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Manipur CM urges end to shutdown as talks progress; COCOMI calls BJP boycott amid unrest

IMPHAL

Chief Minister Y. Khemchand Singh on Monday appealed for the withdrawal of the ongoing five-day statewide shutdown, citing severe disruption to daily life and growing hardship among the public.

Speaking amid escalating tensions in Manipur, the Chief Minister said discussions are already underway with the Joint Action Committee (JAC) formed in connection with the Bishnupur incident, in which two minor children were killed in a suspected militant attack.

"We have not said 'no' to any of the demands. We understand and sympathise with their cause, but talks were already underway, and in the midst of these discussions, the shutdown was suddenly called," he said.

Highlighting the impact of the shutdown, Singh noted that daily wage earners and small vendors have been the worst affected. He pointed to the struggles faced by local vegetable sellers, often referred to as 'Ema' mothers, and others dependent on daily income.

The Chief Minister urged that the



Chief Minister Y. Khemchand Singh speaking at a podium during a press conference.

shutdown be revoked in the larger public interest, emphasising the need to restore normalcy.

He made the remarks on the sidelines of the 83rd commemoration of the Khurai Chingangbam Mandop Aerial Bombing (1943), held at Khurai Thangjam Leikai.

Meanwhile, the Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity intensified pressure on the government by announcing a boycott of all activities linked to the Bharatiya Janata Party in the state.

COCOMI Secretary General Shanta Nahakpam alleged that the government has remained disconnected from ground realities and has failed to adequately engage with civil society organisations across communities.

"What is happening? Why such incidents are recurring, and why the government has not been able to effectively curb these attacks," he said.

Calling for public participation, Nahakpam urged citizens to refrain from attending political, developmental, or public programmes associated with the BJP, including those involving MLAs, party functionaries, or government representatives.

He further criticised the Chief Minister's approach as "person-alised" and lacking broader consultation with stakeholders.

COCOMI said democratic forms of agitation would continue and called on people to unite in the coming days to seek accountability. It also urged citizens to approach the residences of key government officials, including the Chief Minister and the Home Minister, to demand answers.

Rahul Gandhi blames BJP for Manipur unrest, says ruling party 'set fire' to state

NEW DELHI

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on April 20 launched a sharp attack on the Bharatiya Janata Party over the ongoing tensions in Manipur, alleging that the ruling party was responsible for the violence between communities.

Addressing a rally in Colachel in Tamil Nadu, Gandhi said, "Look at what has happened in Manipur. A peaceful state. They set fire to it, and hundreds of people died. There's a civil war still carrying on."

His remarks come amid fresh tensions in the state following the killing of a five-year-old boy and his five-month-old sister in a suspected militant attack in Imphal West district's Leisakthol area. The incident has sparked protests, with demonstrators blocking roads and clashes reported in some areas. Security forces

have resorted to tear gas and smoke shells to disperse crowds.

The violence in Manipur traces back to May 3, 2023, when clashes erupted after protests over the demand for Scheduled Tribe status for the Meitei community. The conflict between Meitei and Kuki-Zo groups has since resulted in deaths, displacement, and widespread destruction of property.

Gandhi also linked the unrest to what he described as the BJP's attempts to centralise power. He alleged that the party seeks to "capture power and run states from Delhi," and extended his criticism to the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu, claiming it has been reduced to an instrument of the BJP.

"The AIADMK played a historic role in Tamil Nadu's progress. Today, it is a hollow shell, its leadership has surrendered due to corruption," he said.

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PERSPECTIVE
You can't change how people feel about you.

Manipur govt mandates office attendance during shutdown

IMPHAL

The Government of Manipur has directed all employees to remain present at their workplaces amid a shutdown call beginning April 20 in connection with the Tronglaobi incident, warning of strict action against those who fail to comply.

In an urgent directive issued by the Office of the Chief Secretary, all Administrative Secretaries and Heads of Departments have been instructed to ensure attendance across offices, including subordinate establishments, despite disruptions caused by the bandh called by various groups.

The order further tasks Deputy Commissioners in all districts with ensuring the smooth functioning of government offices and closely monitoring employee attendance. Officials have also been asked to submit attendance reports to the concerned departments.

The government has made it clear that departmental proceedings will be initiated against employees found absent without authorised leave.

The shutdown has been called by a Joint Action Committee, Meira Paibis, and several civil society organisations demanding justice in the Tronglaobi incident, which has triggered protests across parts of the state.

WHO SAID WHAT

Under the TMC government, potato farmers are struggling to survive, while sand mafias are sitting on piles of money. This is unacceptable!
~ Narendra Modi, PM

Khera moves Gauhati High Court for anticipatory bail after Supreme Court directs him to seek relief in Assam



NEW DELHI

Congress leader Pawan Khera on April 20 approached the Gauhati High Court seeking anticipatory bail in a defamation case filed by Riniki Bhuyan Sharma, wife of Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

The move comes after the Supreme Court of India declined to grant Khera interim protection from arrest and directed him to seek relief from a competent court in Assam. The apex court also stayed the transit anticipatory bail earlier granted by the Telangana High Court and said the Gauhati High Court should decide the matter independently.

The case stems from remarks made by Khera ahead of the recent Assembly elections, in which he alleged that Sharma held passports from the UAE, Egypt, and Antigua and Barbuda, and had acquired foreign citizenships between 2021 and 2022. He also claimed that the Chief Minister failed to disclose his wife's overseas assets in his election affidavit.

Both Sarma and Sharma have rejected the allegations as fabricated and misleading, asserting that the claims were based on manipulated or AI-generated material and originated from a Pakistani YouTube channel. Sharma

subsequently initiated both criminal and civil defamation proceedings against Khera.

Following the complaint, Assam Police registered a case against the Congress leader on charges including making false statements in connection with an election and cheating.

Earlier, Khera had secured limited transit anticipatory bail from the Telangana High Court on April 10. However, the relief was later put on hold by the Supreme Court after a plea by the Assam government. The top court also declined to extend protection from arrest, reiterating that Khera must approach the jurisdictional court in Assam.

During the hearing, senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for Khera, argued that his client was not a flight risk and sought interim protection to enable him to move the Gauhati High Court.

A bench of Justices J K Maheshwari and Atul S Chandurkar declined the request, stating that Khera was free to seek urgent relief before the appropriate court in Assam.

In a related development, a local court in Guwahati rejected Assam Police's request for a non-bailable warrant against Khera. The Chief Judicial Magistrate, Kamrup Metro, observed in an April 7 order that the grounds cited were based on presumptions and lacked material evidence.

The court further noted that since the offences fall under cognisable and non-bailable provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the police already have the authority to arrest without a warrant, rendering such a request unnecessary at this stage.

Tipra Motha threatens to quit Tripura coalition over delay in Tiprasa Accord implementation

AGARTALA

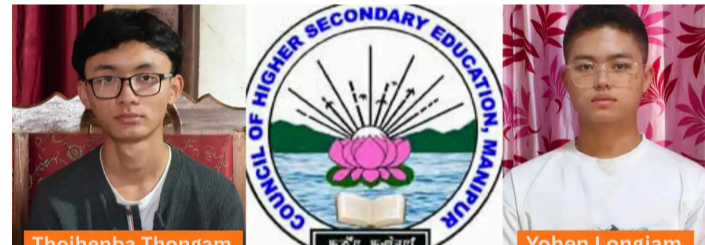
The Tipra Motha has warned of withdrawing support from the ruling coalition in Tripura, citing delays in the implementation of the Tiprasa Accord at the grassroots level.

Party supremo Pradyot Kishore Debbarma issued the warning following the party's sweeping victory in the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (ADC) elections, describing the outcome as a strong political message to the Centre. Debbarma said the party had joined the state government based on assurances given by the Union government to safeguard tribal interests, and cautioned that failure to honour those commitments could force a rethink on its continued support to the alliance.

