while Khuraijam Loken Singh was inducted as a Cabinet Minister.

Senior political leaders, top government officials and party functionaries attended the ceremony, reflecting a unified show of support for the newly formed government.

Speaking to reporters at Lok Bhavan after assuming office, Chief Minister Khemchand said he would work to justify the confidence reposed in him by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah. He also appealed for collective ef-

forts to restore peace and normalcy in Manipur.

"Manipur is home to 36 communities who have together sustained the state over the years. Our hope now is for everyone to contribute towards bringing a peaceful atmosphere," Singh said.

Referring to the central leadership, he added, "Prime Minister Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah have placed great faith in me, and I want to take that faith forward." Singh said his government would prioritise stability, dialogue and cooperation among communities. Explaining the rationale behind appointing two deputy chief ministers from different communities, Singh said Manipur's diversity must be reflected in governance, stressing that participation from all ethnic groups is essential for the state's progress and reconciliation.

Nagaland Cabinet hints at breakthrough on Frontier Nagaland talks

KOHIMA

The Nagaland Cabinet on February 4 took a series of key policy decisions on the Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation's (ENPO) demand for Frontier Nagaland Territory, oil and natural gas exploration, and long-pending landholding reforms, signalling a more assertive push on politically sensitive and economically significant issues.

Addressing the media after the Cabinet meeting held at Chumoukedima, government spokesperson and minister K G Kenye said the Cabinet reviewed the status of the ENPO's demand and expressed hope that a breakthrough could be announced soon. He said discussions between the ENPO and the Government of India are scheduled to be held in New Delhi, and the state government is "keeping its fingers crossed" for a positive outcome.

Describing the issue as one that has been pursued for more than a decade, Kenye said the government hopes it will finally be resolved in accordance with the wishes and aspirations of the people of eastern Nagaland. To strengthen engagement with the Centre on political and constitutional issues, the Cabinet decided to constitute a sub-committee under the Political Affairs Committee. The sub-committee will be convened by Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio and will include the two Deputy Chief Ministers, Nagaland's two Members of Parliament, and select Cabinet ministers.

A delegation from the group has already left for New Delhi to raise concerns related to the Free Move-

ment Regime and the re-imposition of the Protected Area Permit (PAP). The delegation will urge the Centre to review the PAP, which the state government believes is adversely affecting Nagaland.

The Cabinet also revisited the long-pending and contentious issue of oil and natural gas exploration in the state. Kenye said the matter had been delayed due to litigation but noted that the government was relieved when the court agreed to hear the case. With the concerned organisation having withdrawn its petition, the issue has now become infructuous, although a final judicial verdict is still awaited. He said the Cabinet has decided to proceed with oil and gas exploration based on the special constitutional protections accorded to Nagaland under Article 371A. Emphasising the state's distinct constitutional position, Kenye said Article 371A clearly provides that land and its resources belong to the people of Nagaland, unlike in other states where petroleum and natural gas are treated as central subjects. He added that all resources, both above and below the surface, belong to landowners and the people, with the state government acting only on their mandate and consent. Kenye also expressed regret that internal differences had led to litigation, which in turn delayed progress on resource exploration.

Another major decision taken by the Cabinet relates to the regulation of Nagaland's landholding system. Kenye said that despite several legislations and office memorandums over the years, the state had failed to adopt a firm and decisive approach to land regulation.

Suspected blast at illegal coal mine in Meghalaya's Jaintia Hills kills Assam workers

SHILLONG

A suspected dynamite blast inside an illegal coal mine in Meghalaya's East Jaintia Hills district on Wednesday claimed the lives of several workers, most of them believed to be migrant labourers from Assam, triggering renewed concern over unsafe and unlawful mining practices in the region.

At least four deaths have been confirmed so far, officials said, while the toll is feared to rise as rescue and recovery operations continue at the site. The explosion reportedly occurred deep inside the mine, leaving workers trapped and causing severe injuries and fatalities.

Initial statements from the police had downplayed reports of casualties, but subsequent developments contradicted the early official version. Hospital records and accounts from local sources later confirmed multiple deaths. Videos circulating locally also suggested a far more serious incident than initially acknowledged. Meghalaya Police have since launched rescue operations, and a detailed investigation is underway to ascertain the exact cause of the explosion. Preliminary inputs indicate that dynamite may have been used inside the mine, which was allegedly operating in violation of mining regulations. The identities of three of the deceased have been established. They have been identified as Faruk Ahmed of Bihara village under Katigora, and Dildar Hussain and Anwora Hussain, both residents of Sharisha Kuri village. All the victims are believed to be workers from Assam who had migrated to the Jaintia Hills in search of employment. Officials said efforts are ongoing to verify the identities of the remaining victims and to determine whether more workers are trapped inside the mine. District authorities have also been alerted, and coordination with local health facilities has been stepped up.

IIT Guwahati researchers use AI to design high-performance alloys without critical raw materials

GUWAHATI

A team of researchers has developed a machine learning-based method to design advanced metal alloys without relying on critical raw materials, a breakthrough that could significantly boost sustainable manufacturing and reduce industrial dependence on scarce imports.

The study was led by researchers from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Guwahati in collaboration with London South Bank University, the University of Manchester and the University of Leeds. Using artificial intelligence, the team identified high-performance alloy compositions that avoid elements such as tantalum, niobium, tungsten and hafnium—materials that are expensive, scarce and vulnerable to global supply disruptions.

Alloying, a practice dating back to the Bronze Age, involves improving a base metal by adding small quantities of other elements. In recent decades, research has increasingly focused on high-entropy alloys, a class of multi-principal element alloys (MPEAs) that contain several elements in near-equal proportions and are valued for their high strength and thermal stability.

These materials are considered promising for aerospace engines, gas turbines and nuclear systems. However, many high-performance alloys depend heavily on critical raw materials (CRMs), increasing import dependence and environmental stress from mining.

To address this challenge, the researchers developed a machine learning-assisted framework specifically aimed at designing CRM-free alloys. Critical raw materials were first classified into three groups based on supply risk, economic

importance and global availability. The team then built a database of 3,608 alloy compositions, focusing on simpler systems made entirely from non-critical elements.

Among the predictive models tested, the Extra Trees Regressor delivered the most accurate estimates of Vickers hardness.

This model was coupled with optimisation techniques inspired by natural processes to search for alloy compositions capable of achieving high hardness without the use of critical elements.

The alloy was subsequently produced at laboratory scale at IIT Kanpur, where experimental testing yielded hardness values close to the model's predictions, validating the AI-driven design framework.

"The developed CRM-free alloy is particularly suited for applications where high hardness is a primary requirement, while also avoiding the use of critical raw materials," said Shrikrishna N. Joshi, Professor in the Department of Mechanical Engineering at IIT Guwahati.

He said potential applications include wear-resistant mechanical components, tooling, surface-contact parts, and automotive and industrial machinery.

Explaining the novelty of the work, Prof Joshi said the study represents the first validated computational framework for designing CRM-free multi-principal element alloys using a unary- and binary-based compositional database, without relying on microstructural or processing parameters.

Built entirely on compositional data and machine learning, the framework can be adapted to other material systems with limited experimental data.

India hosts Kyrgyz special forces for 13th edition of Exercise Khanjar in Assam

NEW DELHI

The thirteenth edition of the India-Kyrgyzstan Joint Special Forces exercise KHANJAR began at Missamari in Assam, with India hosting the annual military engagement, which will continue until 17 February.

