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PERSPECTIVE
"I prefer peace. But if trouble must come, let it come in my time, so that my children can live in peace." - Thomas Paine

Assam tea brews diplomatic warmth as Chinese Embassy spokesperson lauds iconic black variety

GUWAHATI
In a gesture underlining evolving cultural and economic engagement, Yu Jing, spokesperson of the Chinese Embassy in India, has praised Assam's famed black tea following a visit to a tea estate in the state.

Sharing her experience on social media platform X, Yu described the visit as an immersive journey into the production process of Assam tea. "Visited a tea estate and experienced the full journey of Assam black tea. No wonder it has won many fans in China," she said, also posting her message in Assamese to connect with local audiences.

Assam, the world's largest contiguous tea-growing region, is globally known for producing robust and malty black teas. The beverage's rising international appeal is reflected in export data, with India's tea shipments to China more than doubling in 2025 from 6.24 million kg to over 16.13 million kg driven by growing demand for premium orthodox Assam varieties. Industry observers note that Assam's black tea, valued for its strong flavour profile and antioxidant properties, is steadily gaining popularity among Chinese consumers, who have traditionally preferred green and specialty teas. The trend is being seen as a potential boost to bilateral trade and agricultural cooperation.

Beyond commerce, Assam tea is increasingly emerging as a cultural bridge between India and China, with the potential to promote tourism and deepen people-to-people ties. One of the most widely consumed beverages globally, it is also known for its natural caffeine content that enhances alertness and energy.

WHO SAID WHAT



A revered spiritual guide of the Bodo community, Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma's teachings continue to inspire faith, unity and social upliftment in Assam.

Today on his Punya Jayanti, I bow in reverence to the great saint and pray for the well-being of all.

- Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM, Assam

Nikali K Shohe to represent Nagaland at Femina Miss India 2026

KOHIMA
Nagaland will be represented by 22-year-old Nikali K Shohe at the prestigious Femina Miss India 2026, scheduled to be held on April 18 in Bhubaneswar.

Hailing from Philimi village and currently residing in Akuhaito town, Shohe has emerged as a promising talent from the state, having secured several accolades in recent years. She was first runner-up at Miss Northeast 2026 and previously won titles including Miss Nagaland 2024 and Miss Sumi 2024.

Beyond her achievements in pageantry, Shohe aspires to serve as a Drug Control Officer, reflecting her interest in public service and community welfare.

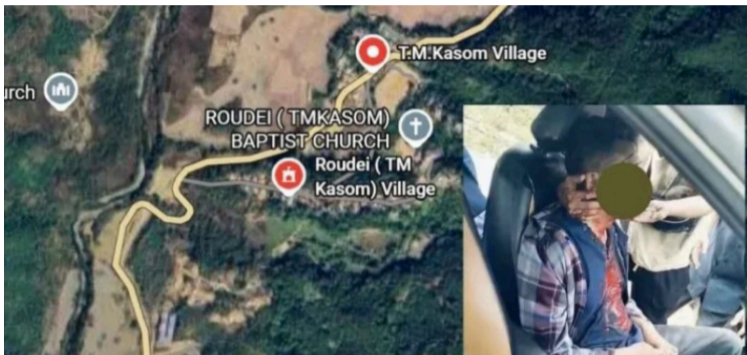
Speaking about her experience at the national platform, she described the journey as transformative, saying it has pushed her to learn continuously and step outside her comfort zone. Representing her state, she added, has been a strong source of motivation to perform at her best.

In a message to the people of Nagaland, Shohe emphasised the importance of staying true to one's identity, encouraging individuals to move forward with confi-

dence, kindness and authenticity despite challenges and stereotypes.

As she prepares to take the stage, Sho-

he carries the aspirations of Nagaland, emerging as an inspiration for youth across the region to pursue their ambi-



IMPHAL
Two Tangkhul Naga men were killed in a suspected militant ambush along National Highway-202 in Manipur's Ukhrul district on Saturday, in an incident that has heightened tensions in the region.

According to reports, the victims were travelling in two separate vehicles when unidentified armed assailants opened fire near T.M. Kasom village along the Imphal-Ukhrul road at around 2:35 pm. At least three other vehicles were also damaged in the attack. The deceased have been identified

as S.W. Chinaoshang, a resident of Tashar village in Ukhrul district, and Yaruingam Vashum, also from the district. One of the victims was reportedly an ex-serviceman.

Sources indicated that the ambush was allegedly carried out by suspected Kuki militants, though there has been no official confirmation from authorities.

Following the incident, central security forces and Manipur Police rushed to the spot and launched preliminary operations. Officials said further action is underway to trace those

responsible.

The ambush comes amid continuing volatility in the district. A day earlier, an unexploded "pumpkin" shell was recovered from Sinakeithei village in Ukhrul after it reportedly landed near a residential area late Friday night. The shell, which fell around 10:30 pm, failed to detonate, averting potential casualties and damage.

The development coincided with the maiden road visit of Manipur minister Y. Khemchand Singh to Ukhrul headquarters, adding to the sensitivity of the situation.

Meanwhile, the United Naga Council (UNC), the apex body representing Nagas in Manipur, reiterated its commitment to peaceful coexistence but issued a cautionary note.

UNC president Ng. Lorho stated that while the organisation remains committed to peace, any misinterpretation of its neutral stance as weakness could compel the Nagas to defend themselves and their land.

Security has been tightened in the area, and authorities are closely monitoring the situation as fears of further escalation persist.