"Unless the accord is implemented in its full spirit, we cannot continue with the government," he said, adding that growing public dissatisfaction over delays was reflected in the ADC poll results.

The Tipra Motha leader said the issue would be taken up with Union Home Minister Amit Shah after the conclusion of the ongoing election campaign in West Bengal. He also claimed that remarks made by Chief Minister Manik Saha during the campaign were rejected by voters. During the polls, Debbarma was sharply critical of the incumbent leadership, at one point accusing Saha of being "anti-tribal". Notably, the comments did not draw any immediate response from senior leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party in the state. Debbarma, who had earlier praised former Chief Minister Biplob Kumar Deb, has in recent weeks intensified his criticism of the current leadership, signalling growing strain within the ruling coalition.

Manipur Class 12 results record 92.23% pass rate, declared on time despite disruptions



IMPHAL

The Council of Higher Secondary Education, Manipur on April 20 announced the Class 12 examination results, registering an overall pass percentage of 92.23 per cent, slightly lower than the 94 per cent recorded in the previous academic year.

Out of 31,530 enrolled students, 31,259 appeared for the examinations, of whom 28,829 successfully cleared the tests, reflecting a marginal dip in performance.

The results were declared on schedule despite ongoing challenges in Manipur, highlighting the education department's efforts to maintain academic timelines amid disruptions.

In the science stream, Takhellambam Kalpana of Comet School and Yohen Longjam of Comprehensive Concept School jointly secured the top position with 490 marks each. Pebam Taibangbam Mangang from Millennium Institute of Sciences stood second, while Keithhellakpam Wynona Devi of Comet School secured third place with 480 marks.

Government institutions dom-

inated the commerce stream, with Thoihenba Thongam of CC Higher Secondary School emerging as the topper with 454 marks. Haorongbam Keniya Devi from TG Higher Secondary School secured second position with 433 marks, followed by Athokpam Deny of CC Higher Secondary School with 431 marks.

In the arts stream, Sarangthem Ayingbi Chanu from Enlighten Knowledge Higher Secondary School topped with 470 marks. Pushpa Kakchingtabam of TG Higher Secondary School secured second place with 456 marks, while Cheshabam Nurmyia from the same institution stood third with 452 marks.

Ningthoujam Geoffrey, Commissioner of Education (Schools), congratulated all students who appeared for the examinations and commended the Council of Higher Secondary Education, Manipur for ensuring timely declaration of results under challenging circumstances. He described Class 12 as a crucial academic milestone and extended his best wishes to students for their future endeavours.

Curfew defied in Manipur night protests; 21 arrested over Sagolband violence as tensions escalate

IMPHAL

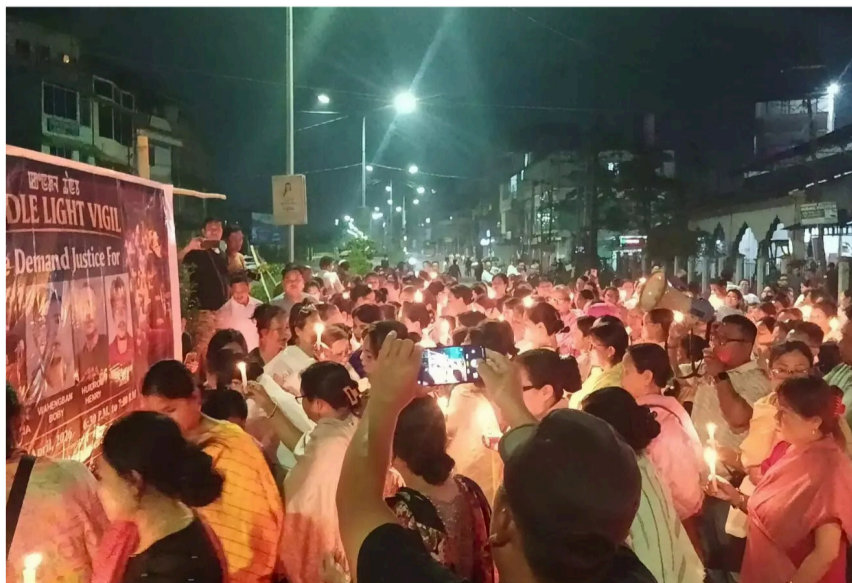
Night-time protests continued to roil parts of Manipur, with large groups defying curfew restrictions and taking to the streets, triggering fresh confrontations with security forces and raising concerns over a deteriorating law and order situation.

Massive rallies were reported from Koirengi in Imphal East, Uripok and Sagolband in Imphal West, as well as parts of Kakching district, where protesters carrying flaming torches marched late into the night, raising slogans. While demonstrations initially remained peaceful, tensions escalated as the night progressed, with multiple instances of clashes reported.

Security forces resorted to firing tear gas shells and mock bombs, along with lathi charges, to disperse crowds in several locations.

Police officials flagged the growing volatility, warning that "anti-social elements" were exploiting the protests to target security personnel. Shivkanta Singh said attackers used iron projectiles, catapults, boulders and petrol bombs during the unrest.

He added that enforcement measures would be intensified against those involved in violence, even as efforts contin-



ue to restore normalcy. Authorities also noted that several individuals participating in the protests were allegedly under the influence of alcohol or other intoxicants.

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a rally in Sagolband in Imphal West on April 18. The detained individuals belong to multiple localities across Imphal, including Tera, Uripok, Brahmapur, Langthabal, Nagamapal, Naoremthong and Thangmeiband.

According to police, the rally turned violent as mobs engaged in stone pelting and used petrol bombs, catapults and boulders, leaving several security personnel injured. Three personnel from the 232 Battalion of the CRPF sustained grievous injuries, while official vehicles were also vandalised.

Arambai Tenggol member arrested. Separately, Manipur Police arrested a 23-year-old individual for allegedly posting provocative and inflammatory content on social media that could disturb public order.

The accused, identified as Tensubam Lamyamba Meitei from Imphal East, was linked to a Facebook account that allegedly shared threats and calls for violence. Police said he is reportedly associated with Arambai Tenggol.

Authorities have warned of strict legal action against individuals attempting to incite violence or disrupt communal harmony through social media or other means, as tensions continue to simmer across the state.

IMD projects improved monsoon for Northeast

GUWAHATI

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has projected a relatively improved monsoon season for the northeastern region this year, raising hopes after a prolonged spell of deficient rainfall. However, the outlook for Assam remains mixed, with uneven rainfall distribution expected across the state. According to IMD's first-stage seasonal forecast for the June-September southwest monsoon, parts of the Northeast are likely to receive normal to above-normal rainfall, even as much of the country may experience below-normal precipitation. "The spatial distribution suggests that below-normal seasonal rainfall is most likely over many parts of the country except some areas over northeast, northwest and South Peninsular India, where normal to above-normal rainfall is likely," the IMD said. Despite the broadly positive outlook, the forecast indicates a patchy scenario within Assam. Western regions of the state and some easternmost pockets may still face rainfall deficits during the season. Neighbouring states

such as Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram are also expected to receive below-normal rainfall.

The IMD is set to release its second-stage forecast by the end of May, which will provide a more granular assessment of regional variations. At the national level, seasonal rainfall is projected at around 92 per cent of the Long Period Average (LPA), based on a combination of dynamical and statistical models.

Climate indicators point to the possible emergence of El Niño conditions during the monsoon season. Typically associated with warming sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific, El Niño tends to suppress monsoon rainfall over India.

However, the current neutral phase of the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) is expected to shift towards a positive phase later in the season. A positive IOD characterised by warmer waters in the western Indian Ocean generally supports enhanced rainfall over the Indian subcontinent and could help offset some adverse effects of El Niño.



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DIGITAL, BUT NOT DETACHED

A familiar sight in airport lounges, restaurants, shopping malls and even family/social gatherings is toddlers clutching smartphones, their tiny fingers swiping screens with a confidence that once belonged to chalk and crayons. Animated games flicker before their eyes while parents, equally absorbed in their own devices, scroll through timelines or reply to messages, mistaking silence for contentment. The room appears peaceful, yet it hums with a quiet disconnection. Everyone is occupied, everyone is entertained-and yet no one is truly present.

