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PERSPECTIVE
A popular Norwegian adage says, "There's no bad weather, just bad clothing choices."

No Evidence of Gang Rape on Silchar Bypass, Say Sources; Police Warn Against Rumours

SILCHAR
Amid rising tension over social media claims of a gang rape near Silchar's Chenakuri Road Bypass, sources have indicated that no such incident has been confirmed, even as Cachar district police continue their investigation.

Over the past few days, social media platforms were flooded with allegations that a woman had been gang-raped in the bypass area, sparking public outrage and street protests. Several political organisations sought clarification from the Senior Superintendent of Police, Cachar, while different groups staged demonstrations demanding swift and exemplary action against those responsible.

A section of women protesters called for the accused, if found guilty, to be tried in a fast-track court near Goldighi Mall and awarded stringent punishment.

Addressing a press conference, Silchar Additional Superintendent of Police Rajat Kumar Paul said that Case No. 177 remains under active investigation and involves multiple aspects that are being carefully examined.

He stated that Cachar police are probing all angles, including reports of alleged financial transactions linked to the case. Investigators are examining who gave and received money and under what circumstances. Paul asserted that strict legal action would be initiated against anyone against whom credible evidence emerges.

The officer clarified that the medical examination report is a confidential document and cannot be disclosed publicly. However, sources indicated that the medical findings received by the police do not point to evidence of gang rape.

WHO SAID WHAT



Assam's changing demography is an alarming call. Keeping this in mind, BJP will focus on safeguarding most constituencies where protecting Assam's future remains our priority.
- Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM Assam.

High-Level Preparations Underway as PM Modi Set to Visit Silchar on March 14



SILCHAR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to visit Silchar on March 14, with the Cachar district administration stepping up elaborate preparations ahead of the high-profile tour. On Tuesday, Assam Chief Secretary Dr. Ravi Kota, Director General of Police Harmeet Singh, Minister Kaushik Rai and Minister Krishnendu Paul conducted a joint inspection of the proposed venue for the Prime Minister's public meeting. The team reviewed arrangements relating to security deployment, traffic regulation and infrastructure preparedness in and around the Ramnagar Bypass area, where the rally is expected to be held.

A high-level review meeting was subsequently convened at the office of the Cachar District Commissioner. The meeting was attended by senior administrative and police officials, including the District Commissioner, Superintendent of Police and heads of key departments. Discussions focused on security protocols, crowd management strategies, traffic diversion plans and inter-departmental coordination to ensure the smooth conduct of the Prime Minister's programme.

Officials informed that the Prime Minister will address a major public gathering at Ramnagar Bypass. During the visit, he is also slated to lay the foundation stone for the proposed Guwahati-Barapani-Panchgram National Highway expressway project and the Silchar flyover, both of which are expected to significantly enhance connectivity in the Barak Valley region. The administration has begun mobilising resources for venue preparation, installation of barricades, deployment of security personnel and streamlining of vehicular movement in the town. Special emphasis is being placed on multi-layered security arrangements in line with standard protocols for visits by the Prime Minister. The announcement of the visit has generated considerable enthusiasm across Silchar and adjoining areas, with officials asserting that comprehensive measures are being put in place to ensure a seamless and secure programme.

"Such incidents will not be tolerated at all": Jyotiraditya Scindia

NEW DELHI

Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia asserted that incidents like the alleged racial abuse and criminal intimidation of three women from Arunachal Pradesh in South Delhi's Malviya Nagar will not be tolerated at all. Scindia said that strict action has been initiated in the matter, and all relevant legal provisions have been invoked. Earlier today, the Delhi Police on Wednesday said that the accused Ruby Jain and her husband, Harsh, have been arrested in connection with the alleged racial abuse and criminal intimidation of three women from Arunachal Pradesh in South Delhi's Malviya Nagar area. According to the police, the investigation is now being conducted by an officer of the rank of Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP), and the probe is being closely supervised by senior officials. The Delhi Police further informed that during the course of the investigation, relevant provisions of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act have been invoked based on the material available on record. Earlier, the case was registered at Malviya Nagar

Police Station in South Delhi against two residents for allegedly racially abusing and criminally intimidating three women tenants from the North-Eastern region, police said. The FIR at PS Malviya Nagar has been registered under BNS Section 79 (Word, gesture, or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman), Section 351(2) (Punishment for criminal intimidation), Section 196 (Promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, etc) and Section 3(5) (Acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention.) The incident occurred on the afternoon of February 20, 2026, when three women, residing as tenants in an apartment complex in Malviya Nagar, were overseeing electrical installation work in their flat.

As an electrician began drilling, dust from the construction allegedly filtered down into the premises of the neighbours living below. This minor environmental grievance quickly turned into a volatile confrontation. The complainants alleged mental harassment and humiliation, though no physical injuries were reported.

Manipur CM Seeks Centre's Nod for Imphal Elevated Highway, Rs 12,000-Cr NH Upgrade



IMPHAL/NEW DELHI, FEB 25

Yumnam Khemchand Singh urged the Centre to prioritise construction of an elevated highway in Imphal and expedite a Rs 12,000-crore proposal to strengthen national highways across the state.

The Chief Minister met Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari in New Delhi and sought special attention to key infrastructure projects aimed at improving connectivity and easing congestion in Manipur.

According to an official statement issued by the Chief Minister's Secretariat, Singh apprised Gadkari of the status of ongoing and proposed road projects and stressed the urgency of addressing mounting traffic pressure in the

state capital.

Singh highlighted the need for an elevated highway in Imphal to tackle increasing vehicular congestion and streamline intra-city movement. He requested the Union Ministry to treat the proposal as a priority project, citing rapid urban growth and rising traffic density.

The proposed elevated corridor is expected to decongest arterial routes and enhance mobility within the capital region.

The Chief Minister also pressed for early clearance of a comprehensive Rs 12,000-crore project aimed at strengthening and upgrading 1,774 km of national highways in Manipur by 2026-27.

Officials said the proposal seeks to modernise existing highway stretches, improve road safety standards and enhance inter-district and interstate connectivity, crucial for economic growth and logistical efficiency in the landlocked state.

Gadkari assured the Chief Minister of all possible assistance from the Ministry and conveyed that the proposals submitted by the state government would receive positive consideration, the statement added. The meeting marked Singh's first formal interaction with the Union Minister since assuming office as Chief Minister on February 4. He was accompanied by Deputy Chief Ministers Nemcha Kipgen of the BJP and Losii Dikho of the Naga People's Front.

The outreach to the Centre signals the new government's push to accelerate infrastructure development, with a particular focus on road connectivity as a catalyst for economic integration and regional growth in Manipur.

APDCL to Suspend All Online Services for 36 Hours from Feb 28 for Cloud Upgrade

GUWAHATI

Assam Power Distribution Company Limited (APDCL) has announced a 36-hour shutdown of its entire digital infrastructure beginning the night of February 28, as part of a major migration to a cloud-based technology platform.

In an official communication issued on February 25, the state power utility said all public-facing portals and internal operational systems will remain inaccessible from 9 pm on February 28 until 9 am on March 2. The scheduled downtime is aimed at facilitating a comprehensive cloud migration designed to modernise and streamline the company's technological backbone.