Conducted annually and alternately in both countries, Exercise KHANJAR has emerged as a key pillar of India's defence cooperation with the Central Asian nation.

The previous edition was held in Kyrgyzstan in March last year and focused on high-altitude and mountainous warfare, terrain familiar to the armed forces of both countries.

The Indian Army contingent comprises 20 personnel from the Para Special Forces, while Kyrgyzstan is represented by an equally strong team from the ILBRIS Special Forces Brigade, a unit known for its expertise in counter-terrorism and mountain warfare operations.

According to a statement issued by the Army, "the aim of the exercise is to exchange best practices and experiences in Counter Terrorism and Special Forces Operations in urban and mountainous



terrain."

In keeping with this objective, the exercise includes intensive training modules aimed at enhancing tactical skills and interoperability. The drills cover specialised capabilities such as sniping, complex

building intervention and mountain craft.

The training is being conducted in terrain that allows troops to simulate realistic operational conditions.

Missamari offers a mix of built-up areas, dense vegetation and access to hilly

terrain, enabling both contingents to rehearse a wide range of counter-terror scenarios. Joint planning, execution and debriefing sessions form a core component of the exercise, allowing personnel to familiarise themselves with each other's tactics, techniques and procedures.

Beyond its immediate training value, Exercise KHANJAR is seen as a confidence-building measure between the two nations.

The Army statement noted that the exercise "will provide an opportunity for both sides to fortify defence ties while addressing common concerns of international terrorism and extremism," concerns that have gained prominence due to the transnational nature of terror networks and radicalisation.

India and Kyrgyzstan have maintained regular defence engagement through military exchanges, training programmes and joint exercises, with KHANJAR remaining the most prominent symbol of this cooperation.

The continuation of the exercise into its thirteenth edition underscores the importance both countries place on sustained military-to-military interaction.

Kuki-Zo groups call 12-hour shutdown in Manipur hill areas over new government formation

IMPHAL

Fresh political tensions surfaced in Manipur on Wednesday as several Kuki-Zo organisations called for a 12-hour shutdown across hill areas, protesting the participation of Kuki-Zo legislators in the formation of the newly constituted National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in the State. The Joint Forum of Seven (JF7), an umbrella body of Kuki-Zo organisations, announced a "total shutdown" in Kuki-Zo-inhabited areas of Outer Manipur and the Kuki Hills from 6 am to 6 pm on February 6. The shutdown is aimed at opposing what the forum described as the involvement of certain Kuki-Zo MLAs in the government formation process. In a statement, the JF7 urged villagers, civil society organisations and youth bodies to participate in the protest in a "democratic and peaceful" manner, while reiterating its long-standing demand for a separate administrative arrangement for the Kuki people.

Tensions escalated on the ground on Wednesday night, with reports of protests in parts

of Kangpokpi district. Agitators allegedly burnt tyres and placed bamboo barricades on roads near Leimakhong to oppose the swearing-in of Nemcha Kipgen, a BJP MLA from the Kuki community, as one of the Deputy Chief Ministers. L Dikho of the Naga People's Front was also sworn in as Deputy Chief Minister.

Meanwhile, the Kuki Liberation Army-Lethkolun (KLA-L) issued a communiqué asserting that no Kuki-Zo MLA had the mandate to participate in the formation of what it termed a "popular government" in Manipur. The group warned of "decisive and uncompromising" measures against those defying the collective stand, adding that any consequences arising from such actions would rest solely with the individuals concerned.

The Kuki Zo Council (KZC) echoed similar views, stating that any Kuki-Zo legislator disregarding the collective decision would be acting in an individual capacity, and that the organisation would not be responsible for the outcome of such unilateral actions.



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THE SOCIAL LOGIC OF BLAME

Every society must find ways to explain failure. When effort does not translate into success, individuals and communities search for meanings that can make uncertainty bearable. In this process, blame emerges not merely as a moral reaction but as a defence mechanism. Often dismissed as a sign of weakness or irresponsibility, blame is in fact deeply embedded in the structure of social life. It functions both as a source of resilience and as a trigger of conflict, revealing how societies negotiate responsibility, hope, and disappointment.

Modern societies strongly emphasise individual responsibility. People are encouraged to believe that success and failure are direct outcomes of personal effort, discipline, and talent. This belief reflects the ideology of meritocracy, which promises that hard work will inevitably lead to reward. Yet lived experience constantly contradicts this narrative. Economic inequalities, structural barriers, unpredictable events, and sheer chance frequently shape outcomes in ways that individual effort cannot control. When such contradictions become overwhelming, individuals often turn to what may be called a "blame bin": a symbolic space where failure is deposited so that life can continue without psychological collapse.

Blame, in this sense, is not always destructive. It can serve a stabilising unit. By attributing failure to destiny, circumstances, timing, or impersonal forces, individuals protect themselves from debilitating self-condemnation. This form of blame does not deny responsibility altogether; rather, it prevents failure from becoming a permanent judgment on personal worth. It allows people to endure disappointment without surrendering hope and to attempt again rather than withdraw from life. Here, blame becomes an instrument of survival, preserving emotional balance in a world where outcomes are uncertain and promises are often inflated.

Traditional Indian village life offers a vivid illustration of this dynamic. Agricultural failure, illness, or economic hardship were commonly explained through ideas such as kismet (destiny), divine will, or seasonal imbalance. From a modern rationalist perspective, such explanations may appear irrational or fatalistic. Yet they performed an important social function. By externalising failure, individuals avoided crippling guilt and despair. They did not abandon effort; crops were sown again, rituals performed, and life resumed with renewed determination. In this context, blame did not undermine social cohesion. Instead, it absorbed uncertainty and enabled communities to endure repeated adversity without losing collective stability.

However, blame does not always remain impersonal. A more destructive form emerges when blame is personalised and directed at specific individuals or groups. In this shift, failure ceases to be an abstract condition and becomes a moral accusation. The same village societies that once attributed misfortune to destiny have also, at times, attributed it to black magic, malicious intent, or conspiracies. In such cases, suspicion falls upon neighbours, widows, marginalised individuals, or social outsiders. The blame bin is no longer symbolic; it becomes embodied in another person. What once served as a coping mechanism now generates exclusion, violence, and enduring social divisions. This transformation reveals the dual nature of blame. When blame remains abstract and impersonal, it can preserve dignity and sustain the will to continue. When it becomes rigid, personalised, and moralised, it converts disappointment into hostility and produces conflict. Modern societies, despite their claims of rationality, continue to oscillate between these tendencies. Individuals are encouraged to internalise failure completely, often leading to burnout, anxiety, and despair, while public discourse increasingly directs frustration toward migrants, minorities, and imagined internal enemies. In both cases, deeper structural causes of failure-economic inequality, political decisions, and institutional breakdowns-remain largely unexamined. The persistence of blame in contemporary life is not accidental. It reflects a deeper social necessity. Societies cannot function if failure is experienced as absolute meaninglessness or unbearable injustice. Blame provides narratives that make failure intelligible, even when those narratives are imperfect or distorted. Yet the way blame is organised matters profoundly. When societies encourage individuals to bear the entire burden of failure, they produce fragile subjects overwhelmed by self-doubt. When societies normalise scapegoating, they produce fractured communities haunted by suspicion and resentment. Understanding blame as a social phenomenon rather than merely a moral flaw allows for a more humane conception of responsibility. Responsibility does not mean immediate self-condemnation, nor does it justify the persecution of others. It begins with the capacity to endure failure without psychological collapse or social hostility. Only after such stabilisation can genuine reflection and accountability emerge. The question, therefore, is not whether blame should exist, but how it should be structured. In a world marked by uncertainty, inequality, and inflated promises, blame is unavoidable. The challenge lies in shaping it in ways that sustain resilience rather than resentment, and hope rather than hostility. How societies organise blame may ultimately determine whether failure becomes a source of renewal or a pathway to rupture.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"When we seek to discover the best in others, we somehow bring out the best in ourselves." - William Arthur Ward