This digital immersion is not an intrusion but the default setting of life. Screens are not "devices" anymore; they are extensions of memory, emotion, and social belonging. What earlier generations learned through conversation, boredom, or observation is now often mediated by pixels and algorithms. In such spaces, interaction becomes optional, eye contact feels awkward, and silence is treated as a problem rather than a possibility. This is not a moral panic, but a cultural shift-one where happiness is individual, portable, and endlessly customizable.

Ever wonder why isn't GenZ called Genzee or why not Genzed? In which language of the world, the English alphabet Z is pronounced as zee instead of zed? Gen Z is written with the letter name, not its sound spelled out. The pronunciation "zee" is mainly used in American English. Language follows usage, not logic, and branding usually follows the most globally visible accent-which today happens to be American English. In American English, the letter Z is pronounced "zee". In British, Bhartiya and most other English varieties, it is pronounced "zed." So, who's "right"? Both. Gen Z-those born roughly between the mid-1990s and early 2010s is a generation trying to make sense of a noisy world while insisting, quietly and creatively, that life can be kinder, fairer, and more meaningful. This is a lighter look at Gen Z: where it comes from, why it matters, and what it's actually up to-beyond the headlines and hot takes.

Gen Z didn't grow up waiting for the internet to arrive; it arrived before they could spell it. Their childhood memories are stitched together with the soft glow of smartphones, the click of a Wi-Fi router rebooting, and the endless buffering circle that taught an early lesson in patience. They are the first generation to experience life both online and offline from the start-not as separate realms, but as overlapping realities. Their formative years coincided an information ecosystem that updates by the second. It learned early that the world is not a fixed syllabus-it's an open-book exam with changing questions. Every generation is relevant to itself, but its relevance stretches far beyond age demographics. It is quietly redefining how we talk about work, success, identity, and well-being. For Gen Z, success is modular, personal, and negotiable. A stable income matters, yes-but so does mental peace, creative freedom, and time that doesn't belong to spreadsheets. This is not laziness disguised as philosophy. It is a recalibration. Having witnessed burnout up close-sometimes in parents, sometimes online-Gen Z is asking an inconvenient but necessary question: What is the point of winning a race that leaves everyone exhausted? Gen Z values authenticity. Credibility must be earned, not assumed. This generation listens closely, but it also asks follow-up questions. If earlier generations built roads and institutions, Gen Z is questioning where those roads lead-and who gets to walk on them. It is a generation that asks why before how, and should we before can we. This curiosity is sometimes mistaken for confusion. In reality, it is courage. It prefers conversations over commands and collaboration over hierarchy. In doing so, it nudges power to speak a more human language. It's tempting to imagine Gen Z as permanently glued to screens, but this is a partial truth. Yes, they are acutely aware of the emotional cost of constant connectivity. This is the generation that normalized phrases like digital detox, setting boundaries, and logging off. In a world where everyone is connected, the real challenge for Gen Z may not be learning how to log in, but remembering when-and how-to log out. They talk openly about anxiety, loneliness, and the strange fatigue that comes from scrolling through perfection. Ironically, the most online generation is also the one most interested in going offline-towards nature, slow hobbies, analogue joys, and unfiltered conversations.

If you listen closely to today's public conversations-on television panels, newspaper columns, family dining tables, and social media timelines-you will hear Gen Z being talked about far more than being listened to. The generation is alternately praised as visionary and dismissed as distracted, celebrated for its courage and scolded for its candour. Between admiration and anxiety, one thing is certain: Gen Z has arrived, and it is quietly reshaping the mood of the moment. To understand Gen Z merely as a trend is to miss the point. Their childhood memories are stitched together with the soft glow of smartphones, the click of a Wi-Fi router rebooting, and the endless buffering circle that taught an early lesson in patience. They are the first generation to experience life both online and offline from the start-not as separate realms, but as overlapping realities. Often accused of being overly sensitive, Gen Z does not reject earlier generations; it borrows selectively. It admires discipline, depth, and endurance. It also learns what not to repeat. Freelancing, side hustles, portfolio careers, and creative entrepreneurship feel natural to them. Not because commitment is scary, but because flexibility feels honest. The resume is no longer a straight line; it's a collage. It is still learning, unlearning, failing, trying again. And that is precisely why it deserves patience rather than judgment. In many ways, Gen Z is holding up a mirror to the world, asking it to slow down, speak honestly, and care a little more. It may not have a manifesto carved in stone, but it carries something equally powerful i.e. intention. Beneath the experimentation lies a steady instinct-to make life more balanced, conversations more honest, and choices more conscious. This is not a generation in revolt; it is a generation in repair mode. And in a world weary of certainty, that careful, questioning energy may turn out to be its greatest contribution.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Patience and perseverance have a magical effect before which difficulties disappear and obstacles vanish.

- John Quincy Adams

TRUMP CAN'T AFFORD SCALATION OF US WAR WITH IRAN AT THE MOMENT



NITYA CHAKRABORTY

President Donald Trump as usual has been talking in conflicting voices on his immediate stand on Iran war. The U.S. President ordered naval blockade of Iranian ports after the failure of the Islamabad peace talks on Sunday but on Tuesday, he indicated that another round of talks would be held in the Pakistan capital this week end. In fact even though the first round on April 11 ended in stalemate, enough ground was covered. The US and Iran officials continued back channel negotiations for organizing the second round as early as possible. In the White House, there is a gloom among the Trump advisers as the U.S. President is losing his bargaining position vis a vis Iran and the escalation by the U.S. side will intensify the process further. Right now, there is no friend in Europe among the ruling heads of the governments. Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Oban has been defeated in the national elections. He was only real supporter of Trump among EU nations. Then the Italian PM Giorgia Meloni, a confidant of Trump, has fallen out with him on Iran war. Trump had to strongly lambast her on Tuesday. Trump is a businessman and he takes the future of the US corporates seriously. His corporate friends earlier advised him to settle with Iran through any other means excepting going to war. They said that

if the war continued, it would damage global economy in a big way leading to another big recession. Now that is confirmed by the International Monetary Fund in its half yearly update released on Tuesday. The IMF report warned that any further escalation in the Iran war could trigger a global recession that would have severe impact on all G-7 countries.

Against an increasingly volatile backdrop, the Washington-based fund said the economic damage from the Middle East conflict was steadily rising as it cut its growth forecasts for 2026 based on the impact of the war so far. The impact on the UK economy will be most severe among the G 7 countries, but US will suffer equally. Trump can't risk a recession in US economy just six months before the midterm elections in November this year. The Democrats are on his neck. The entire Republican Party will blame the President if the Democrats win in the midterm.

While warning that countries worldwide would face slower growth and higher inflation, the IMF said net energy importers and developing nations would face the biggest hit. IMF report says that even a short lived conflict would dent growth and stoke inflation. The IMF chief economist said that the continuation of the war meant that the world was moving closer to an adverse scenario in which oil prices would remain close to US\$

100 a barrel this year before falling back to US \$ 75 in 2027.

Oil prices had jumped back above \$100 (£74) a barrel on Monday amid choppy trading in global markets after crunch weekend talks between the US and Iran ended in stalemate and as a US blockade of the Strait of Hormuz began. On Tuesday, Brent crude was down 4% at about \$95 a barrel on hopes of further peace talks.

The IMF said that under a "severe scenario - with a lengthier, intensive war keeping the oil price above \$110 into 2027 - global growth would collapse to about 2% this year, a threshold widely seen as equivalent to a worldwide recession. The IMF estimates global growth has only fallen below this rate four times since 1980, most recently amid the Covid pandemic in 2020 and after the 2008 financial crisis.