According to APDCL, the temporary shutdown will affect a range of digital services widely used by electricity consumers across Assam. Key platforms that will remain unavailable during the maintenance window include ARMS, the Consumer Portal, EasyPay, MyBijulee, and BijuleeBandhu, along with other integrated applications linked to its service ecosystem.

During this period, consumers will not be able to access online bill payment facilities, recharge prepaid meters, lodge complaints, or manage their electricity accounts through the company's digital interfaces.

The suspension will apply not only to consumer-facing applications but also to internal administrative and operational systems. Officials indicated that backend processes and certain field operations could also experience limited disruption during the transition window.

Issuing an advisory ahead of the planned outage, APDCL has urged prepaid electricity consumers to maintain adequate balance in their accounts before the shutdown begins. The advisory is particularly significant for households and commercial establishments using prepaid smart metering systems, as failure to recharge in advance could result in supply interruptions during the service blackout.

Silchar Court Awards Life Term to Three in 2004 Munna Mazumder Murder Case



SILCHAR

In a landmark judgment delivered more than two decades after the crime shook the town, the Court of the Additional Sessions Judge (Fast Track Court), Cachar, on Wednesday sentenced three persons to life imprisonment in the sensational 2004 Munna Mazumder murder case. The court, presided over by Additional Sessions Judge Bankim Sharma, convicted cloth trader Dhanraj Surana, a resident of Swarupa Complex in Janiganj, Silchar, along with his two employees - Ratan Debnath and Rinku Deb alias Madhusudan Deb, both residents of Udharbond - under Sections 302/34 of the Indian Penal Code for murder committed with common intention.

The deceased, Munna Mazumder, a resident of Shiv Colony in Silchar, had been working at Surana Textiles, owned by Dhanraj Surana.

According to case records, the incident dates back to November 5, 2004, when Mazumder was taken to Silchar Medical College and Hospital by Surana and the two employees. Doctors at the hospital declared him brought dead. The circumstances surrounding his death triggered

widespread suspicion and unrest in the town.

As news of the incident spread, tension escalated across Silchar, prompting the district administration to impose curfew to prevent further deterioration of the law and order situation. The case quickly became one of the most talked-about criminal incidents in Cachar district at the time.

In the midst of the tense atmosphere, the victim's sister, Ratna Mazumder, lodged a First Information Report (FIR), alleging that her brother had been murdered. In her complaint, she named Dhanraj Surana, Ratan Debnath and Rinku Deb as the accused. Following the FIR, police launched an investigation, collected evidence, examined witnesses and eventually filed a charge sheet against the three accused. The case was subsequently committed to the Sessions Court, where trial proceedings continued over the years.

After examining witnesses and evaluating the evidence presented during the prolonged trial, the Fast Track Court on February 25, 2026, found all three accused guilty of murder with common intention.

In addition to life imprisonment, the court imposed a fine of Rs. 20,000 on each of the convicts. In default of payment, they will have to undergo an additional six months of simple imprisonment. The verdict brings closure to a case that had remained etched in public memory in Silchar for over two decades, marking a significant moment in the district's judicial history.

Compensation Row Halts Silchar-Saurashtra Corridor Work Again in Dima Hasao

NEW DELHI/GUWAHATI

Members of Parliament across party lines voiced concern over what they described as significant under-utilisation of funds earmarked for the Northeast during a meeting of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs.

The committee convened to examine the Demands for Grants for 2026-27 relating to the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER). During deliberations, several MPs flagged what they termed a worrying pattern of unspent allocations over successive financial years.

According to sources present at the meeting, MPs including Sanjay Raut, Supriya Sule, Derek O'Brien, and Naveen Jindal raised the issue, contending that funds allocated for development in the Northeastern states were not being fully utilised.

Members reportedly pointed out that in 2024-25, as much as 41 per cent of the budgetary allocation to DoNER remained unspent. In



the ongoing 2025-26 fiscal, the unutilised portion was said to stand at 36 per cent. MPs argued that such gaps defeat the purpose of enhanced allocations meant to accelerate infrastructure and socio-economic growth in the region.

Sources said a letter was submitted to the committee chairperson by the Trinamool Congress, detailing concerns over both fund utilisation and scheme implementation.

The letter allegedly highlighted discrepancies between targets and actual beneficiaries under the PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana, claiming that nearly 75 per cent of intended beneficiaries in the region remain uncovered. MPs urged closer scrutiny of scheme rollout mechanisms, especially in remote and conflict-affected districts.

The communication also reportedly pointed to a 25 per cent vacancy rate in sanctioned posts within the DoNER Ministry, arguing that staffing shortages could be contributing to delays in project execution

and fund disbursal.

In addition, pending central disaster relief dues to West Bengal, amounting to approximately Rs 53,696 crore, were cited in the letter as an example of fiscal bottlenecks that require urgent attention.

Committee chairperson Radha Mohan Das Agrawal is understood to have directed Ministry officials present at the meeting to furnish detailed responses to the issues raised within three days.

Sources said the chairperson also informed members that the letter submitted by the TMC would be forwarded to the Union Home Ministry for its response. Officials were instructed to clarify the reasons for under-utilisation and outline corrective measures to ensure more efficient expenditure in the coming fiscal.

The panel also sought a separate, detailed note on fund utilisation in Manipur, reflecting concerns over the state's ongoing challenges and the need for targeted developmental intervention.

As per the Union Budget, the allocation for the DoNER Ministry in 2026-27 stands at Rs 6,812.3 crore, marking a substantial increase over the revised estimate of Rs 4,479.2 crore for the previous fiscal.

Of the total outlay, Rs 2,500 crore has been earmarked for the North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS), Rs 2,300 crore for the Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North East Region (PM-DevINE), and Rs 825 crore for schemes under the North East Council.

MPs emphasised that while higher allocations are welcome, actual implementation and timely utilisation remain critical. Several members reportedly underscored that unspent funds weaken the case for enhanced future allocations and undermine development commitments made to the region.

The committee is expected to take up the matter again after receiving the Ministry's written responses.



VOLUME:1, ISSUE 711

CHINA AND BRITAIN BREAK ICE WITH STARMER'S VISIT

China and the EU experienced a breakthrough in their ties last month with British PM Keir Starmer's visit to China. It comes at a time when the UK is looking for possible alternatives to US' forced protectionism, just like the other middle rung powers. Sir Keir's visit between 28-31st January is the first by a UK prime minister to China since Theresa May in 2018. Both countries sought to resolve economic barriers in trade but no sweeping concessions were made. Similar visits by several other countries of the European Union are also reflective of the change in the winds.

Agreements on visas, services, healthcare, green technology and finance were made; most importantly, commercial announcements from the pharmaceutical firm AstraZeneca came through, which promised to invest USD15bn (£11bn) in China over the next four years. This is the company's biggest investment in China till date. There were other deals with the Pop Mart, the toymaker behind Labubu dolls, e-commerce group JD.com, and battery giant CATL. Besides, Chinese automaker Chery Commercial Vehicles promised to establish a regional headquarters in Liverpool and is expected to partner with the UK's Jaguar Land Rover for its British operations. There were four economic and trade cooperation documents signed in all: an MoU on export cooperation with China, an MoU on launching a joint feasibility study on a China-Britain services trade agreement and an MoU on establishing a bilateral partnership on services; and lastly, an MoU on strengthening the work of the China-UK Joint Economic and Trade Commission with an aim to consolidate the commission's role as a platform for bilateral economic and trade policy dialogue and trade and investment promotion.