SDGS: FEWER THAN 20% OF TARGETS MAY BE ACHIEVED BY 2030 - A PREDICTION



PROF (DR) SUKAMAL DEB, ADVISER, NEIR, 2026

Resist, and hope could be the new strategy for peace and achieving the SDGs, the webinar organised by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) emphasised. On 2nd Feb 2026, I participated in the webinar on the geopolitics of war and peace. The in-depth discussion was around the dichotomy of the geopolitics of war and peace, the slow progress of SDGs, and the impediments.

Our world is grappling with more obstacles to sustainable development than ever before. Mounting pressures, including rising climate change impacts, escalating global conflicts, intense power competition and technological races, persistent human rights violations, economic fragmentation, chronic underfinancing, and societal polarisation, are contributing to the rapid reshaping of the geopolitical landscape. The global community need to not only engage in an in-depth conversation but also take action to repair the recent crises rapidly reshaping the geopolitical order. We need a universal blueprint for addressing poverty, inequality, climate change, and the long-term viability of our planet. In 2015, 193 UN Member States committed to achieving them, yet, more than eleven years later, they remain significantly off track. Fortunately, the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), a global initiative launched by the United Nations in 2012 to promote sustainable development and implement the SDGs, is exploring strategies to accelerate SDG progress, including regional integration, reforms to the global financial architecture, and improved planning. It has over 2000 member institutions worldwide, including universities and research organisations, with expertise in developing practical solutions for sustainable development.

The webinar was a spontaneous flow of wisdom moderated by Professor Jeffrey Sachs, President of the SDSN. I have a special connection with him. On seeing him on the live screen, after a long time, my enthusiasm for active participation shot up. Prof. Jeffrey Sachs, an erudite, World-renowned Econ-

omist, Professor, and President of the UN SDSN, was my teacher when I pursued my specialisation in Sustainable Development, the Degree name "The Age

of Sustainable Development," from Columbia University in New York City in 2020. My Prof Sachs was then the Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, NY, who contributed immensely to understanding sustainable development and economic development. From 2001 to 2018, Professor Sachs was a special advisor to the UN Secretary General. Until 2016, he held a similar advisory position related to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), eight internationally sanctioned



objectives to reduce extreme poverty, hunger, and disease by 2015.

Sachs has written several books and received several awards. His views on economics, on the origin of COVID-19, and on the Russian invasion of Ukraine have garnered attention and criticism. To be a student of such towering wisdom has been a rare gift to my life. I am profoundly grateful to my professor, who repeatedly made us reflect through his teachings that we, the human beings, the new name Anthropocene, may not survive as we are rapidly crossing the planetary boundaries. In 2020, his online late-night classes, spread over a period of six months, when the COVID-19 pandemic was looming around, kept me inspired on the intrigued by the subject, with deep admiration for his wisdom and the unique simplicity of teaching.

The speakers in the webinar were H.E. Miguel Ángel Moratinos, Under Secretary General, High Representative for the UN Alliance of Civilisations, H.E. Ms Maria Fernanda Espinosa, President of Cities Alliance and Executive Director of Global Women Leaders for Change and H.E. Vuk Jeremić, former President of the UN General Assembly. In attending the webinar, listening to the eminent speakers, I was made to reflect upon wheth-

er the world order has been quickly rupturing with the geopolitical recession.

Global Governance for Peace and the SDGs makes sense in today's rapidly evolving global challenges. In one way, humanity should strive to achieve SDGs, and on the other, to identify solutions for sustainable development beyond 2030. Against this backdrop are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a universal blueprint for addressing poverty, inequality, climate change, and the long-term viability of our planet. The webinar highlighted concerns that SDGs remain significantly off track, with fewer than 20 per cent of targets expected to be achieved by 2030. In addition, the UN faces deep political, operational, and financial challenges, but remains critical for fostering cooperation, establishing global norms, and overcoming the complex geopolitical obstacles we face. Understanding the geopolitics of war and peace, while the need is for acceleration of SDG implementation, has become

a critical learning for people sensitive about the present and future of the planet. And we know, the present lays the foundation of the future. Prof. Sachs taught us that sustainable Development has four major dimensions - economic development, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and good governance. We live in a complex, crowded world today, with 7.2 billion people, ten times the population since the start of the industrial revolution. The Planetary Boundaries and Anthropocene are the concepts that have become so important in the age of climate change. Both these concepts, Planetary Boundaries and Anthropocene, signify that humanity has become so numerous, our 7.2 billion people and rising, and so effective, one could say, so productive in the capacity to mine and extract resources, that we are endangering ourselves and our coming generations. To transform resources for production in industry, to consume, we have suddenly, unprecedentedly, as a species, hit these planetary risks and even dead ends if we're not careful.

It's a time of historical importance to ponder over: What are the major challenges coming from humanity's impact on the physical environment? Can we identify those challenges? Can we quantify them? Can

we identify what would be safe limits for human activity so that we can begin rather urgently, because we're late to this? To redesign our technologies and our economic

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Biggest Health Crisis in India FOOD ADULTERATION - Urea in Milk Oxytocin in Vegetables Caustic Soda in Paneer Brick powder in Spices Yellow dye in Honey Steroids in Poultry Detergent in ice cream We all are consuming slow poison! Raised this serious issue in Parliament today. Watch my intervention. ~ Raghav Chadha, Member, National Executive & National Spokesperson, Aam Aadmi Party



growth dynamics so that we can have economic improvement while staying within the planetary boundaries.

Even if late, we can begin to look deeply at the question of how to reconcile growth and these various environmental threats, Prof Sachs instil these questions in us while teaching high scholarly sustainable development.

As 2026 begins amid complex and evolving geopolitical developments, the SDSN has remained steadfast in its commitment to advancing sustainable development and supporting evidence-based solutions to global challenges. This is where the ray of hope emerges. Let us, as a single humanity, reflect our sustained commitment to the 2030 Agenda under the SDGs and look beyond.

Six witnesses tell Singapore court Zubeen Garg did not smell of alcohol on yacht

GUWAHATI

Six witnesses who testified during the second hearing of the Singapore Coroner's Court inquiry into the death of Assamese cultural icon Zubeen Garg said the singer did not smell or "reek" of alcohol when he arrived at Capo Bay Marina on the day he drowned.

According to a report by Singapore-based broadcaster Channel News Asia, seven witnesses gave evidence on February 3, six of whom were present on the yacht with Garg on September 19, 2025. Their testimonies broadly aligned on the sequence of events leading up to his fatal swim, but differed on whether and how much alcohol Garg had consumed before boarding the vessel.