In a blow to households, inflation would also exceed 6% - forcing central banks worldwide to drive up interest rates to prevent the shock from allowing fast-rising consumer prices becoming entrenched.

With the threat of an escalating war in the Middle East, the IMF said the best way to limit the economic damage was to bring an end to the conflict. Beyond that, it called on central banks to remain vigilant and urged governments considering using emergency financial support to focus on temporary and targeted measures

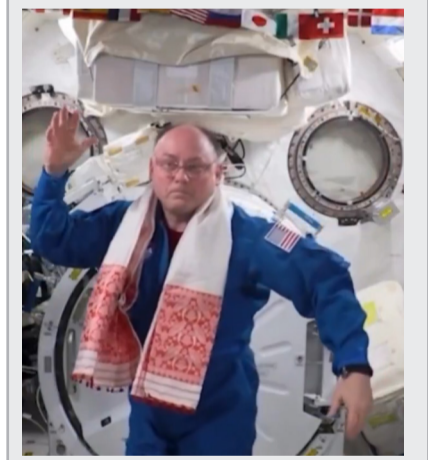
because most countries had unsustainably high debt levels

While the US economy will feel the heat with further rise in gasoline prices and increase in inflationary pressures, the U.S. is witnessing with

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Bihu in an International Space Station Kudos to astronaut Mike Fincke for this special gesture to Assam's culture. It's wonderful to see Bihu going global, especially after the special focus given by Adarniya Shri @narendramodi ji during #BihuBinandia

~ Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, Assam CM



dismay, the intensive diplomatic outreach of the Iranian leadership with Europe and China. While Trump's relations with Europe have reached the lowest point, Tehran is cosy with EU getting results. For the White House, this is a setback in its present diplomatic offensive. Similarly, the review by Trump advisers show that while the US is incurring heavy costs in destroying Iranian state, China and Russia are getting dividends from the US war despite all the warnings and threat of sanctions by Trump. In fact, Iran has suggested that China should be a member of the monitoring countries of Hormuz Strait. Russia is also keeping close ties with Iran and assisting them through high tech advice. In this scenario, the best option for the US is to wriggle out of Iran war by extracting maximum concessions on Iran's right on enrichment of uranium in the coming peace talks. Israel Prime Minister Netanyahu is opposed to the peace deal but this Trump can ignore him as he has to be concerned more about his political fate in his own country rather than pampering Israeli PM again. Trump can claim that the US objectives have been achieved in Iran and the US has earned victory. But if at the coming round, the talks again fail, the West Asia situation may go to unpredictable direction.



Five-day valley shutdown cripples life in Manipur; Home Minister appeals for normalcy

IMPHAL

A five-day shutdown across the Imphal Valley has severely disrupted normal life in Manipur, with the state government terming the protest "extremely unfortunate" and urging an immediate end to the agitation.

The shutdown was called by civil society groups, including the Meira Paibis, in protest against the death of two minor children in a suspected mortar blast in Bishnupur district earlier this month.

Addressing the media at the Chief Minister's Bungalow, Home Minister K. Govindas Singh said the prolonged shutdown has impacted all aspects of daily life, including essential services, online operations, farming activities and educational



institutions.

He appealed to protestors to consider the broader inconvenience caused to the public and called for restoration of normalcy.

The minister also announced that the government would provide jobs to members of the bereaved family and assured that justice would be delivered in connection with the incident.

Meanwhile, the shutdown continued to paralyse the Imphal Valley, with markets remaining closed and transport services coming to a halt amid sustained public anger over the killings reported from Moirang.

Key commercial hubs, including the iconic Ima Keithel (women's markets), Paona International Market, Thangal Bazar, Alu Gali, M.G.

Avenue and Masjid Road, wore a deserted look as shutters remained down.

The impact has been particularly severe on daily wage earners and small businesses, many of whom reported loss of income due to the prolonged closure.

Public transport, including auto-rickshaws and inter-district services, remained off the roads, while schools and colleges have stayed shut since April 7 following the Tronglaobi incident.

Other markets such as Singjamei Supermarket, Hatta Market and Lamlong Market also remained closed, reflecting the widespread disruption across the valley.

The shutdown follows night-long protests in several areas, including

Sagolband in Imphal West district, where large crowds defied curfew to participate in torch rallies on Saturday. Security forces intervened to stop a rally that began from Tera Bazar and was headed towards Overbridge Junction. Police used tear gas shells and mock bombs to disperse the crowd, leading to clashes in which several people sustained injuries. In partial relief, mobile internet services, which had been suspended amid the unrest, have since been restored.

The protests stem from an April 7 incident at Tronglaobi Awang Leikai near Moirang, where a suspected mortar shell struck a residential house in the early hours, killing two minors and triggering widespread outrage across the state.

Rahul Gandhi links women's quota Bill to delimitation push, cites 'Assam, J&K model'

GUWAHATI

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Saturday alleged that the Women's Reservation Bill is being used as a cover for a larger plan to redraw electoral boundaries through delimitation, invoking what he described as the "Assam and Jammu & Kashmir model."

Campaigning in Tamil Nadu ahead of the April 23 Assembly elections, Gandhi accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah of misleading the public on the intent behind the legislation.

Addressing rallies, including one in Tiruchirappalli, he claimed that the proposed law conceals a broader agenda aimed at altering the distribution of parliamentary seats across states through delimitation—an exercise he said could disadvantage southern, smaller and northeastern regions.

Gandhi argued that similar approaches had already been implemented in Assam and Jammu and Kashmir, and alleged that the Centre intends to expand such measures nationwide, raising concerns over their impact on India's federal structure.

He further accused the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party of attempting to reshape political representation and weaken regional identities through delimitation and centralised policies.

The Congress leader also targeted the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, an NDA ally in the state, alleging it was acting as a proxy for the BJP. He claimed that the Centre aimed to install a compliant leadership in Tamil Nadu that would follow directions from New Delhi.

Congress questions BJP's women's quota claims, cites ticket row in Guwahati

GUWAHATI

The Indian National Congress on Sunday intensified its attack on the Bharatiya Janata Party over women's political representation, alleging that the ruling party's record does not match its claims of promoting women's participation. Addressing a press conference in Dispur, Congress leader Mira Borthakur Goswami accused the BJP of misleading the public over the circumstances surrounding the setback to the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, also known as the Women's Reservation Bill. She rejected claims that the Congress opposed 33 per cent reservation for women, calling such assertions "false and politically motivated." Goswami noted that the Bill, passed in September 2023, had received broad support across party lines, including from the Opposition. Questioning the delay in implementation, she alleged that the BJP had linked the reservation to delimitation and census processes, effectively postponing its roll-out. "If the Bill was passed in 2023, why has it not been implemented yet?" she asked. Goswami further claimed that the BJP's track record on fielding women candidates remained limited. Citing data, she said the party had nominated around 12 per cent women candidates since coming to power, compared to nearly 15 per cent by the Congress. She also asserted that women's participation has historically been a priority for the Congress, pointing to leadership roles held by women over the decades, including under former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

Raising concerns over the linkage between reservation and delimitation, Goswami suggested that the move could be politically motivated and aimed at delaying implementation while projecting support. Calling for immediate action, she urged the Centre to convene a special session of Parliament to operationalise the reservation without further delay, assuring full support from the Congress. Highlighting local developments, the Congress leader criticised the BJP's candidate selection in Central Guwahati, alleging that despite multiple women aspirants, the party did not field a female candidate from the constituency.



GUWAHATI

Dilip Saikia on Sunday asserted that the National Democratic Alliance remains committed to implementing 33 per cent reservation for women in legislatures by 2029, despite the recent setback to the Women's Reservation Bill in Parliament.

en candidates remained limited. Citing data, she said the party had nominated around 12 per cent women candidates since coming to power, compared to nearly 15 per cent by the Congress. She also asserted that women's participation has historically been a priority for the Congress, pointing to leadership roles held by women over the decades, including under former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

Raising concerns over the linkage between reservation and delimitation, Goswami suggested that the move could be politically motivated and aimed at delaying implementation while projecting support.