Tianjin-headquartered life sciences group Asymchem also declared an intention of major expansion of its UK operations, which will add 150 jobs over the next five years. Chinese energy storage manufacturer HiTHIUM pledged to invest £200 mn in Britain and to add 300 jobs in the country. Hence, employment generation was one of the larger focus areas of the meet. In addition, the visit also achieved a diplomatic thaw and renewed high-level dialogue. Both sides reinstated parliamentary, people-to-people and business exchange mechanisms. Starmer's visit also promised to expand cooperation between UK brands like Welsh manufacturer Cultech and British bikemaker Brompton to increase exports to China.

The visit is more significant because Britain choose to engage with China despite US president Donald Trump's warning against closer business ties with China; that it would be 'very dangerous'. Starmer envisioned that the engagement with China would help in balancing economic opportunities with concerns about security threats and human rights. Not only the UK, but many other countries have paid subsequent visit to the emperor of the 'middle kingdom'. There is a broader understanding amongst the EU nations that pragmatic engagement with China is necessary if they hope to sustain the momentum of growth in their economies in this era of global uncertainty. It also reflects a broader debate in Western policy circles about whether to engage pragmatically with China without compromising on strategic principles. The Transatlantic alliance has been the corner stone of European politics so far, but today, due to conflicts, economic stagnation and growing questions over long-term strategic dependencies, the European countries are undertaking a necessary recalibration.

China's renewed ties with the UK signal that China is likely to reassert itself as a dependable partner for the West despite Trump's 'my way or highway' attitude. The British PM went so far as to comment that China and its overcapacity was 'marginally less acute a concern' in comparison to the vagaries of Trump's regime. For China, this means increased acceptance of the narrative of the 'community with a shared future for the mankind'. China has time and again expressed concern over the European Commission's unfair market competition by deciding to launch in-depth investigations into the Chinese wind power companies under the EU's Foreign Subsidies Regulation (FSR). In return, China also promised to expand market access for British companies and improve its business environment that has deteriorated in recent years.

Now, with the EU suddenly showing interest in renegotiating the terms of trade, China has an opportunity to bolster its foreign policy objectives through the trade agreements. Starmer's visit was followed by several other EU leaders. Their alacrity to engage was reflected in the statements of the leaderships as China and Finland pledged to 'deepen mutually beneficial cooperation and jointly uphold the multilateral international order,' following a meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Finnish Prime Minister Petteri Orpo in Beijing. During these trips, Xi Jinping encouraged expanded cooperation in areas including energy transition, the circular economy, agriculture, forestry, and technological innovation.

This renewed engagement with the European Union countries, also demonstrates an opportunity for China to promote and demand loyalty to its 'One-China policy' amongst the EU nations, which often remains a lynchpin amongst the two sides. It also demonstrated how the two sides are willing to overlook past misunderstanding over critical infrastructure security, espionage risks and bolster technology dependency on China, in a view to create more jobs and sustain a positive growth over the coming decades. In a foray of articles published in the Chinese media, an article in the China Daily by Maya Majueran stands out, as it emphasises how the coming together of these two entities reflects a belief that 'engagement, despite its frustrations, remains preferable to containment or confrontation and an acknowledgment that the future international order will be shaped not by the design of any single nation, but through the complex, often messy interactions of many.' China's clarion call to engender and support the bulwark of a multipolar world then, has finally found salience and is shaping up amongst others and the EU is now keen to be an active and incremental partner.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

You can destroy your now by worrying about tomorrow.

Janis Joplin

ENLARGEMENT IMPERATIVE IS EU ON ADEQUATE PATH?

PROF. DANUTA HÜBNER

The unprecedented environment in which Ukraine has been preparing for European Union membership, reminds the fight for its future goes beyond the battlefield and security guarantees, including its reconstruction and integration. This accession is not only about the benefits of membership for Ukraine, but about it taking its share of responsibility for the European continent. In short, this is a path toward a stronger and more resilient Europe, a historic opportunity for Ukraine and Europe regarding development of new markets, strengthening of supply chains, and of stability in a region historically prone to instability.

Ukraine's close ties with the EU did not begin with its application for membership. They have been growing since 1994, when the first EU-Ukraine partnership agreement was signed. At that time, and after 2004 enlargement, both European Commission (EC) and European Parliament (EP), maintained close contacts with Ukraine in support of institutionalising the relations, including trade, single market, regional policy and democracy.

It's also true that when at start of 1990s preparing the first ever Eastern enlargement had begun, Ukrainian politicians and officials were expressing their deep worries that this major Eastern enlargement would be a new European iron curtain.

There are many similarities between the Eastern enlargements of EU in 2004, 2007 and 2013, but differences too. Certainly, their enormous geostrategic importance and democratic consolidation of this part of the continent gave a strong base for making this gigantic step. From the economic point of view, it was both a challenge and an unprecedented opportunity. But it was also a huge administrative effort for countries with no tradition of civil service, no capabilities of horizontal coordination, or territorial solidarity, with dominant vertical structures, low wages and social status of those employed in public administration.

In 1990s, when countries of Central and Eastern Europe were preparing for EU accession, the world around was divided. New countries emerged practicing democracy, but assertive regimes of autocrats and dictators remained in the neighbourhood. Accession to EU was a guarantee of the irreversibility of the transition to a market economy and democracy, freedom and security.

Today, geopolitical polarisation is much stronger and unpredictable. The EU is undergoing a profound revolution, reinventing itself to boost its security, competitiveness potential and its global role. Transatlantic relations, which were mutually reinforcing, are no longer so. Political will among 27 member states

to move forward on the new "big bang enlargement" doesn't seem cast in stone.

While before 2004 opponents of enlargement came up with a theory the Union should first deepen and only then expand, the only reform imperative was related to political reform. Eventually, the treaty was amended. This was considered justified by the necessity of institutional adjustments.

In 2022, when Ukraine and Moldova received the candidate status, joining other candidate countries, the intention was to demonstrate to Putin what was Europe's preferred political order on our continent. That was European geopolitical reaction to aggression. While previous Eastern enlargements were about democracy, the current one is first about security. Yet security is not part of the accession negotiations. While not all EU members are NATO members, enhanced defence cooperation implies collective defence efforts. Also, we see growing presence of China in candidate countries, expanding its influence, linked to security.

The questionnaires and the screening could have allowed the Commission to link better enlargement and defence policies to evaluate candidates' readiness for a geopolitically stronger Europe and alignment of defence sectors. Of course, greater EU oversight could be rejected by candidates or member states, but then another mechanism would be needed for the enlarged Union to ensure defence cooperation leading to integration and interoperability in the security domain, for non-NATO states.

There are some aspects of the current enlargement process, where doubts emerge regarding its adequacy to the challenges and forces behind it. The abuse by some member states of using negotiation blocking power. This is not a novelty, but its geopolitical and ideological nature is. The tradition of blocking accession negotiations started with Greece blocking in 2008 Macedonia, preparing to join NATO and the most advanced candidate for membership in Western Balkans. The agreement was reached in 2018, but then the veto came from Bulgaria demanding from the Northern Macedonia a change of its constitution.