Several witnesses told the court that Garg was seen occasionally sipping from a single large can of beer during the yacht ride, and that no other alcoholic beverages were observed. One witness stated that the singer did not



appear intoxicated and was taking only small sips. Another said a whisky order had been placed at a bar before the group boarded the yacht, but could not confirm whether Garg drank it.

Only one witness claimed that the artist appeared tipsy when he boarded the yacht.

Video footage presented in court

showed Garg entering the sea for the first time wearing a life jacket. Some witnesses said the jacket appeared oversized and that Garg later removed it while in the water. After swimming, he returned to a kayak near the yacht and was described by multiple witnesses as appearing tired.

A witness who organised the gathering testified that he tried to put a life jacket on Garg before his second swim, but the singer refused, reportedly saying, "I have never worn it before. I don't like it."

Witnesses further said Garg swam rapidly towards the shore during his second swim, prompting others to follow him. He was also heard telling people on board that he had taught two members of the group how to swim.

The testimonies presented at the second hearing stand in contrast to earlier evidence placed before the Coroner's Court by investigators.

Singapore Police have previously

informed the court that toxicology tests showed Garg's blood alcohol level was far above the country's legal limit at the time he entered the water. During the first hearing on January 14, Assistant Superintendent of Police David Lim of the Police Coast Guard testified that the 53-year-old singer was severely intoxicated and had repeatedly refused to wear a life vest before entering the sea.

The inquiry is ongoing, with further evidence expected to be presented. Garg's uncle, Manoj Borthakur, and nephew, Rahul Gautam Sharma, were present at the February 3 hearing.

Separately, Garg's wife, Garima Saikia Garg, visited Peerless Hospital on Wednesday, coinciding with the couple's marriage anniversary. Doctors said she was not admitted and was undergoing routine check-ups.

"She has suffered a major personal loss and will need time to recover emotionally," a doctor said, adding that all medical tests were normal.

Congress alleges CM Himanta Biswa Sarma's family grabbed 12,000 bighas of land across Assam

GUWAHATI

The Assam Congress on Wednesday alleged that Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and his family have illegally occupied nearly 12,000 bighas (over 3,960 acres) of land across the state, an allegation to which the ruling BJP has not immediately responded. Addressing a press conference at Rajiv Bhanu, Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president Gaurav Gogoi said the claim was based on what he described as an internal party investigation that had revealed "startling facts": "Almost 12,000 bighas of land have been occupied by the Chief Minister and his family across Assam. This is not the final figure as the investigation is still ongoing," Gogoi alleged.

He said the APCC had launched an "abhiyan" to trace the sources of the Chief Minister's assets and invited public participation in the exercise.

As part of the campaign, the party launched a website titled 'Who Is HBS', seeking information related to Sarma's assets. Gogoi said a QR code had been introduced to enable digital submissions, while details

could also be shared through a helpline number-9133400200.

The Jorhat MP further alleged that Sarma had revived claims about Gogoi's purported links with Pakistan to divert attention from the alleged land grab.

Sarma had earlier stated that he would make public evidence of Gogoi's alleged links by September 10, 2025.

"Why did he not do it on September 10 last year? He has been silent for five months and has suddenly remembered my Pakistan links," Gogoi said. "He knows we are preparing a dossier on his and his family's alleged corruption and land grab. That is why this issue has been raised again." Even as the press conference was under way, APCC media department chairman Bedabrata Bora claimed that the newly launched website had been hacked. Bora alleged that the site briefly displayed the message "HBS 2.0" and accused the BJP's IT cell of being behind the alleged cyber attack.

There was no immediate response from the BJP or the Chief Minister to the allegations made by the Congress.

Kuki Inpi Manipur opposes formation of 'popular government', calls for continuation of President's Rule

IMPHAL

The Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM) on Tuesday strongly opposed the Bharatiya Janata Party's move to form what it termed a "so-called popular government" in Manipur, warning that such a step could further aggravate the fragile law and order situation in the state.

In a strongly worded statement, the apex body of the Kuki-Zo people described the BJP's attempt to install a popular government as "deeply disturbing and shocking," asserting that the move, at the present juncture, could have serious consequences for peace and stability.

Rejecting the proposed political arrangement outright, KIM alleged that it was a Meitei-centric exercise incapable of delivering peace, justice or reconciliation. The organisation claimed that such a government would embolden the state machinery to pursue what it described as an agenda of domination, persecution and systematic subjugation of the Kuki-Zo community.

Against this backdrop, the Kuki Inpi Manipur said it has strongly dissuaded Kuki-Zo MLAs from associating with the proposed government. It maintained that no Kuki-Zo legislator should, under any circumstances, lend legitimacy to a political exercise that, according to the organisation, ignores the suffering, aspirations and political will of the Kuki-Zo people.

"At this highly sensitive and volatile juncture, the formation of a popular government is not only ill-advised but deeply provocative," the statement said. It added that such a move would neither restore normalcy nor heal the deep fractures caused by the ongoing conflict, but could instead further inflame tensions and push the state towards greater instability.

While clarifying that it does not claim the authority to decide whether a popular government should be formed, KIM asserted its moral right to appeal to Kuki-Zo MLAs to stay away from the proposed arrangement as a mark of respect for the sentiments of their constituents.

Rs.1 Crore Sanctioned for Lakhipur DSA Playground



OUR CORRESPONDENT

LAKEPUR: Assam Minister Kaushik Rai on Wednesday attended the 8th Assam Premier Club Championship 2025-26 organised by the Lakhipur Sports Association. On the same day, he laid the foundation stone for infrastructure development of the Lakhipur DSA Playground at LDSA Stadium, Pailapool.

The project has been sanctioned with an amount of 1 crore under the Barak Valley Development Department. The initiative aims to upgrade sports facilities and strengthen sporting infrastructure in the region.

The event was attended by

Lakhipur DSA President Rajdeep Goala, Secretary Debobrata Paul, and Dr. Suvrojit Chakraborty, along with sports lovers and local residents. Speaking on the occasion, Minister Kaushik Rai said the development will help local athletes get better facilities and encourage young sports persons to pursue sports seriously. He added that such projects create new opportunities for youth and promote a healthy sporting culture. The minister also said the government remains committed to holistic development, where sports and youth empowerment are given priority along with overall infrastructure growth in Barak Valley.

Nagaland recruitment issue raised in Lok Sabha as MP flags bias in SSC exams

NEW DELHI

A long-standing recruitment anomaly affecting youth from Nagaland was raised in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday, with Congress MP S. Supongmeren Jamir flagging what he described as systemic discrimination in Staff Selection Commission (SSC) examinations that has effectively excluded eligible candidates from the state.

Invoking Rule 377, Jamir drew the Centre's attention to recruitment practices that, he said, have resulted in chronic staff shortages in key central government institutions, particularly Doordarshan and All India Radio (AIR) in Nagaland.

Referring to an SSC notification published in Employment News/Rozgar Samachar on March 23, 2013, the MP said vacancies for Programme Executive and Transmission Executive (Production Assistant) posts in Doordarshan and AIR were advertised for Nagaland. Despite



15 posts being available, no candidate from the state could qualify, largely due to the mandatory Hindi Paper-II requirement in the examination.

Jamir argued that the language criterion has consistently placed aspirants from Nagaland at a disadvantage, even though English is the primary medium of education and official communication in the state. He maintained that the requirement has little relevance to job performance in broadcasting roles within the region.