Calling for immediate action, she urged the Centre to convene a special session of Parliament to operationalise the reservation without further delay, assuring full support from the Congress. Highlighting local developments, the Congress leader criticised the BJP's candidate selection in Central Guwahati, alleging that despite multiple women aspirants, the party did not field a female candidate from the constituency.

'Don't vote for BJP': Assam CM Sarma's appeal to 'illegal immigrants' during Bengal poll campaign sparks row

GUWAHATI

Himanta Biswa Sarma, campaigning in West Bengal ahead of the Assembly elections, on Sunday stirred political controversy with an unusual appeal urging alleged illegal immigrants not to vote for the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Speaking on the sidelines of a rally in Alipurduar, the Assam Chief Minister said that "illegal immigrants," particularly those from Bangladesh, should refrain from supporting the BJP.

"The illegal immigrants who have come from Bangladesh, please don't vote for us. Indian Muslims have been voting for us extensively, and I urge the infiltrators not to vote for us," Sarma said.

The BJP leader, who has been campaigning in the state for the past three days, also pitched what he described as the "Assam model" of governance, promising to replicate



it in West Bengal if the party comes to power.

"The work I am doing in Assam is because I have been asked to do so by the Prime Minister. Once the BJP wins in West Bengal, the same approach will be followed," he said.

Highlighting development priorities, Sarma emphasised industrial growth, expansion of tourism and agricultural diversification, particularly in north Bengal. He expressed confidence that the BJP would secure more than 200 seats in

West Bengal and over 100 seats in Assam.

Illegal immigration has emerged as a key campaign issue for the BJP in the state, with Sarma repeatedly targeting the government led by Mamata Banerjee.

At a rally in Kalimpong a day earlier, he accused the state administration of diverting resources towards "Bangladeshi Muslim infiltrators" and asserted that a change in government was necessary.

The remarks triggered a sharp response from the All India Trinamool Congress, which approached the Election Commission of India, alleging that Sarma had made "divisive and inciteful statements" along with unverified claims against the Chief Minister.

The exchange underscores intensifying political sparring between the BJP and the Trinamool Congress as campaigning gathers momentum ahead of the Assembly polls.

NDA committed to 33% women's quota by 2029 despite Bill setback: Assam BJP chief



GUWAHATI

Dilip Saikia on Sunday asserted that the National Democratic Alliance remains committed to implementing 33 per cent reservation for women in legislatures by 2029, despite the recent setback to the Women's Reservation Bill in Parliament.

Addressing a press conference in Guwahati, Saikia said the BJP and its allies were "extremely sad" over their inability to secure the numbers required to pass the constitutional amendment, but maintained that the promise of women's political empowerment would be fulfilled.

He said Narendra Modi, along with Union Home Minister Amit Shah and the NDA leadership, had assured in Parliament that the quota would be ensured during the 2029 Lok Sabha elections, even if the delimitation process remains incomplete.

"Even if delimitation is not completed by 2029, we will ensure 33% reservation," Saikia said, without detailing the mechanism for implementing the measure.

Launching a sharp attack on the Opposition, Saikia accused the Indian National Congress and other

INDIA bloc parties of celebrating the Bill's defeat rather than supporting women's empowerment.

"It appeared as though women are not a priority for them, but merely a means for political gain," he said.

Saikia claimed that the BJP would now seek to expose what he termed the Opposition's "anti-women policies", alleging consistent resistance to key initiatives aimed at empowerment and governance reforms.

Highlighting the legislative background, he said the Women's Reservation Bill, passed in September 2023, could not be implemented immediately due to the proximity of the 2024 general elections. He also referred to the delimitation process, noting that the last such exercise was conducted in 1972 based on the 1971 Census.

Citing representation trends,

Saikia said the highest number of women MPs had been elected during the Modi government's tenure. He pointed out that 78 women were elected to Parliament in 2019—the highest ever—while 75 women MPs were elected in 2024.

He added that women across the country continue to await implementation of the quota, cutting across social and regional lines.

The BJP leader also accused parties such as the All India Trinamool Congress, Samajwadi Party and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam of opposing the Bill on "technical grounds", including concerns over delimitation and its potential impact on representation of southern states.

He argued that such objections were aimed at confusing the public and reiterated that opposing the Bill amounted to opposing greater political representation for women.

Missing poll official found dead in Assam's Karbi Anglong; family alleges negligence



GUWAHATI

A polling official who had gone missing during election duty earlier this month was found dead under mysterious circumstances in Karbi Anglong district, raising serious concerns over the safety of election personnel and prompting allegations of negligence.

The deceased, identified as Cornelius Kindu, was serving as the third polling officer at a polling station in the hill district. His decomposed and partially unclothed body was recovered from a remote area in Rongwongwey on Saturday, officials confirmed.

Kindu had been missing since April 9, the day Assam went to the polls. He had reportedly left the polling station citing ill health but never

reached his residence in Diphu, triggering a search operation.

Police teams, assisted by drones, had been combing the difficult terrain for several days before local residents discovered the body and alerted authorities.

Officials said the exact cause of death is yet to be determined and will be established following a post-mortem examination.

The incident has sparked outrage among family members and local leaders, who have alleged lapses in handling the official's health condition during duty. According to his family, Kindu had shown signs of medical distress, including seizures, but did not receive timely medical assistance.

His daughter claimed that he had collapsed multiple times while on duty and should have been immediately shifted to a hospital. "If he had received proper treatment in time, he could have been saved," she alleged.

Echoing similar concerns, local leaders questioned the response of polling authorities, stating that despite his deteriorating condition, he was only asked to rest instead of being provided urgent care.

They also raised questions about how the official managed to leave the polling station unnoticed and reach a remote hilly location, demanding accountability from the authorities.

Calls for a high-level probe have grown louder, with demands for an inquiry by the Central Bureau of Investigation into the circumstances surrounding the death.

The case has intensified scrutiny over arrangements for polling personnel, particularly in remote and challenging terrains, as investigations continue.

Month-long wait for Assam poll results keeps candidates anxious ahead of May 4 counting

GUWAHATI

With nearly a month-long gap between polling and counting, candidates who contested the Assam Legislative Assembly elections 2026 are grappling with anxiety as they await the declaration of results on May 4.

Polling for the assembly elections was held on April 9, but the extended wait for counting has left candidates in a state of uncertainty over their electoral fate.

Kunki Chowdhury, a first-time contestant and among the youngest candidates in the fray, said she is trying to stay composed during the waiting period. Reflecting on her campaign in Central Guwahati, she described it as a transformative experience.

"I walked nearly 15 km every day for over 10 days. Meeting people from different walks of life and exploring the

Quest!

A "gut feeling" is a chemical signal that your stomach creates to warn the brain of danger.



constituency was a life-changing experience," she said.

Chowdhury also acknowledged en-

countering political mudslinging during the campaign, something she experienced for the first time. "I expected some

level of it, but not from senior leaders," she remarked, adding that she intends to remain in politics regardless of the outcome.

In the Dispur constituency, independent candidate Jayanta Das said the prolonged wait has been mentally taxing, comparing it to the anxiety of awaiting examination results.

Das, who quit the Bharatiya Janata Party to contest independently, said campaigning without party backing posed significant challenges. While he received support from friends and well-wishers, the lack of organisational experience proved to be a constraint.

He also pointed to the limited campaign period as a drawback, noting that he could not cover all areas of the constituency. "I received encouraging responses from the people, but with more time, I could have reached every part of the constituency," he said.

The extended gap between polling and counting has intensified anticipation across Assam, with candidates and political observers alike closely watching developments ahead of the results day.