Undoubtedly both vetoes had dramatically negative impact not only on the enlargement process but also on political situation in the candidate country. Hungary vetoes the initiation of negotiations with Ukraine, pairing it with Moldova. It is true for continuation of the system where all elements of negotiation process are approved through unanimity. This is not demanded by the treaties and is a sheer political practice.

There seemed to be understanding that Ukraine's accession cannot be considered in the cost and benefit perspective only.

There is hardly any public visibility of a debate about how EU will benefit from this enlargement economically and geopolitically, and how the global influence of Europe will be strengthened. The same is true for prevailing understanding that Ukraine's accession would strengthen the EU competitiveness and innovation potential.

A deeper reflection on the new enlargement takes place mostly in some European think tanks. Lack of political understanding of the risk related to extending the negotiation period, in particular in case of Ukraine, leading to a kind of permanent candidate status, known only too well by some candidates from Western Balkans, not to mention Turkey, generates a risk that as time goes by, especially as the war drags on, public opinion in EU could shift towards perceiving Ukraine as a burden.

Experience shows negotiations shouldn't last more than four years. There might also be French referendum on the next enlargement, to be decided by newly elected President in 2027 elections in France. This will decide on Europe's integration.

While this enlargement seems to be a European imperative, its link with European reforms, not long ago seen as necessary, has been lost. At same time the EC President made it clear there's no appetite for Treaty change. But she has announced a new generation of Accession Treaty. That might imply redefinition of what membership means which sounds deeply controversial or that those ready to join from day one would not be granted full rights as member states enjoy. It seems this approach goes beyond transition periods or enhanced cooperation and implies some sort of safeguards followed by additional verification mechanisms— meaning going back to mechanism applied to Bulgaria and Romania, which didn't pass a test of effectiveness.

We might be back to the concept of enlargement based on the principle "all but institutions". The Union would wait first for its own political will to introduce institutional reform and then proceed with full rights for new members. So, it would be a solution without legal basis. This approach might lead to a different from already established concept of progressive enlargement.

When it was proposed by EC it was not trusted by Ukrainians, who saw it as a delaying full accession factor. Potentially redefined progressive integration might be used as an integration mechanism for a slower process. That might mean the new generation of Accession Treaty could offer progressive integration which would be rather a regressive one.

A commitment for such a review was made by the Commission President in EP in March 2024. In this context several re-

search institutions made proposals regarding the cost of this enlargement for the European budget. The commitment was several times postponed, the last date mentioned was the November 4th, combining the policy review with enlargement package 2025. Again, there was no report on that date. In October 2025, the EP has adopted their own report.

It is good to hear from EC that enlargement is the best geopolitical investment of the Union. It's clear that Russian invasion on Ukraine and political situation in Belarus are a proof of the fail-

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

I welcome the hike in NRI investment limit. It will unlock 'Diaspora Capital.' However, we must also ask why FIIs and foreign portfolio investors are pulling money out of India. In Parliament, I acknowledged the enhancement in the NRI investment limit. It gives nearly 32 million NRIs a bigger window to invest in India. But it only came after foreign investors pulled out about 23 billion in the last one year. Along with opening the door for NRIs, the government must address the underlying reasons behind the foreign money outflow. Because if we desire 'sustainable capital flows', then we must restore confidence, not just raise limits.

~ Raghav Chadha, MP (RS)



ure of both European neighbourhood and enlargement policies. But between February 2022 and beginning of 2026 four years have passed, accession negotiations with Ukraine cannot be triggered since one member state is blocking them.

Meanwhile, Chinese expansion in Europe has exploded. The failure of presenting the reform of policies, shows rather a cautious position of EC in context of ambiguity of Council. The possibility of the big enlargement is off the table. Whatever the enlargement model will be, and I think the most likely a kind of regatta approach will be reality, one day the moment will be reached when there will be the Union of 35.

And it's unimaginable that one day the EU could say to candidates that it's not ready to offer them membership. There is no reason why a coalition of the willing could not launch such a debate. It is very important that the Union spares no effort and does not allow that in public domain appear ideas that are taking the credibility of the enlargement process down. This is undermining Europe's objective to enhance its global position, its democracy consolidation, its security.



Manipur Cabinet Expansion May Be Delayed After Delhi Talks, Says Dy CM Losii Dikho

IMPHAL

Deputy Chief Minister of Manipur Losii Dikho on Wednesday indicated that the expansion of the BJP-led government in the state may not take place immediately, stating that central leaders have given no specific signal regarding the induction of more ministers.

Speaking to reporters upon his arrival at Imphal Airport after a five-day visit to New Delhi, Dikho dismissed reports suggesting that a cabinet expansion would follow soon after his return.

Dikho, a leader of the Naga People's Front (NPF), had accompanied Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh and fellow Deputy Chief Minister Nemcha Kipgen to Delhi from February 21 to 25.

During the visit, the Manipur delega-



tion held meetings with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and senior leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Referring to the state cabinet, Dikho said central leaders have indicated that the Budget Session of the Manipur Legislative Assembly is likely to be held in March, but no explicit direction regarding cabinet expansion was conveyed.

Earlier in the day, Chief Minister Khemchand avoided interaction with the media upon arrival in Imphal and was escorted away under tight security, fuelling speculation that the much-anticipated ministry expansion could be delayed.

The new government led by Khemchand was sworn in on February 4, 2026, with a truncated council of ministers

comprising two Deputy Chief Ministers - Dikho and Kipgen - and two Cabinet Ministers, Govindas Konhoujam and Khuraijam Loken. Since its formation, the government has been functioning with only four ministers, none of whom have been assigned portfolios so far.

Sources indicated that the Centre is closely monitoring the situation in Manipur, with particular focus on restoration of peace and acceleration of development initiatives in the state.

During the Delhi visit, the Chief Minister also met BJP National General Secretary (Organisation) B. L. Santhosh to discuss possible expansion of the Council of Ministers, allocation of portfolios, organisational strengthening in Manipur and preparations for the 13th Manipur Legislative Assembly elections scheduled for 2027.

Sarma Says Congress Erred at Partition, Calls for Clearer Religious Definition of Nations

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday launched a sharp attack on the Indian National Congress, alleging that the party failed to exercise foresight at the time of India's Partition in 1947 and left critical issues unresolved, the effects of which, he claimed, are still being felt in the form of illegal infiltration. Addressing a press conference, Sarma said the question of cross-border migration should have been anticipated during the division of the country. "At the time of independence, when the country was partitioned, these things should have been thought about. We have now started driving out the Bangladeshis. We are driving out around 30 people daily. I regularly post about it on X, formerly Twitter. We will drive out more and do it better. We have also made a plan," he said.

The Chief Minister asserted that recent legal developments have strengthened the administration's hand in dealing with cases of illegal immigration. He said the Supreme Court has empowered Deputy Commissioners to take action in such matters. "No matter how much border fencing you do, people can still enter through natural gaps and ditches. These issues should have been addressed at the time of Partition," Sarma said, arguing that structural and policy decisions taken then have long-term implications. He further contended that the nature of the division between India and Pakistan lacked clarity in defining the character of the two nations. "The country was partitioned, and if it was done in this manner, people from Pakistan and Bangladesh would keep coming and one day make India disappear. What should have been done? India should have been declared a Hindu country and Pakistan a Muslim country, or both should have been declared Hindu-Muslim countries," he said.