Highlighting the extent of the manpower crisis, Jamir said Doordarshan Kendra, Kohima, has 89 vacancies out of 144 sanctioned posts. At All India Radio, Kohima, the Programme Section is functioning with just 15 personnel against a sanctioned strength of 79. Administrative staff strength stands at 34 against 90 sanctioned posts, while the Engineering wing has only 41 employees in place out of a sanctioned 91.

According to the MP, the large-scale vacancies have se-

verely affected the functioning, outreach and quality of public broadcasting services in the state, which play a crucial role in information dissemination, cultural preservation and regional representation in the national media.

Calling for immediate corrective measures, Jamir urged the concerned Union Ministry to initiate a special recruitment drive for Nagaland with suitable relaxation of the Hindi language requirement. He specifically recommended that both Paper I and Paper II of SSC examinations for such posts be conducted in English to ensure a level playing field for local candidates.

Reiterating his appeal, Jamir said recruitment policies must be inclusive and sensitive to the linguistic and educational realities of the Northeast, stressing that qualified youth should not be denied central government jobs due to language barriers unrelated to professional competence.

Heritage Sites at Mayang Imphal: MHRC Directs Protective Steps After Prolonged Administrative Inaction

IMPHAL

A citizen representation seeking statutory protection of two historically significant heritage sites of Mayang Imphal—Sati Khongnang (Sapam Leikai) and Meikibi Khongnang (Konchak Maning Leikai)—has resulted in formal directions by the Manipur Human Rights Commission (MHRC) to the State Archaeology Department to initiate protective measures.

The matter originated with a grievance filed on 21 August 2025 by Asem Roshan Singh, resident of Mayang Imphal, through the Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS), Ministry of Culture, Government of India, seeking preservation and statutory protection of the two heritage banyan trees of historical, cultural, and women's heritage significance.

Following the grievance, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Aizawl Circle, vide official communication dated 26 August 2025, forwarded the representation to the Superintendent, State Archaeology, Government of Manipur, for necessary action and submission of a report.

Despite the official referral, no written inspection report or action-taken communication was conveyed for a considerable period. Although a field visit was subsequently scheduled by the State Archaeology Department, the said visit was postponed on the scheduled day a few hours prior, without assigning any reason and without

communicating a revised date. No further written outcome was thereafter communicated.

In view of the prolonged inaction, a complaint was filed before the Manipur Human Rights Commission, which registered the matter as MHRC Complaint Case No. 54/14/15/2025.

By an interim order dated 23 December 2025, the Hon'ble Acting Chairperson of the Commission took cognizance of the complaint, noted the cultural and heritage significance of the sites, acknowledged the prompt action of the Ministry of Culture and ASI, and issued notice to the Superintendent, State Archaeology, Government of Manipur, directing submission of a response.

Subsequently, after examining the report placed before it, the Hon'ble Acting Chairperson of the Manipur Human Rights Commission, vide order dated 29 January 2026, observed that protection of heritage sites involves statutory procedures including physical survey, verification of historical and cultural value, and examination of land and revenue records.

The Commission disposed of the complaint with a direction to the respondent authority to take necessary steps to protect the two historical sites within a period of three months and to submit a compliance report before the Commission.

The Commission's orders place the matter under official monitoring and constitute institutional recognition of the heritage value of Sati Khongnang and Meikibi Khongnang.

Citing Gandhi, Himanta Biswa Sarma calls for 'civil disobedience' to push out illegal Bangladeshi migrants



GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said his government is pursuing a policy of "civil disobedience and non-cooperation," which he claimed is inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, to deal with illegal Bangladeshi migrants in the state by creating conditions that make it difficult for them to continue living in Assam. Speaking on the sidelines of a

Quest!

According to psychologists, exposure to nature allows us to remember and value important things like relationships, sharing, and community.

their own. Referring to eviction drives, he said, "Rather than sending them, they should be bound to go back themselves. Now we have evicted 1.5 lakh bigha of land, which they will never get back. That means they have to go back from Assam."

Drawing a distinction between popular agitations and administrative action, the Chief Minister said his approach differs from traditional movement-based politics. "The concept of andolan and mine is different. Mine is to create an environment where they cannot stay—don't give them land, car, rickshaw or carts. Then Bangladeshis will automatically go away," he said, claiming the strategy has yielded results.

He further claimed that despite daily pushbacks at the border, the government's actions have not been challenged in court. "Every day 20-30 people are being pushed back, but no one has dared to approach the court. Tell me whose system is better now," Sarma said, defending what he described as a dual approach of border enforcement and internal pressure.

Explicitly invoking Gandhian philosophy, Sarma said, "This is called civil disobedience and non-cooperation, followed by Mahatma Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi

taught us two things—non-cooperation and civil disobedience. When Assamese people start non-cooperation and civil disobedience, illegal Bangladeshi nationals will vacate our land automatically."

He also called for social and economic non-cooperation at the grassroots level. "Before boarding a rickshaw, one must think whether the person is indigenous or Miya. My system is civil disobedience and non-cooperation—don't give shelter to Miya of Bangladesh," he said.

At the same time, the Chief Minister stressed the need to distinguish between illegal migrants and indigenous Muslim communities. "Understand the difference between Miya and Muslim. Don't trouble indigenous Muslims in the name of Miya, and don't shelter Miya in the name of indigenous Muslim. We must have no connection with Miyas coming from Bangladesh," he said.

Sarma concluded by stating that while the government would not intervene if action is taken against illegal Bangladeshi migrants, it would oppose any harassment of indigenous Muslims. "If someone is troubling Miya Bangladeshi, I don't have to say anything. But if the same goes for indigenous Muslims, we will never support it," he added.

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Rahul Gandhi's 'traitor' jibe at Bittu sparks firestorm, Union minister retorts with 'desh ke dushman' jibe



NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH:

A sharp war of words between Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Union minister Ravneet Singh Bittu snowballed into a political storm on Wednesday with the BJP urging the Lok Sabha Speaker to take action against the LoP.

The face-off took place outside Parliament's Makar Dwar, where Rahul was standing with the suspended opposition MPs, who were protesting on the stairs.

While walking past the protesting MPs, Bittu said, "They are sitting here as if they have won a war." In response, Rahul said, "The thing is, here is a traitor walking right by. Take a look at the face. How he looks."

Rahul then extended his

hand towards Bittu and said, "Hello brother, my traitor friend. Don't worry, you will come back to the Congress." Bittu refused to shake hands, saying: "Desh ke dushman (enemies of the country)," pointing at Rahul.

A former close aide of Gandhi, Bittu had switched to the BJP ahead of the 2024 polls.

Later in a video statement, Bittu asked why Rahul didn't say such a thing to other MPs, but only to a Sikh? "I am the grandson of a martyr (former Punjab CM Beant Singh, who was assassinated by militants in 1995) and as long as I was in the Congress, it was fine. But, now that I am with the BJP, he is giving me such names," he said.

Stepping up the attack, the BJP fielded its Sikh leaders, including Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri and Delhi minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa, to accuse the Congress of harbouring the same "anti-Sikh mentality" that was on display at the height of the 1984 riots.

But Congress MP Sukhpal Singh Khaira said the word "my traitor friend" used by Rahul was to address Bittu as an individual who ditched the party in testing times. "It is by no means an insult to the Sikh community."

The 'traitor' jibe evoked reactions in Punjab, which will go to polls next year. Ashwani Sharma, BJP leader, said Rahul is trying to cover up his failures by using abusive language.