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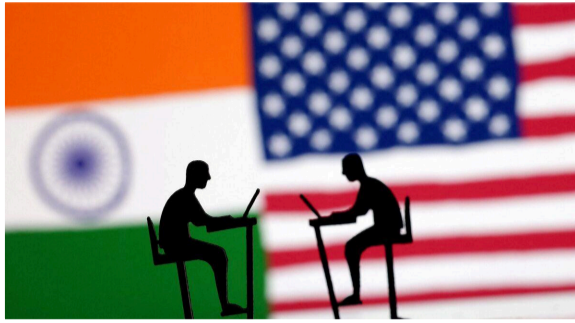
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India, US to begin first-phase of trade talks in Washington from April 20



NEW DELHI

Indian officials will travel to Washington on April 20 for three days of talks with US counterparts on the first phase of a bilateral trade agreement, an official said, with about a dozen officers part of the delegation. "The meeting will happen from April 20-22 in Washington DC. India's chief negotiator Darpan Jain (additional secretary in the department of commerce) is leading the team. Officers from customs and external affairs ministry are also part of the Indian team," the official said.

With the US tariff landscape having shifted, both sides may revisit the agreement's framework, the text of which was released on February 7.

Following a US Supreme Court decision against sweeping tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump on multiple countries, the administration imposed a 10% tariff on all countries from February 24 for 150 days.

Two unilateral investigations launched by the US Trade Representative (USTR) may also figure in the discussions. India has strongly rejected allegations made by the USTR

in those investigations under Section 301 of US trade law and has sought their termination, saying the initiation notice failed to provide a cogent rationale to substantiate the claims. Under the framework, the US had agreed to cut tariffs on India to 18% from 50%. It had removed 25% tariffs on Indian goods imposed over purchases of Russian oil and was to reduce the remaining 25% to 18% under the pact. However, on February 20, the US Supreme Court ruled against Trump's reciprocal tariffs imposed under the 1977 International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA). The president subsequently announced a 10% tariff on all countries for 150 days, effective February 24.

In light of these changes, a meeting between the chief negotiators of India and the US scheduled for February was postponed. They will now meet in Washington from April 20, 2026.

Under the agreed framework, India proposed to eliminate or reduce tariffs on all US industrial goods and a wide range of US food and agricultural products, including dried distillers' grains (DDGs), red

sorghum for animal feed, tree nuts, fresh and processed fruit, soybean oil, wine and spirits, and additional products.

India had also expressed its intentions to purchase USD 500 billion of US energy products, aircraft and aircraft parts, precious metals, technology products, and coking coal over the next five years.

Further, when India finalised the deal, it enjoyed a comparative advantage over its competitor countries.

Now, with all US trading partners facing a uniform 10 per cent tariff, the pact requires recalibration. "So the agreement will have to be recalibrated, redrafted," a government source has said, adding, "that amount of change will take place from their side."

"In our case, since the agreement has not been signed, we have got the option where we can right now change whatever needs to be changed," the source has said.

As the circumstances have changed, every country is engaging with the US to see what is going to be the nature of their trade agreements with America.

Notably, China has overtaken the United States to become India's largest trading partner in 2025-26, after the US had held the position for four consecutive years till 2024-25.

The country's outbound shipments to the US grew marginally 0.92 per cent to USD 87.3 billion during the last fiscal year, while imports increased 15.95 per cent to USD 52.9 billion. The trade surplus declined to USD 34.4 billion in 2025-26 from USD 40.89 billion in 2024-25.

No Naxal-affected districts in India anymore: MHA to states



NEW DELHI

The Centre has officially declared that no district in India remains affected by Left-Wing Extremism (LWE), marking what it describes as a historic milestone in the country's internal security landscape.

The announcement follows a comprehensive security review conducted earlier this month under the National Policy and Action Plan to Address Left Wing Extremism, introduced in 2015.

According to a recent communication issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on April 8 to nine states, a detailed assessment carried out after March 31 concluded that no district in the country now falls under the LWE-affected category.

This marks a major shift from previous classifications, where certain districts were identified as severely impacted by Maoist or Naxal activity.

The review was conducted against the backdrop of a deadline set by the Centre to eliminate LWE by March 31. During the high-level meeting, officials evaluated key indicators such as the operational strength of armed Naxal cadres, their capacity to carry out violent acts, the existence of so-called "liberated zones," and the frequency of incidents in previously affected areas.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah had informed Parliament on March 30 that India had effectively become free of Maoism, adding that a formal declaration would follow. The latest communication is seen as the fulfilment of that assurance.

Officials acknowledged that while isolated incidents involving residual Naxal elements continue to occur in parts of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, as they do not warrant the classification of entire districts as LWE-affected. Instead, the focus has now shifted to sustaining the gains achieved through coordinated efforts between central and state governments.

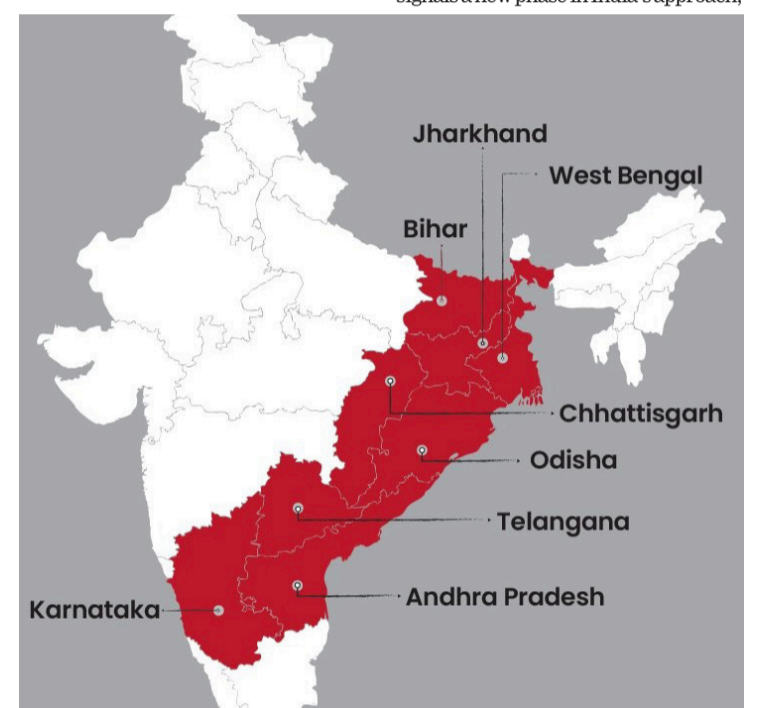
As part of the revised framework, the MHA has categorised 37 districts across multiple states as "Legacy and Thrust districts," indicating that they are now free of active insurgency but require continued attention to prevent any resurgence. Additionally, one district—West Singhbhum in Jharkhand—has been designated as a "District of Concern," where Naxal activity has been largely neutralised but vigilance remains necessary. The states covered under the latest communication include Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Telangana, and West Bengal. Several districts in these states, once considered hotspots of Naxal violence, are now part

Jamui in Bihar, Koraput and Malkangiri in Odisha, and Jhargram in West Bengal, among others.

Under the National LWE Policy, "Legacy and Thrust districts" are those where insurgency has been effectively eliminated, but sustained development initiatives and security presence are required to consolidate peace. Meanwhile, a "District of Concern" is one where the insurgent network has been dismantled, though continued monitoring and targeted interventions remain essential.

Government sources described the development as the result of sustained and coordinated action over several years, combining security operations with infrastructure development, welfare measures, and improved governance in affected regions. They emphasised that while the removal of the LWE tag represents a major achievement, efforts will continue to ensure long-term stability and prevent any re-emergence of extremism.

The decision to do away with the classification of LWE-affected districts signals a new phase in India's approach,



of the "Legacy and Thrust" category. These include regions such as Bastar and Sukma in Chhattisgarh, Gaya and

which is focused on consolidation, development and vigilance rather than active conflict management.