NSF Slams Racial Attacks on Northeastern Women, Seeks Exemplary Punishment for Accused

DIMAPUR

The Naga Students' Federation (NSF) on Wednesday strongly condemned recent incidents of racial and physical attacks on women from the Northeast in different parts of mainland India, including an alleged case involving a woman from Nagaland.

In a statement, the federation said it stands in firm solidarity with the victims and all women from the region who have faced humiliation, intimidation and violence outside the Northeast.

The NSF described as "deeply disturbing" the reported incident involving a young doctor from Nagaland at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Gorakhpur, where she was allegedly stalked, subjected to obscene remarks and racial slurs, and physically intimidated. Calling it a "shocking reminder" of the persistent racial prejudice faced by citizens from the Northeast, the federation said such acts reflect entrenched discrimination that continues to endanger the safety and dignity of women from the region.

The NSF also referred to the reported harassment of three young women

from Arunachal Pradesh in New Delhi, stating that the incidents point to a troubling pattern of racial targeting.

While acknowledging that the incidents have drawn widespread condemnation from various quarters, the federation asserted that statements of outrage must be followed by concrete legal action.

"Condemnation alone is not enough," the NSF said, demanding stern and exemplary punishment for all those involved.

It called upon law enforcement authorities in the respective states to ensure immediate arrests, impartial and time-bound investigations, and strict enforcement of existing legal provisions. "If any leniency is shown, it will only embolden perpetrators and perpetuate a culture of racism and gender-based violence," the statement warned. Beyond punitive action, the federation urged authorities to adopt preventive measures to curb racial discrimination and ensure the safety of Northeastern citizens living and working in mainland India.

Congress-Rajior Dal Seat Talks Strained as Gaurav Gogoi Flags Concerns Over Ex-Congress Faces

GUWAHATI

Signs of strain have surfaced within Assam's Opposition camp ahead of the 2026 Assembly elections, with the Congress indicating discomfort over ongoing seat-sharing negotiations with Rajior Dal.

Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president Gaurav Gogoi on Wednesday acknowledged that discussions with Rajior Dal are progressing at different levels but admitted the situation is not as smooth as earlier anticipated.

"I have sent detailed reports to the party high command, including discussions that have been concluded and those that are still half-way," Gogoi said, adding that while he remains optimistic about an alliance, "it is not the same as before."

Concerns Over Former Congress Leaders

The Jorhat MP flagged particular concern over Rajior Dal fielding leaders who had either resigned from or been expelled by the Congress. The development, he suggested, has created internal unease



within the party.

"People know and understand everything," he remarked, indicating that the matter is under review at the party level.

While stopping short of announcing a breakdown in talks, Gogoi made it clear that any final decision on seat-sharing would be taken by the Congress central leadership.

"We will formally inform about the seat sharing and alliance talks. Our discussion of seat sharing has been concluded with multiple parties," he said, underscoring that established party conventions would be followed before any public declaration.

BJP Weighs In

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma entered the fray, cautioning the Congress against conceding minority-dominated constituencies to smaller alliance partners.

"There is no point denying that Congress has a strong presence in minority-dominated constituencies and a high probability of winning them. If those seats are given to Rajior Dal or Asom Jatiya Parishad (AJP), Congress may be deprived of sitting on the Opposition bench next time," Sarma told reporters in Jorhat.

Pointing to the arithmetic in the 126-member Assembly, he noted that a party needs at least 22 seats to

claim the post of Leader of the Opposition. "If Rajior Dal gets five seats, AJP one seat, and All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) wins two or three seats, then Congress will definitely lose the Opposition seat next year," he added. The BJP has repeatedly portrayed the Opposition's seat-sharing exercise as a zero-sum arrangement that could weaken the Congress institutionally, even if the alliance collectively performs well.

Despite uncertainty in talks with Rajior Dal, the Congress appears to have advanced negotiations with other regional players.

The party has reportedly cleared nine Assembly constituencies for the Asom Jatiya Parishad - Khowang, Barhampur, Binnakandi, Bajali, Dibrugarh, Saruapathar, Guwahati Central, Sadiya and Palashbari. Whether similar clarity will emerge in negotiations with Rajior Dal remains uncertain, as both sides navigate political sensitivities ahead of what promises to be a closely contested 2026 Assembly election in Assam.

Protests Erupt in Dispur Over Zubeen Garg Case; Fast-Track Court, NRI Arrests Demanded

GUWAHATI

Hundreds of protesters took to the streets of Dispur on Wednesday, demanding swift justice in the death case of Assam's cultural icon Zubeen Garg and pressing for the constitution of a fast-track court and the arrest of alleged accused persons residing abroad.

Members of Axomiya Yuva Mancha and Axomiya Mahila Mancha marched from Super Market towards Janata Bhawan, raising slogans and attempting to gherao the state secretariat complex.

Demand for Speedy Trial
The demonstrators alleged prolonged delays in the judicial process and accused the state government of failing to expedite proceedings. They called for the immediate establishment of a fast-track court to ensure time-bound

hearings in the case.

Security personnel were deployed at Last Gate to prevent the protesters from advancing towards Janata Bhawan, as tensions briefly escalated during the march.

Jadab Gogoi, Central Committee President of Axomiya Yuva Mancha, criticised what he termed the lack of visible progress in the case.

"The Prime Minister and the Union Home Minister visited Assam several times after the demise of Garg, but they never once visited his Zubeen Kshetra. They did not even mention the ongoing justice process," Gogoi said.

Issuing a political warning, he added, "We want to warn the Chief Minister - if Zubeen Garg does not get justice in the coming days, the government will fail to

get justice from the people in the 2026 elections."

Another protester questioned the handling of the investigation, particularly with regard to individuals reportedly present at the scene at the time of the incident.

"From Day 1, without any compromise, we have raised our voice for justice. The biggest concern is why the Chief Minister could not arrest the Singapore NRIs who were present on the same yacht. Five individuals were accused, but seven to eight others who were present were not. Is someone protecting them?" he asked.

The demonstrators demanded that those allegedly based in Singapore be brought to India to face legal proceedings, alleging that the investigation had failed to hold all present accountable.

"We are not going to accept dates after dates in court. We want

to know when justice will prevail. The accused in Singapore must also be brought here. How long will we wait?" another member said, criticising repeated adjournments.

Apart from seeking justice in the case, some protesters raised slogans against alleged political interference in the investigation. A section of participants also reiterated long-standing demands for sealing the Indo-Bangladesh border and deporting illegal Bangladeshi nationals from the state, linking broader governance concerns to the issue.

As security forces maintained a cordon to prevent the march from reaching Janata Bhawan, protest leaders said their agitation would continue if their demands were not addressed promptly.

The state government has not yet issued a fresh statement in response to Wednesday's protest.

Northeast's First Women's University Inaugurates Rs 29-Crore Permanent Campus in Jorhat

JORHAT

Marking a major step forward for women's higher education in the region, Assam Women's University on Wednesday formally shifted to its permanent campus at Kaliyapani in Teok under the Mariani Assembly constituency of Jorhat district, more than a decade after its establishment. The newly built campus, developed at an estimated cost of Rs 29 crore, sprawls across 58 bighas of land and was inaugurated by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

Describing the event as "historic", the Chief Minister said the state government would continue to extend financial and institutional support to help the university evolve into a leading centre of learning. "Today we have inaugurated the women's university, and in the coming days the state government will provide more funds for its development so that it becomes a powerful educational hub," he said.