'My Didi in Bengal...': Kamal Hassan extends support to Mamata's fight against SIR, slams voter deletion

NEW DELHI

Actor-turned politician and Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) chief Kamal Hassan on Wednesday, in his maiden speech at the Rajya Sabha, expressed solidarity with West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in her fight against the Election Commission regarding the controversial Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.

Speaking at the Upper House, Kamal Hassan called the deletion of votes through SIR a disease plaguing the country and said the ECI is facilitating its spread.

Hassan called Bihar the "land of living dead" in apparent reference to irregularities in the final voter list after SIR, in which names of voters who were alive were deleted, citing death.

"Bihar has become the land of the living dead. We don't want this disease to spread across the country. My Didi from Bengal also lamented the same at the ECI office...she is litigating it in the Supreme Court as we speak now. ECI is surely facilitating the spread of this disease," he said.

Expressing concern regarding the deletion of voters in Tamil Nadu, he said, there could soon be "one crore living dead on paper."

Over 97 lakh voters were deleted from the draft electoral rolls published after the initial phase of SIR in TN in December last year. Several voters, deleted from the list after being branded dead, were found to be alive. Some of these voters have spoken to TNIE and expressed shock over their names being deleted from the electoral rolls.

The veteran actor demanded the "living dead to be resurrected" and urged action to prevent



the "impending disaster."

"I cannot pray to God to alleviate this impending disaster. My rationalist mind has already rejected the idea years ago. I won't pray to any government either.

I'm demanding that the living dead be resurrected. Not through miracles...we cannot wait for miracles, our lives are short. Act now," he said.

Hassan also slammed the ECI for deleting voters from the electoral rolls for minor spelling mistakes in their entries.

"Spelling mistakes are a curse only for languages, and modern

literature forgives these in favour of content, as does the internet, but the Election Commission obviously does not. EC doesn't mean English Coaches," he said.

Stressing that no government will hold power permanently, he said, "This democratic juggernaut will roll over differences, but should never roll over people. We will not allow it.

Nobody is immortal. No government can or should aim for permanency. No government in the history of this world has achieved it yet, and none ever will. This government also falls under the universal

political unwritten law."

Kamal Hassan's comments came amid relentless protests by opposition parties, including the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu and Trinamool Congress (TMC) in West Bengal against the SIR, alleging arbitrariness and mass disenfranchisement of voters, especially those from marginalised communities.

Upping the ante, Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday personally appeared before the apex court to argue her case against the conduct of SIR in Bengal.

INTERNATIONAL

'Everyone is terrified': Bangladesh's Hindu minority in fear as attacks rise and national election nears

DHAKA

Dipu Chandra Das, a 27-year-old Hindu garment worker, was accused in December by several Muslim colleagues of making derogatory remarks about the Prophet Muhammad.

The accusations drew a violent mob to his workplace. He was beaten to death, his body hung from a tree and set on fire.

Across Bangladesh, Hindus watched the recorded images on their phones with dread. Protests erupted in Dhaka and other cities, with demonstrators demanding justice and greater protections. The interim government, led by Muhammad Yunus, ordered an investigation, and police said that about a dozen people were arrested.

But human rights groups and Hindu leaders say the killing wasn't an isolated act, but part of a wider surge in attacks on the minority community, fueled by rising polarization, the reemergence of Islamists and what they describe as a growing culture of impunity.

Among Hindus, fear has grown more pervasive as the Muslim-majority nation moves toward a national election on Feb. 12. "No one feels safe anymore," said Ranjan Karmaker, a Dhaka-based Hindu human rights activist. "Everyone is terrified."

Hindus make up a small minority in Bangladesh, about 13.1 million people, or roughly 8% of the country's population of 170 million, while Muslims make up 91%.

The Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, an umbrella group representing minority communities, says it documented more than 2,000 incidents of communal violence since the ouster of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in a mass uprising in August 2024.

The group recorded at least 61 kill-

ings, 28 instances of violence against women — among them rape and gang rape — and 95 attacks on places of worship involving vandalism, looting and arson. It has also accused the Yunus-led administration of routinely dismissing or downplaying reports of such violence.

When contacted by The Associated Press for a response, an official from Yunus' press team declined to comment. The administration headed by Yunus has consistently denied claims that it has failed to ensure adequate protection for minority communities and insisted that most incidents aren't driven by religious hostility.

Previous elections in Bangladesh have also seen increases in violence, with religious minorities often bearing the brunt. But with Hasina's Awami League party barred from contesting elections and with her living in exile in India, many Hindus fear the worst as they have long been viewed as aligned with Hasina.

Karmaker, the rights activist, said that Hindus are often perceived as voting en masse for one side, a perception that heightens their vulnerability. He said that the community was also gripped by fear because of a culture of impunity, and near-weekly incidents, warning that in some parts of the country the Hindu community was facing "an existential crisis."

"The individuals involved in this violence are not being brought under the law, nor are they being held accountable through the justice system. It creates the impression that the violence will continue," Karmaker said.

A portrait of Dipu Chandra Das hangs alongside images of Hindu deities inside his home in Tarakanda village, Mymensingh District, Bangladesh, Jan. 9, 2026.

The surge in attacks against Hindus has unfolded alongside the reemergence of Jamaat-e-Islami,

Bangladesh's largest Islamist party, and its student wing. After years on the political sidelines because of bans, arrests and sustained crackdowns under Hasina's government, the party sees the election as an opportunity to reclaim influence.

Jamaat-e-Islami anchors a broader Islamist alliance of 11 parties, among them the student-led National Citizen Party, or NCP, whose leaders played a central role in the 2024 uprising.

As concerns grow over what its return could mean for religious minorities, Jamaat-e-Islami has moved to recast its public image, even though it advocates Shariah, or Islamic law. It has organized public rallies featuring Hindu participants and nominated a Hindu community leader as one of its candidates.

Meanwhile, NCP has pledged to support citizens facing religious discrimination and said that if elected, it would establish a dedicated unit within the Human Rights Commission to protect minority rights.

Political analyst Altaf Parvez said that such decisions were largely symbolic. He said that other political parties, including the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, had also failed minorities by nominating only a handful of candidates — a move, he said, that didn't reflect a genuine political commitment to inclusive politics.

Parvez said a systematic pattern of attacks was taking place in rural areas to inject more fear among the minorities before the vote. "It will impact the participation of the voters from the minority communities in the next elections too," he said.

Attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh have also inflamed tensions with neighboring India, prompting protests by Hindu nationalist groups and criticism from Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government.

India's Foreign Ministry recently

accused Bangladesh of downplaying a "disturbing pattern of recurring attacks" on Hindus, saying such violence was wrongly blamed on personal or political disputes. Bangladesh, in turn, described India's criticism as "systematic attempts" to stoke anti-Bangladesh sentiments.

The dispute has spilled into diplomacy and sporting events. Both sides have suspended some visa services and accused each other of failing to protect diplomatic missions. Protests in India led cricket officials to bar a Bangladeshi player from the Indian Premier League tournament, followed by Bangladesh's boycott of this month's World Cup in India.

Sreeradhha Datta, a Bangladesh expert at India's Jindal School of International Affairs, said that India's concerns were "legitimate."

"Hindus in Bangladesh are a very vulnerable group that can't defend themselves, and Yunus' administration is in exit mode and deliberately looking the other way," she said.