INTERNATIONAL

US seizes Iranian ship near Hormuz, Tehran vows to 'soon respond' as ceasefire nears collapse

WASHINGTON

The confrontation between the United States and Iran deepened dramatically on Sunday after U.S. forces seized an Iranian-flagged cargo vessel near the Strait of Hormuz, a move that has pushed an already fragile ceasefire to the brink and injected fresh uncertainty into last-ditch diplomatic efforts.

U.S. President Donald Trump said the vessel, *Touska*, was intercepted in the Gulf of Oman after ignoring repeated warnings from an American warship enforcing a newly imposed blockade on Iranian ports. He said a U.S. Navy destroyer disabled the ship by firing into its engine room before Marines boarded and took custody, adding that forces were now inspecting its cargo. U.S. Central Command later released video showing warnings issued to the vessel and the moment disabling fire was used, describing the action as deliberate and proportional after hours of non-compliance.

Iran swiftly condemned the seizure as "maritime piracy" and a violation of the ceasefire that has held uneasily since early April. The country's military headquarters warned of a response. "We warn that the armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran will soon respond and retaliate against this armed piracy and the US military," said a spokesperson for the military's central command centre, Khatam Al-Anbiya, cited by ISNA news agency.

Officials across Tehran have also hardened their rhetoric. President Masoud Pezeshkian accused Washington of provocative and illegal behaviour that was eroding trust, and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told Pakistan's top diplomat that U.S. threats against Iranian ships and ports showed "bad intentions" and a lack of seriousness about diplomacy.

U.S. Central Command footage shows American forces warning the Iranian-flagged vessel *Touska* to evac-



uate its engine room before firing disabling rounds and boarding the ship in the Gulf of Oman after it allegedly ignored repeated orders.

Iran rejects US peace talks as Trump orders negotiators to Pakistan. The seizure comes at a particularly sensitive moment, with the ceasefire due to expire within days and tentative plans for a second round of U.S.-Iran talks in Islamabad hanging in the balance. While Washington has said its negotiators are ready to travel, neither Tehran nor Pakistan has formally confirmed the meeting. Iranian state-linked media have already suggested the talks may not take place, even as Pakistani authorities quietly stepped up security in the capital, deploying troops, closing tourist sites and clearing hotels in preparation for a possible summit. At sea, the situation is deteriorating quickly. Iran has reimposed strict controls over the Strait of Hormuz, effectively, once again shutting down one of the world's most vital oil corridors. Ships attempting to pass through the narrow waterway have reversed course or remained stranded, with hundreds of vessels now waiting on either side. Iranian forces have reportedly fired on multiple ships in recent days, and a French-operated container vessel was damaged after warning shots, underscoring the growing risks to commercial shipping.

Iranian leaders have made clear

that the restrictions are directly tied to the U.S. blockade. Parliamentary Speaker Mohammed Bagher Qalibaf, who is also involved in negotiations, said the strait would remain closed as long as Iran's own oil exports are restricted, declaring it "impossible" for others to transit freely under those conditions. First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref echoed that position, warning that global energy stability depends on lifting pressure on Iranian oil and framing the crisis as a choice between a free market and escalating costs for all.

The economic implications are already reverberating globally. With roughly a fifth of the world's oil normally flowing through the Strait of Hormuz, the disruption has intensified an energy crisis that is affecting markets from Asia to Europe. U.S. officials have tried to contain the fallout, with Energy Secretary Chris Wright describing recent moves, such as redirecting Russian oil flows toward countries including India, as "pragmatic" steps to stabilize supply, even as critics argue they benefit Moscow.

At the same time, military tensions are rising across multiple fronts. Iran says it has resumed rebuilding its missile and drone arsenal during the ceasefire, signalling preparation for renewed conflict. The United States has escalated its own rhetoric, with Trump warning he could target Iranian infra-

structure, including power plants and bridges, if Tehran refuses U.S. terms, threats that some legal experts say could raise questions under the laws of war.

Regional dynamics are also shifting. Israel has announced a new forward defense line inside southern Lebanon, extending its military presence beyond previously understood ceasefire arrangements, a move likely to heighten tensions with Hezbollah and the Lebanese government. Meanwhile, the British military has declared the situation in the Gulf "critical," warning of a high risk of miscalculation amid increased naval activity.

Despite the intensifying crisis, U.S. officials insist diplomacy is not dead. US energy secretary Chris Wright said negotiations with Iran are continuing behind the scenes and suggested a deal may still be within reach, describing Trump's approach as one that uses pressure and uncertainty to force concessions. But on the Iranian side, skepticism is deepening, with officials increasingly questioning whether Washington intends to negotiate in good faith or is preparing for further escalation.

The broader conflict has already exacted a heavy toll, with thousands killed across Iran, Lebanon, Israel and other parts of the region, as well as casualties among U.S. forces. The seizure of the *Touska* now stands as a flashpoint that could determine the next phase of the crisis. It has intensified the standoff at sea, disrupted global energy flows, and cast doubt over diplomatic efforts just as time is running out. With the ceasefire deadline approaching and both sides hardening their positions, the situation remains highly unstable. Whether the coming days bring renewed negotiations or a return to open conflict may depend on how each side responds to this latest confrontation in the waters of the Gulf.

UK eyes 'Reset' in European ties as Iran war strains relations with Trump's US

LONDON

Britain's government is set to announce legislation next month to move the country closer to the European Union, as the Iran war sours the UK's so-called special relationship with the United States.

President Donald Trump's unpredictability and stream of insults towards America's historic ally is adding impetus to Prime Minister Keir Starmer's bid to deepen ties with the 27-nation bloc, a decade after Britons narrowly voted to leave the EU. "We have a government that is already eager to move closer towards the EU, and the events in Iran provide an opportunity to speed up that process," Evie Aspinall, director of the British Foreign Policy Group think-tank, told. Starmer's administration is preparing an EU "Reset" bill that will give ministers powers to align UK standards with EU single market rules as they evolve -- something called "dynamic alignment".

King Charles III will announce the legislation on May 13 when he reads out Starmer's legislative plans for the coming months, a government official told AFP on condition of anonymity. Starmer has repeatedly called for a deeper economic and security relationship with Europe since his Labour party won the 2024 general election, ousting the Conservatives, who had implemented the 2016 Brexit referendum. He has urged those calls in recent days, telling Dutch leader Rob Jetten on Tuesday that "he believed the partnership between the UK and the bloc needed to be fit for the challenges we were facing today."

From left, Italian

Premier Giorgia Meloni, Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer, France's President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz arrive to give a statement after an international summit to push forward efforts to reopen the Strait of Hormuz at the Elysee Palace in Paris, France, Friday, April 17, 2026.

The EU is Britain's biggest trading partner, while the International Monetary Fund warned this week that the UK will be the advanced economy hardest hit by the Iran conflict.

"Certainly Iran has made it (the reset) more present," said the UK official.

"We need to build economic resilience across the continent," they added. Starmer refused to involve Britain in the US and Israel's initial strikes on February 28, angering Trump, although he has since allowed American forces to use UK bases for a "limited defensive purpose."

Under pressure at home for his disastrous decision to appoint former Jeffrey Epstein associate Peter Mandelson as ambassador to Washington, Starmer has received plaudits for standing up to Trump in the face of repeated taunts from the US president. Days ago, Trump threatened in a phone interview with Sky News to scrap a US-UK trade deal that limited the impact on Britain of his tariffs blitz. "There's no doubt that there is now momentum in the UK-EU relationship partly as a result of Trump's unreliable behaviour," David Henig, an expert on UK's post-Brexit trade policy, told AFP.

"Independent UK trade policy looks much harder, the prospects of working with the EU much brighter."

Starmer's administration hopes to table the EU legislation in the next few months, meaning it could come around the time of the 10th anniversary of the Brexit referendum, held in June 2016.

MPs will get to approve whether to provide the government with a mechanism to adopt EU rules -- sometimes without a full parliamentary vote -- in areas where it has already signed deals with the bloc. They include a trade agreement designed to ease red tape on food and plant exports and plans for an electricity deal that would integrate the UK into the EU's internal electricity market.