Assam Women's University, the first women's university in the Northeast, was established following the passage of legislation in the Assam Legislative Assembly on July 15, 2013. It was formally inaugurated on September 11, 2014, under the initiative of then Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi.

In its formative years, the university operated from the premises of Assam Agricultural University before work on the permanent campus gathered pace.

On September 12, 2019, then Governor Jagdish Mukhi appointed Prof. (Dr.) Malini Goswami as the

institution's first Vice-Chancellor, laying the groundwork for its academic and administrative consolidation. Education Minister Ranaj Pegu, who was present at the inaugural ceremony, said that despite its establishment in 2013, the university had remained "largely neglected and overlooked" for nearly a decade. "After inaugurating the new buildings of Rabindranath Tagore University, Madhavdev University and Bhattadev University, today we are inaugurating the new building of Assam Women's University - one of the significant universities of the state. Though it was established in 2013, it remained largely neglected for the past ten years. Construction of the new campus has been underway for the last five years," Pegu said. Local MLA Rupjyoti Kurmi termed the completion of the permanent campus a proud moment not just for Jorhat or Assam, but for the entire Northeast. He expressed confidence that the institution would play a transformative role in promoting women's education and empowerment across the region.

Currently, the university runs 17 departments offering 46 academic programmes. It has implemented multiple skill development initiatives and adopted the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 framework to align with evolving national academic standards.

The institution has also secured accreditation from the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), strengthening its academic standing and institutional credibility.

MSFDS Applauds 'Boong' BAFTA Win, Calls It a Turning Point for Manipuri Cinema

BISWADEEP GUPTA

IMPHAL: The Manipur State Film Development Society (MSFDS) on Wednesday placed on record its profound appreciation of the historic BAFTA win of Boong, the debut feature written and directed by Manipuri filmmaker Laksmipriya Devi.

The acknowledgement came during the 16th Development Committee Meeting of the Society, chaired by Art & Culture Commissioner H. Gyanprakash Singh and attended by senior members of the state's film fraternity, including Oken Amakcham, Romi Meitei, Wungkhakhing Makang, Kh. Kuleswar Singh, the chairman of Film Forum Manipur, along with Joint Director G. Dharma Das representing the Department of Art & Culture, and the Society's secretary, Sunzu Bachaspatimayum.

Hailing the film's victory at the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) Awards in the Children and Family category, the Committee described the honour as a watershed moment for Manipuri cinema and for Indian filmmaking at large. Boong is the first Indian film to secure a BAFTA in this category—an accolade often regarded as Britain's equivalent to the Academy Awards.



Set against the fragile emotional landscape of childhood in conflict-affected Manipur, Boong tells the tender story of a young boy navigating friendship, fear, and fractured innocence amid social unrest. With quiet realism and lyrical restraint, Laksmipriya crafts a narrative that speaks to universal childhood experiences while remaining deeply rooted in the soil of Manipur. The film's international recognition affirms the power of regional storytelling to

transcend geography and language.

Members of the Committee noted that the achievement comes at a time when Manipur continues to grapple with social and ethnic tensions.

In such a climate, Boong stands as a reminder that art can restore dignity, refract narratives, and return global attention to the state for its creativity rather than its crises.

Chairing the meeting, the Commission-

er lauded Laksmipriya's accomplishment as bringing national glory and placing Manipur on the global cinematic map. The members collectively asserted that with focused institutional support, sustained infrastructure, and visionary policy intervention, Manipuri cinema is poised to scale greater heights. The BAFTA victory, they agreed, is not merely a personal milestone but a clarion call to strengthen the foundations of the state's film movement.

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Citing emails, Congress alleges Epstein laid foundation of India-Israel ties post-2014



NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday cited several email exchanges made public under the 'Epstein Files' in the US to allege that the foundation of the India-Israel relationship post-2014 was laid down and shaped by convicted American sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Congress' media and publicity department head Pawan Khera said India's foreign policy regarding Israel and Palestine has always been based on the 'two-nation' theory but an "America-Israel lobby" changed the state and direction of the decades-old foreign policy.

"Jeffrey Epstein is a notorious sex offender for the common people, but a hero for the Modi government's foreign policy. Even after death,

Jeffrey Epstein lives on in the Modi government's decisions and policies," Khera alleged at a press conference, with a big movie-like parody poster, 'Jeffrey Ne Bana Di Jodi', behind him.

"Recently, I heard Narendra Modi say - 'I built a robot in my childhood, for which I even received a medal'. The same thing is said by (US President Donald) Trump, (Israeli premier Benjamin) Netanyahu, and Epstein - that we have built a robot named Narendra Modi, who is the prime minister of India," Khera said, taking a swipe at the prime minister.

Congress leader Pawan Khera addresses a press briefing at the Congress headquarters, in New Delhi.

The Congress made the allegations against the government

while the prime minister is in Israel for a two-day visit.

Khera said on January 4, 2017, BJP leader Hardeep Singh Puri, emails Epstein stating that he needs to meet, and the meeting is fixed for January 6.

"Immediately after this, Epstein emails another person, Deepak Chopra, and inquires about Anil Ambani. Finally, Epstein and Anil Ambani meet on February 21, 2017. The question is - on whose signal did Epstein set out to find Anil Ambani with someone else's help," he asked.

Khera cited several email exchanges between Epstein and Ambani. He claimed that Epstein introduced Anil Ambani to former Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak via email on February 23, 2017. Khera also cited email exchanges between Epstein and Barak related to India.

"India's Israel strategy's framework was decided like this. The foundation of India-Israel ties post-2014 was laid down by Jeffrey Epstein.... Ehud Barak, Jeffrey Epstein, Hardeep Puri... this is how our foreign policy was shaped," he alleged.

There was no immediate reaction from Ambani, Puri, the BJP or the government on the allegations made by Khera.

Between 2014 and 2017, when Hardeep Puri, now a Union minister, was meeting Epstein, Ehud Barak's close associate and a major Mossad agent, Yoni Koren, was living in the same apartment, Khera alleged.

"It's deeply alarming. In whose hands is our country's government playing? In this situation, India's biggest threat today comes from those who are seated in the government itself," he alleged.

Modi receives red-carpet welcome in Israel as he begins two-day state visit



NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday arrived in Tel Aviv for a two-day state visit to Israel at the invitation of his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu, in a trip aimed at further strengthening the "robust and multifaceted Strategic Partnership" between the two nations.

Modi was accorded a red-carpet welcome and Guard of Honour at Ben

Gurion Airport, where Netanyahu, accompanied by his wife Sara Netanyahu, personally received him. The two leaders exchanged a warm hug on arrival, underlining their close personal rapport. Israeli Ambassador to India Reuven Azar was also present.

This is Modi's second visit to Israel in nine years. During his landmark 2017 trip, bilateral ties were elevated to a strategic partnership,

setting the stage for deepening coop-

eration across sectors. In his pre-departure statement, Modi said India and Israel share a partnership that has witnessed "remarkable growth and dynamism" in recent years. He expressed confidence that the visit would consolidate enduring bonds, set new goals for the strategic partnership and advance a shared vision for a "resilient, innovative and prosperous future".

The Prime Minister said he looks forward to discussions with

Netanyahu to expand cooperation in science and technology, innovation, agriculture, water management, defence and security, trade and investment, and people-to-people ties. The two leaders are also expected to exchange views on key regional and global developments.