For those caught in the violence, the losses have been deeply personal.

When word of Das' killing reached his home village in Bangladesh's Mymensingh district, disbelief settled in among relatives and neighbors. Many said they watched images of his killing on their phones.

"When people say they saw it on their phones, my chest feels like it is going to burst," his father said. Das was known as a quiet, well-behaved man. He was also the sole breadwinner for his family, relatives said, and his death has left his wife and mother facing an uncertain future.

His mother, Shefali Rani Das, said the family is seeking justice for the killing. "They beat him, hung him from a tree, and burned him. I demand justice," she said.

'We see nothing new': Russia says India free to buy oil from any supplier amid Trump's claim



MOSCOW

India is free to buy oil from any country, and there is nothing new about its decision to diversify its crude suppliers, the Kremlin said on Wednesday amid US President Donald Trump's claim that New Delhi had agreed to stop buying Russian oil.

"We, along with all other international energy experts, are well aware that Russia is not the only supplier of oil and petroleum products to India. India has always purchased these products from other countries. Therefore, we see nothing new here," Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said while responding to a question.

He was asked about Trump's claim that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had agreed to stop buying Russian oil and switch to purchasing crude from the United States and, potentially, from Venezuela. A day earlier, Peskov said that Russia has not received any statements from India regarding the cessation of Russian oil purchases.

Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova on Wednesday said that the hydrocarbons trade is beneficial for both India and Russia.

"We remain convinced that

India's purchase of Russian hydrocarbons is beneficial to both countries and contributes to maintaining stability in the international energy market. We are ready to continue close cooperation in this area with our partners in India," Zakharova said at a press briefing.

Private Kommersant FM business radio noted that, unlike President Trump, PM Modi did not mention any agreement on stopping Russian oil imports.

Igor Yushkov, a leading expert at the National Energy Security Fund, said that Indian refiners cannot fully stop the import of Russian crude.

"The American shale oil they export is light grades, similar to gas condensate. Russia, on the other hand, supplies relatively heavy, sulfur-rich Urals. This means India will need to blend US crude with other grades, which incurs additional costs, meaning a simple substitution won't be possible," he said.

"Russia typically exports 1.5 million to 2 million barrels per day to the country. America won't be able to cover that volume. So, one gets the sense that Trump is simply trying to show that he won these trade negotiations and the deal was concluded entirely in line with

US demands," he said.

Last time, when Russia switched to the Indian market from European and American markets in 2022, it cut production by 1 million barrels per day. This led to prices rising to \$120 per barrel, and the US set an all-time high for gasoline and diesel prices, Yushkov recalled.

Trump last year imposed 50 percent tariffs on India, among the highest in the world, including 25 percent levies for its purchases of Russian energy.

India buys about 88 percent of its crude oil, which is converted into fuels like petrol and diesel, from overseas. Russian oil made up hardly 0.2 percent of all crude oil that India imported till 2021.

India, the world's third-largest oil importer, became the largest buyer of discounted Russian crude after Western countries shunned Moscow following its February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. India's import of Russian crude oil dropped to around 1.1 million barrels per day in the first three weeks of January, from an average of 1.21 million bpd in the previous month and over 2 million bpd imports in mid-2025, according to data from real-time analytics company Kpler.

Steady, Not Splashy: How Union Budget 2026 Shapes the Indian Household's Finances

The Union Budget for 2026-27, presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1, does not promise dramatic tax windfalls or headline-grabbing giveaways for Indian households. Instead, it signals continuity and caution at a time when families are still navigating high living costs, uneven income recovery, and an uncertain global economic environment. For the average household, the message of Budget 2026 is clear: stability first, stimulus later-if at all.

Rather than boosting consumption through tax cuts or expansive subsidies, the government has chosen a path centred on fiscal discipline, infrastructure-led growth, and gradual improvements in employment and incomes. The impact on households, therefore, is less immediate and more indirect, spread across areas such as taxation simplicity, healthcare affordability, education, jobs, and macroeconomic stability.

No Big Tax Relief, But a Simpler System
For salaried individuals and middle-income households hoping for a reduction in personal income tax rates, the Budget offers little in terms of direct relief. Tax slabs and rates remain unchanged under both the old and new regimes. Disposable incomes, therefore, are not set to rise overnight because of lower tax outgo.

However, the announcement of a new Income Tax Act, scheduled to come into force from April 2026, is a structural reform with potential long-term benefits for taxpayers. The government's stated objective is to simplify tax laws, reduce ambiguity, and minimise litigation. India's tax system has long been criticised for its complexity, frequent amendments, and scope for disputes, all of which impose hidden costs on households in the form of professional fees, time spent on compliance, and uncertainty over future liabilities.

For first-time taxpayers, young professionals, and small business owners, a clearer and more predictable tax framework could ease financial planning and reduce stress, even if it does not immediately increase take-home pay. In that sense, the reform is less about generosity and more about governance.

Targeted Relief for Overseas Spending
While broad-based tax relief is absent, the Budget does extend targeted concessions in specific areas of household spending. One notable measure is the reduction of Tax Collection at Source (TCS) to 2 per cent on overseas education, medical expenses, and tour packages. This move is likely to benefit urban, middle- and upper-middle-income families that are increasingly sending children abroad for higher education or seeking specialised medical treatment overseas.

Outward remittances under the Liberalised Remittance Scheme have crossed USD 25 billion annually in recent years, underscoring the growing relevance of such expenses in household budgets. Although the reduction in TCS does not lower the final tax liability-since it can be adjusted against total tax payable-it does ease cash flow pressures by reducing upfront deductions.

For families managing large education loans or medical bills, this modest change can make overseas expenses slightly more manageable, even if it does not fundamentally alter affordability.

Healthcare: Small Steps Toward Lower Costs

Healthcare remains one of the most significant financial risks for Indian households, with out-of-pocket expenditure accounting for nearly 60 per cent of total health spending. Against this backdrop, the Budget's decision to exempt customs duty on several critical medicines, including drugs used in cancer treatment and rare diseases, carries tangible significance. Lower import duties can translate into reduced prices for life-saving medicines, easing the burden on families facing long-term or high-cost treatments. While the impact will vary depending on supply chains and pricing behaviour, the direction of the policy is clearly pro-consumer.

That said, the Budget stops short of announcing any large-scale expansion in health insurance coverage or direct subsidies for medical care. The relief, therefore, is selective rather than systemic, helping specific categories of patients rather than transforming household healthcare economics as a whole.

Prices, Inflation, and the Infrastructure Bet

At a time when households are sensitive to food, fuel, and essential commodity prices,



the Budget consciously avoids broad consumer subsidies. There are no sweeping announcements on fuel tax cuts or food price interventions. Instead, the government has doubled down on supply-side strategies, particularly infrastructure investment, as its primary tool for managing inflation over the medium term.

Capital expenditure has been raised to ₹12.2 lakh crore for 2026-27, up from ₹11.2 lakh crore in the previous year-an increase of around 8 per cent. The focus remains on transport, logistics, urban infrastructure, and connectivity. In theory, better roads, ports, railways, and digital infrastructure reduce the cost of moving goods and services, which can eventually help stabilise prices for consumers.

However, such benefits are neither immediate nor guaranteed. Infrastructure-led cost efficiencies take time to materialise and are influenced by broader market dynamics. Moreover, revenue expenditure continues to grow faster in relative terms, and government borrowing remains significant. A substantial portion of borrowed funds goes toward servicing interest payments, limiting the net developmental impact of new debt.