Britain and the EU are also aiming to finalise negotiations on a youth mobility scheme in time for a joint summit in Brussels expected in late June or early July. Starmer has ruled out rejoining the single market or returning to free movement but the Liberal Democrats, Britain's traditional third party, wants him to cross one of his other red lines by negotiating a customs union with the EU.

"We need to be doubling down on relations with reliable partners who share our interests and values," the Liberal Democrats foreign affairs spokesman Calum Miller told AFP. But Brexit remains a toxic issue and the far-right Reform UK party, leading opinion polls and headed by Eurosceptic firebrand Nigel Farage, have branded the legislation "a betrayal" of the referendum's narrow result.

Surveys regularly now show, however, that most Britons regret the vote to leave the EU, something Starmer hopes to capitalise on.

A Political Turning Point in Tripura: BJP's Decline and Tipra Motha's Tribal Consolidation



JAYANTA DEBNATH

The 2026 elections to the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) have marked a decisive political shift in Tripura's electoral landscape. The sweeping victory of Tipra Motha Party, securing 24 out of 28 seats, is not merely an electoral outcome but a structural transformation in tribal political alignment. For the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), this election represents a significant setback with far-reaching implications, particularly in the context of the 2028 Assembly elections.

While BJP remains in power in the state, its dramatic decline in the ADC, from 9 seats in 2021 to just 4 seats in 2026, reflects a deep erosion of its support base in tribal regions. The numbers clearly illustrate the magnitude of this shift.

The official vote statistics present a stark picture. The total votes polled stood at 8,04,667. Out of this, BJP secured 2,18,072 votes, translating to 27.1 percent, while Tipra Motha surged ahead with 4,57,943 votes, accounting for 56.9 percent.

The gap of nearly 2.4 lakh votes between the two parties signifies a near-total consolidation of tribal voters in favor of Tipra Motha. This is not a fragmented or marginal victory but a decisive and overwhelming mandate that reflects a clear shift in political sentiment.

A closer examination of constituency-level data reveals a consistent pattern of BJP underperformance across regions. In Damchhara-Jampui, BJP polled 9,022 votes against Tipra Motha's 12,836. In Mandainagar-Pulinpur, BJP secured only 3,294 votes compared to Tipra Motha's massive 19,033. The gap was even more pronounced in Jirania (ST), where BJP received 3,066 votes while Tipra Motha surged to 21,500. Similarly, in Ampinagar (ST), BJP managed 4,488 votes against Tipra Motha's 15,278.

Even in relatively stronger pockets such as Silachari-Manubankul, BJP's tally of 13,965 was only marginally ahead in a close contest where Tipra Motha secured 13,474 votes, indicating that even traditional support bases are no longer secure.

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In more than fifteen constituencies, BJP candidates failed to cross even 10,000 votes, whereas Tipra Motha candidates

consistently polled between 15,000 and 20,000 votes. This disparity underscores a structural weakness in BJP's voter mobilization strategy.

One of the most critical issues identified is the lack of grassroots engagement among BJP candidates. Many candidates were perceived as imposed rather than organically connected to their constituencies. This perception significantly weakened campaign engagement and voter trust.

Even in areas where BJP had historically enjoyed favorable conditions, candidates struggled to activate core supporters. The absence of strong local leadership directly affected booth-level performance and ultimately voter turnout.

The decline in BJP's vote share is not limited to specific pockets but is widespread across the state. From Kanchanpur in the north to Sabroom in the south, the party has experienced a uniform erosion of support. This clearly indicates systemic organizational and strategic failures rather than isolated electoral setbacks.

The ADC tribal belt, which once formed a crucial component of BJP's expansion strategy in Tripura, has now shifted decisively away from the party.

Opposition Dynamics and Consolidation of Tribal Sentiment

Although CPI(M) secured 71,335 votes, amounting to 8.8 percent, and Congress along with smaller parties like IPFT retained fragmented vote shares, the anticipated split in opposition votes did not benefit BJP.

Instead, Tipra Motha emerged as the principal beneficiary of a consolidated tribal sentiment. The election effectively evolved into a bipolar contest in which BJP was unable to counter the dominant regional and identity-based narrative.

The reasons behind BJP's poor performance are deeply rooted in structural and strategic shortcomings. Candidates lacked local acceptance and were often seen as externally imposed, which reduced their credibility among voters. Organizational structures at the booth and mandal levels were largely inactive or ineffective, resulting in weak voter mobilization.

The party also failed to effectively counter Tipra Motha's strong identity-driven narrative, which resonated deeply with tribal voters. Additionally, several electoral promises made specifically for ADC voters were either unrealistic or poorly communicated, leading to dissatisfaction and backlash.

A major contributing factor was the absence of coordination among the party's top leadership, which adversely affected candidate selection, campaign planning, and overall execution.

Internal Conflict and Leadership Challenges

Internal factionalism within BJP significantly contributed to the defeat. Reports suggest that senior and experienced leaders were sidelined during the campaign process, leading to weakened coordination and reduced effectiveness. Leadership decisions by Chief Minister Dr. Manik Saha and State President Rajib Bhattacharjee have come under scrutiny in this context.

Post-election developments have further exposed leadership shortcomings. Incidents of violence reportedly affected more than 200 party workers and leaders, many of whom were forced to flee their homes and take shelter in places such as Bhagat Singh Youth Hostel in Agartala. The perceived lack of

timely and effective response from leadership has deepened dissatisfaction at the grassroots level.

There are widespread discussions within political circles regarding the limited involvement of key leaders such as Ratan Lal Nath, Sushanta Chowdhury, and MP Biplab Kumar Deb. Allegations of non-cooperation, internal sabotage, and prioritization of personal interests over collective party goals have further weakened the organizational structure.

Such internal divisions have significantly undermined BJP's ability to present a united and coordinated campaign.

Organizational Weakness and Loss of Ground Support

Despite being in power for several years, BJP has not been able to establish a strong and credible leadership base in ADC areas. Long-time dedicated workers have reportedly been neglected, leading to demotivation and reduced campaign efficiency.

There are also concerns that attendance at campaign rallies may have been artificially inflated through managed participation, creating a misleading perception of support. This disconnect between perceived and actual ground support contributed to strategic miscalculations.

Implications for Future Alliances

The election outcome has complicated future political alignments. While Tipra Motha had previously aligned with BJP, its current victory is largely built on anti-BJP sentiment. This makes any future alliance between the two parties politically sensitive and potentially unstable.

Resistance from both cadres and supporters could pose significant challenges to any attempt at rebuilding such an alliance.

Warning Signals for Upcoming Elections

The 2026 TTAADC election results serve as a clear warning signal for BJP. Unless immediate corrective measures are taken, including resolving internal conflicts, strengthening organizational structures, and reconnecting with grassroots workers, the party risks further setbacks in upcoming Village Council, Municipal, and Nagar Panchayat elections.

More importantly, the trends observed in this election could have serious implications for the 2028 Assembly elections if not addressed with urgency and strategic clarity.

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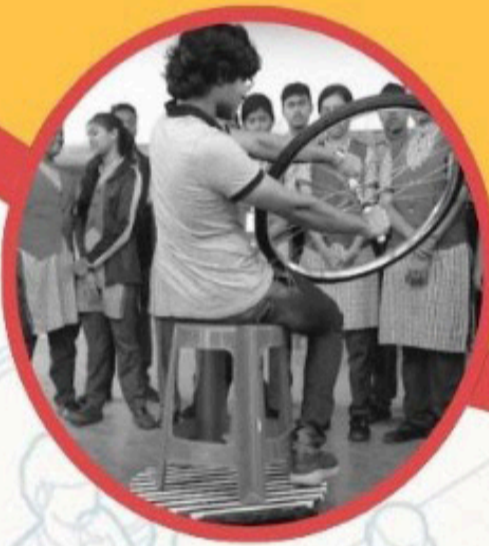
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