During the visit, Modi is scheduled to meet Israeli President Isaac Herzog and will address the Israeli Parliament, the Knesset, becoming the first Indian Prime Minister to do so. He will also hold a brief meeting with Netanyahu ahead of the address, followed by wide-ranging talks on Thursday. The visit assumes added significance amid ongoing tensions in the Middle East, including strained ties between the United States and Iran.

In recent years, India-Israel cooperation has expanded in defence, cybersecurity, scientific research and innovation. Defence has emerged as a key pillar, with Israel supplying a range of military platforms and weapon systems to India. During the visit of India's defence secretary to Israel in November last year, an important agreement on defence cooperation was signed. As India pursues development of an indigenous air defence shield dubbed "Sudarshan Chakra", New Delhi is also exploring the possibility of incorporating certain elements from Israel's Iron Dome all-weather air defence system capable of intercepting missiles and artillery shells. Trade and investment ties are also progressing steadily. During Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal's visit to Israel in November, the terms of reference for launching negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement were signed. In September, the two sides inked a Bilateral Investment Agreement to further expand economic cooperation.

People-to-people ties remain a vital component of the relationship, with an over 41,000-strong Indian diaspora in Israel contributing significantly to bilateral goodwill and engagement.

INTERNATIONAL

Iran pushes back against Trump ahead of Geneva talks in face of major US military deployment



DUBAI

Iran pushed back Wednesday against US President Donald Trump's pressure tactics ahead of critical talks in Geneva over Tehran's nuclear program, alternating between calling his remarks "big lies" to saying negotiations may yield an agreement through "honorable diplomacy."

The remarks by two Iranian officials ahead of Thursday's talks come as the United States has assembled its biggest deployment of aircraft and warships into the Middle East in decades, part of Trump's efforts to get a deal while Iran struggles at home with growing dissent following nationwide protests last month.

If the negotiations fails, Trump has repeatedly threatened to attack Iran — something Mideast nations fear could spiral into a new regional war as the embers of the yearslong Israel-Hamas war still smolder.

Already, Iran has said all US military bases in the Mideast would be con-

sidered legitimate targets, putting at risk the tens of thousands of American service members in the region.

US warships typically docked in Bahrain appear to have been sent to sea, satellite photos analyzed by The Associated Press show.

Trump on Tuesday night in the US gave his annual State of the Union speech, touching on Iran and the nuclear negotiations.

"They've already developed missiles that can threaten Europe and our bases overseas, and they're working to build missiles that will soon reach the United States of America," Trump said. "They were warned to make no future attempts to rebuild their weapons program, and in particular nuclear weapons, yet they continue. They're starting it all over."

Satellite photos earlier analyzed by the AP showed Iran beginning to rebuild its missile production sites and doing some work at the three nuclear sites attacked by the US in June. Iran long has maintained its nuclear pro-

gram is peaceful.

The West and the International Atomic Energy Agency say Iran had a nuclear weapons program until 2003. It had been enriching uranium up to 60% purity before the June attack — a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels of 90%.

Responding to Trump, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei sought to compare him to Joseph Goebbels, Adolf Hitler's propaganda minister. He accused Trump and his administration of conducting a "disinformation and misinformation campaign" against Iran.

"Whatever they're alleging in regards to Iran's nuclear program, Iran's ballistic missiles, and the number of casualties during January's unrest is simply the repetition of 'big lies,'" Baghaei wrote on X.

Trump said in his speech at least 32,000 people were killed in the protests, which is at the further end of estimates offered by activists for the death toll. The US-based Human Rights Activist News Agency has so far counted more than 7,000 dead and believes the death toll is far higher. Iran's government, which long has downplayed death tolls in other unrest, offered its only toll on Jan. 21, saying 3,117 people were killed.

Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, Iran's parliament speaker, separately said the US could either try diplomacy or face Iran's wrath. "If you choose the table of diplomacy — a diplomacy in which the dignity of the Iranian nation and mutual interests are respected — we will also be at that table," Qalibaf said, according to the semi-official Student News Network, a media outlet believed to be close to the all-volunteer Basij force of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard.

"But if you decide to repeat past experiences through deception, lies, flawed analysis and false information, and launch an attack in the midst of negotiations, you will undoubtedly

taste the firm blow of the Iranian nation and the country's defensive forces."

Vehicles drive in downtown Tehran, Iran, Tuesday, Feb. 24, 2026.

Iran and the US are due to meet Thursday in Geneva, their third round of talks under the mediation of Oman, long an interlocutor between Tehran and the West. If the talks fail, uncertainty hangs over the timing of any possible attack, as well as its mission and goals.

The US has not made clear the aims of possible military action. If the goal is to pressure Iran to make concessions in nuclear negotiations, it's not clear whether limited strikes will work. If the goal is to remove Iran's leaders, that will likely commit the US to a more massive, longer military campaign. There has been no public sign of planning for what would come next, including the potential for chaos in Iran. The status of Iran's nuclear program is another mystery. Trump earlier said American strikes "obliterated" it. Now, dismantling whatever remains of the program appears to be back on the administration's agenda. IAEA inspectors have not been allowed to inspect those sites and verify what remains.

There is also uncertainty about what any military action could mean for the wider region. Tehran could retaliate against the American-allied nations of the Persian Gulf or Israel. Oil prices have risen in recent days in part due to those concerns.

Satellite photos shot Tuesday by Planet Labs PBC and analyzed by the AP appeared to show American vessels typically docked in Bahrain, the home of the US Navy's 5th Fleet, all out at sea. The 5th Fleet referred questions to the US military's Central Command, which did not immediately respond. Before Iran's attack on Qatar in June, the 5th Fleet similarly scattered its ships at sea to protect against a potential attack.

Sri Lanka police arrest ex-intelligence chief in connection with 2019 Easter bombings



COLOMBO

Police in Sri Lanka arrested the country's former intelligence chief in connection with suicide bomb attacks in 2019 that killed nearly 270 people and were believed to be inspired by the Islamic State group, a spokesman said.

Suresh Salley, a retired army major general, was arrested Wednesday by the country's Criminal Investigation Department, police spokesman Fredrick Wootler said.

Two Islamist groups carried out six nearly simultaneous suicide bomb attacks on April 21, 2019, which targeted churches and leading tourist hotels on Easter Sunday. Videos recorded by the attackers showed them pledging allegiance to the Islamic State group.

The attacks shook the island nation and revived

memories of a 26-year civil war with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, widely known as the Tamil Tigers, a separatist group that fought to create an independent state for the country's ethnic Tamil minority.

Salley was a highly respected military intelligence official credited with a large role in ending the war in 2009. The CID is investigating possible "links or lapses" by Salley in connection with the 2019 attacks, Wootler said.

Sri Lankan police officers secure the area of the exploded St. Anthony's Church on Easter Sunday attacks in Colombo, Sri Lanka, April 28, 2019. Following the bombings, allegations surfaced that the attackers had links with Sri Lanka's state intelligence.

In 2023, Britain's Channel 4 interviewed a man who said he arranged a meeting

between Salley and a local group known as National Thowheed Jamath, which was inspired by the Islamic State group. The meeting prior to the bombings allegedly hatched a plot to create insecurity in Sri Lanka and enable former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to win the presidential election later that year.