For households, this means that relief from high prices, if it comes, will be gradual and indirect rather than swift and visible.

Employment and Income Prospects Take Centre Stage

Perhaps the most consequential aspect of Budget 2026 for households lies in its emphasis on employment and income generation. Rather than stimulating consumption directly, the government appears to be betting on job creation as the more sustainable way to improve household finances.

The continued push toward infrastructure, manufacturing, MSMEs, and services is designed to generate employment, particularly in Tier II and Tier III cities. As new industrial corridors and growth centres emerge, the expectation is that job opportunities will expand beyond major metros, easing migration pressures and broadening income sources.

The Budget also seeks to strengthen the link between education, skills, and employment. Proposals such as setting up universities near industrial corridors, expanding vocational and professional training, and creating a High-Powered Education to Employment and Enterprise Standing Committee reflect an attempt to align learning outcomes with labour market needs.

For young people entering the workforce, these measures could translate into better employability and more stable career paths over time. For households, especially those supporting students and early-career earners, improved job prospects matter more than one-time tax breaks.

Fiscal Discipline and the EMI Factor

Another indirect but important household consideration is the government's

commitment to fiscal discipline. By targeting a fiscal deficit of 4.3 per cent of GDP, the Budget sends a signal of macroeconomic stability to financial markets.

Lower fiscal risk helps contain inflationary pressures and supports stable interest rates. For households with home loans, vehicle loans, education loans, or credit card debt, interest rate stability can be as valuable as direct fiscal incentives. Even small changes in lending rates can significantly affect monthly EMIs over the life of a loan. In this context, the absence of populist spending may actually work in favour of borrowers, particularly middle-class families juggling multiple financial commitments.

A Budget of Patience, Not Populism

Taken together, Union Budget 2026-27 reflects a deliberate policy choice. Instead of short-term giveaways aimed at boosting consumption, the government

has opted for a framework built on steady growth, infrastructure investment, employment generation, and fiscal prudence. For the average Indian household, the immediate gains are limited. Taxes remain the same, prices are not dramatically lower, and subsidies are restrained. Yet the Budget's architects appear to be prioritising long-term income security and economic resilience over instant gratification.

If the strategy succeeds-if infrastructure projects deliver efficiencies, if job creation accelerates, and if inflation remains contained-the real payoff for households will come in the form of more secure employment, stable incomes, and predictable financial conditions. In that sense, Budget 2026 asks Indian families for patience, offering reassurance rather than rewards, and stability rather than spectacle.

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NEIR Strengthens Call for Peace and Dialogue Amid Manipur Crisis



The North East Integration Rally (NEIR) has steadily emerged as an important platform for peace, dialogue, and regional unity in the Northeast. As Manipur continues to grapple with prolonged unrest and social tension, the relevance of such initiatives has grown significantly. Recent NEIR engagements have consistently highlighted one shared objective: the restoration of peace and harmony in Manipur.

During this period, the Governor of Manipur has repeatedly emphasised the need for calm, unity, and constructive engagement among communities. These priorities closely align with NEIR's approach, which focuses on dialogue-driven solutions rather than confrontation. NEIR's meetings are characterised by steady, serious discussions aimed at fostering understanding and trust.

As part of NEIR's outreach, Meghalaya MLA, A L Hek visited Manipur and held a meeting with the Governor A. K Bhalu, during which the prevailing situation in the state and the urgent need for peace were discussed. The interaction highlighted the importance of regional cooperation and collective responsibility in addressing challenges faced by Manipur.

NEIR's foundational emphasis on inclusive dialogue has been shaped by sustained efforts from those associated with the initiative since its inception. Biswadeep Gupta has played a key role in conceptualising and strengthening NEIR's peace-oriented framework, with a consistent focus on di-

alogue, community participation, and regional integration.

The platform has brought together social workers, community elders, youth representatives, civil society members, and lawmakers, enabling open conversations on loss, mistrust, and fear, while also fostering hope for reconciliation and coexistence.

In addition to institutional engagement, A L Hek, through his continued involvement in NEIR activities, has supported calls for restraint, trust-building, and rejection of violence. His participation has reinforced the message that peace in Manipur is a shared concern across the Northeast.

A recent NEIR appeal placed particular emphasis on Manipur, calling for an immediate end to violence and urging all stakeholders to prioritise the protection of lives and respect for all communities. The appeal was humanitarian in nature, underscoring the belief that peace must come before political or ideological differences.

NEIR's continued engagement through follow-up meetings, local-level interactions, and public appeals reflects its belief that peace-building is a long-term effort. Acting as a bridge between people and institutions, the platform promotes unity and understanding through sustained dialogue.

While the road to lasting peace in Manipur remains complex, initiatives like NEIR play a vital role in keeping dialogue alive during times of deep division. Through collective effort and regional solidarity, NEIR continues to reinforce a clear message: peace is essential, and without it, progress cannot take root.

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JANUARY 10-12, 2025

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10 JAN
NE Cultural Fest
 Any Form of Art and Cultural showcase can be showcased here.
 The Top performances will be invited to perform in the Main Event.
 Schools, Colleges, University Department, Individual & Group Competition.



11 JAN
Adventure Sports
 Trekking & Canoe, Obstacle Navigation, Sport Climbing, Disaster Management Technique, Water Sports.
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11 JAN
Barak Valley Conclave
 Potential, Issues and Challenges of Barak Valley by different youth organizations.
 Includes: MOCA, and D-governance and reform for rural, urban, and semi-urban areas, and present and future. Participation through invitation only. Different rewards are provided.



10 JAN
Book Club
 KRC Foundation Book Club. 10 Books. 10 Days.

JAN'25
Online Global Fest
 All can participate online and send a video clip on Poems, Songs, and Dance Performances, Bengali, English, Hindi & Manipuri. Last Date: 31st December 2024.

12 JAN
River-Climate Conclave
 Climate Change will influence on Climate Change, pollution and river flooding. The Conclave will focus on the importance, technical and protection of River Barak. Training & Geography competition and exhibition on River Barak, Climate Change.



10 JAN
Media Conclave
 All can participate online and send a video clip on Poems, Songs, and Dance Performances, Bengali, English, Hindi & Manipuri. Last Date: 31st December 2024.



10-12 JAN
Science Studio
 Real a glimpse of Science to its new heights. Class VI-XI | Teachers | Seniors, Administrators | Parents. Raw science out of textbooks into real-life experiences of students.

10-12 JAN
E-Sports
 Full Blown! Don't miss! CASH PRIZES | Trophy



DEC'24-JAN'25
Photography
 Online Photography Contest: River Barak | NE India | Art & Culture of NE | NE Culture. Real-Time Photography Contest of 'Barak Festival 2025'.





10 JAN
Band Night
11 JAN
Musical Night



10-12 JAN
Book Bank
 #NoLike Campaign Book Bank at Silchar, Assam | online

10-12 JAN
Book Club
 Meet Authors, Publishers, Read & Discuss, Buy and Sell Books

Painting Carnival
 Water Colour and Paint and Draw with Campaign

11 JAN
film festival
 Award-Giving Ceremony | Film from Mizoram. Short Films from Barak Valley, NE India, W's. Media Talk | Exhibitions | Meet & Greet.





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