The man in the Channel 4 program, Azad Maulana, was a spokesperson for a Tamil Tigers breakaway group that later became a pro-state militia and helped the Sinhalese-dominated government defeat the rebels.

After security camera footage of the bombings was released, Maulana said he recognized the faces of the attackers as the people he had arranged to meet with Salley.

Sri Lanka's defense ministry has denied any involve-

Nagaland University study identifies Ecotourism as key to managing Human-Tiger conflicts near Jim Corbett

Research identifies expanding human-tiger conflict hotspots around the National Park & calls for holistic mitigation through ecotourism initiatives, technological monitoring and participatory conservation measures



LUMAMI, NAGALAND

Nagaland University researchers have proposed a holistic conflict mitigation approach integrating ecotourism-based measures, community participation and geospatial technology to address the rising human-tiger conflicts in Uttarakhand, particularly in the transitional buffer zones around Jim Corbett National Park.

The study highlights that increasing human-wildlife conflicts, driven by ecological degradation, climate change and expanding human activities, have intensified significantly in recent years.

The research calls for urgent and coordinated interventions combining ecological conservation, technological monitoring and active community engagement, terming them as essential to prevent further escalation of human-tiger conflicts and to ensure sustainable coexistence between humans and wildlife.

A Video Byte of Prof MS Rawat, Department of Geography, Nagaland University, explaining the Research can be viewed and downloaded from - https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vySm_GtxQpCmpshk-gzqiCdsyHTRR_II9/view?us



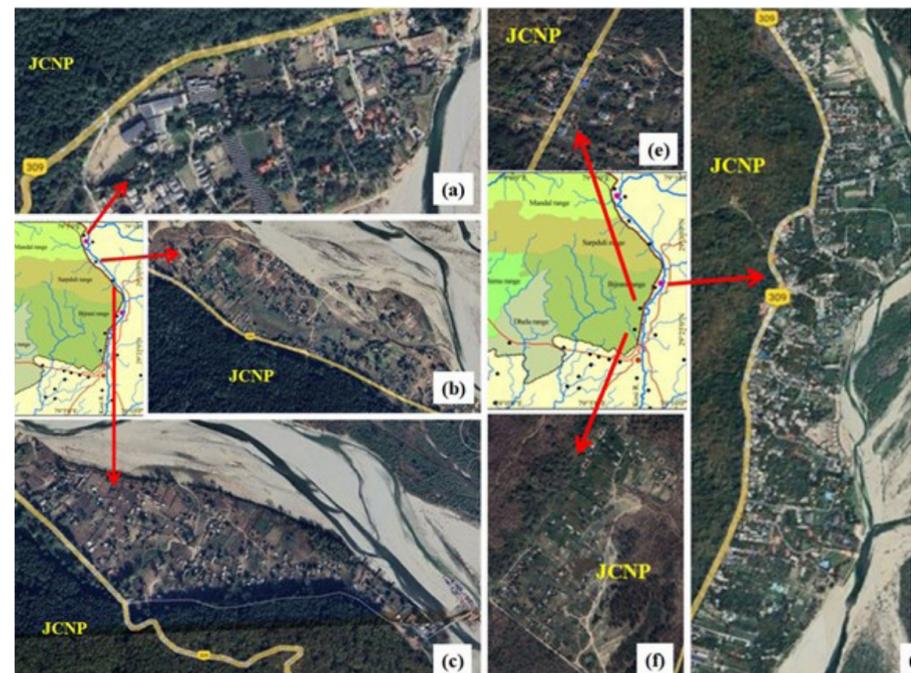
Uttarakhand, known for its rich biodiversity and high tiger population, has witnessed growing incidents of human-tiger encounters due to habitat loss, human encroachment and rising pressure on natural resources. These conflicts have resulted in loss of human life, livestock damage and widespread fear among local communities, particularly in the districts of Pauri, Almora and Nainital.

Focusing on the eastern transitional buffer zone of Jim Corbett National Park near Ramnagar and surrounding villages, the research analysed spatiotemporal trends in human-tiger conflicts over three decades (1991-2025). The researchers integrated two GIS-based modules—an ecological module and a human-tiger conflict module—to assess changes in land use, habitat area, population density, tourism pressure and conflict incidents. Based on this analysis, the study identified four categories of human-tiger conflict risk zones: low, moderate, high and very high.

Lauding the recent study conducted by university researchers identifying ecotourism as a sustainable strategy to manage human-tiger conflicts near Jim Corbett National Park, Prof. Jagadish K. Patnaik, Vice Chancellor, Nagaland University, said, “The study highlights that community-based ecotourism can reduce dependency on forest resources, enhance local

livelihoods, and promote coexistence with wildlife. Such research reflects the university’s commitment to addressing critical environmental challenges through practical and community-oriented solutions.”

The findings were published in Springer’s International Journal Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10661-025-14936-0>), an international, peer-reviewed scientific journal that publishes research on environmental monitoring systems and pollution risk assessment



The paper was co-authored by Prof. M. S. Rawat from Nagaland University, Ms. Ananya Rawat from Amity Institute of Forest and Wildlife, Amity University, Noida, and Dr. Pradeep Kumar Rawat, Department of Geography, Asian International University, Imphal.

Elaborating on the key findings, Prof. M. S. Rawat, Department of Geography, School of Sciences, Nagaland University, said, “Our study found that adverse ecological changes, including shrinking wildlife habitats, rapid demographic shifts, increasing tourist inflow beyond ecological carrying capacity and expanding infrastructure in eco-sensitive areas have contributed to a steady rise in conflict incidents. We observed that human-tiger conflicts have increased by approximately 3 per cent annually, with very high-risk zones expanding at the fastest rate.”

Emphasising the need for sustainable solutions, Research Paper co-author Dr. Pradeep Kumar Rawat, Consultant Professor, Department of Geography, Asian International University, said, “We recommend a comprehensive mitigation framework that prioritises ecotourism-based strategies in and around identified conflict hotspots. The measures we propose include community awareness campaigns in vulnerable locations, implementation of conflict risk zone mapping for planning interventions, promotion of responsible ecotourism activities for both tourists and local communities, and ecological management measures such as scientific land-use planning and pro-

ective barriers in high-risk areas.” Further, Co-Author Ms. Ananya Rawat, M.Sc. Student of Wildlife Science (2023-2025), Amity Institute of Forestry and Wildlife, Amity University, said, “Our study underscores that ecotourism-based initiatives can help reduce conflict by generating alternative livelihoods for local communities, promoting conservation awareness and ensuring balanced development in ecologically sensitive regions. The findings also highlight the importance of habitat restoration, early warning systems and community vigilance to enable safe coexistence between humans and wildlife.”

Using field surveys, interviews with victims’ families and data from forest department offices, the research developed risk zone and hotspot maps that provide valuable inputs for planners, administrators and policymakers. The study notes that unplanned urbanisation, infrastructure expansion and socio-economic pressures are key drivers of increasing human-wildlife conflicts, and addressing these factors is essential for long-term mitigation. According to the researchers, the findings will support wildlife managers and authorities in implementing sustainable development strategies in buffer zones, strengthen conservation planning and enhance public safety. The study also calls for future research on changing wildlife behaviour and human activities, recommending that human-wildlife conflicts be addressed through coordinated approaches similar to disaster management frameworks.

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