Women's Reservation Bill defeat sparks BJP-Congress showdown in Assam over intent, impact

GUWAHATI

A day after the Constitution Amendment Bill proposing 33 per cent reservation for women in legislatures was defeated in the Lok Sabha, a sharp political confrontation unfolded in Assam, with the BJP and Congress trading charges over the intent and implications of the legislation.

Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president Gaurav Gogoi launched a strong attack on the ruling BJP, alleging that the party's underlying objective was not women's empowerment but "political control through delimitation".

"Their main aim is to fulfil their own individual and political interests by taking the Women's Reservation Bill into a web," said Gogoi, the MP from Jorhat. He further claimed that parliamentary debates over the past three days had exposed what he described as attempts by the BJP to centralise constitutional powers and alter the political balance among states.

"These discussions have shown how the BJP wants to concentrate constitutional authority and reduce the political weight of states with smaller populations," he said.

Raising concerns over delimitation, Gogoi alleged that similar exercises in Assam and Jammu and Kashmir had been carried out with political motives ahead of elections. He cautioned that such measures could be expanded nationwide and urged continued vigilance.

Senior Congress leader Ripun

Bora also questioned the BJP's commitment to women's empowerment, pointing to what he termed a contradiction between the party's advocacy for reservation and the limited representation of women in its electoral nominations.

He argued that genuine empowerment must go beyond rhetoric and translate into consistent and meaningful participation of women in electoral politics.

Responding sharply, Assam BJP president Dilip Saikia accused the Congress and other Opposition parties of obstructing women's empowerment and termed the Bill's defeat a "historic injustice".

"The manner in which Congress and other Opposition parties have disrespected women's empowerment is an inexcusable crime," Saikia said, describing April 17 as a "black day" in India's political history.

He alleged that Opposition parties, including the Congress, Trinamool Congress, Samajwadi Party and DMK, had collectively blocked the passage of the Bill, thereby undermining the future of women's political participation.

Saikia added that women across the country would respond democratically to what he described as "anti-women politics".

The war of words highlights a deepening political divide in Assam over the Women's Reservation Bill, with both sides accusing each other of undermining its core objective while advancing competing narratives on delimitation and representation.

MBSE to announce Class 10, 12 results in April; dates to be finalised soon



AIZAWL

The Mizoram Board of School Education (MBSE) will declare the results of the Class 10 and Class 12 board examinations within April, officials said on Saturday, though the exact dates are yet to be finalised. MBSE Chairman JH Zoremthanga said the board is preparing to release the results at the earliest, with a meeting of the examination committee scheduled soon to decide the final timeline.

"We are planning to declare the Class 10 and 12 board examination results within April. We will soon convene a meeting of the examination committee to finalise the dates," he told reporters. Meanwhile, Mizoram School Education Minister Vanlalhlana had earlier announced a key reform in the evaluation system. From this year, the MBSE will discontinue the practice of publishing merit lists, including Top 10 ranks, distinctions and divisions in result booklets.

The move, the minister said, is aimed at reducing unhealthy academic competition driven by rote learning and promoting a more competency-based approach to education.

Last year, the Class 10 board examinations recorded a pass percentage of 76.68 per cent, with most students securing second division, while the Class 12 examinations saw a pass rate of 81.10 per cent.

Further details regarding result declaration dates are expected after the examination committee meeting.

EVM security row: Assam LoP flags 'serious lapses' in Sivasagar strongrooms, moves EC observer

GUWAHATI

Leader of Opposition in the outgoing Assam Assembly, Debabrata Saikia, on Saturday alleged major security lapses in strongrooms housing election materials in Sivasagar district and moved the Election Commission observer seeking urgent intervention.

In a letter addressed to Election Observer T.L. Reddy, Saikia claimed that arrangements at Rooms 12 and 15 of Sivasagar Government Boys HS and MP School violate core guidelines laid down by the Election Commission of India.

The Congress leader said the alleged lapses pertain to three Assembly constituencies-Demow, Sivasagar and Nazira-where polled election materials, including EVMs, are stored.

Citing photographic evidence, Saikia claimed that the rooms have two doors, but only one is secured with a padlock while the other is "merely shut from the inside", raising concerns over unauthorised access.

"This physical state is in direct and alarming contravention of the Election Commission's strict directives designed to safeguard sensitive election materials," he stated.

He further alleged that the absence of a mandatory double-lock system violates EC norms, which require strongrooms to have a single entry point secured with two locks,

leading to a brief scuffle. Security personnel responded by firing tear gas shells to disperse the crowd and bring the situation under control.

The latest incident comes amid a broader wave of protests triggered by the recent violence at Tronglaobi in Bishnupur district, where two children were killed in a bomb explosion while asleep and their mother sustained injuries. The incident has sparked widespread outrage and intensified agitation across the state.

Over the past few days, demonstrators have been staging sit-in protests during the day and torch rallies at night in multiple locations. A similar rally earlier this week, which began in Lilong and moved towards Singjamei, had also turned violent.

Authorities said the situation remains under close watch, with intermittent clashes continuing in protest-hit areas as tensions persist.

with keys held separately by the Returning Officer and Assistant Returning Officer.

"The presence of only a single lock renders these shared-key security protocols entirely defunct," Saikia said.

The LoP also flagged what he described as a "total collapse" of perimeter security. He claimed that guidelines mandating Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) deployment in the innermost layer and State Armed Police in the outer perimeter were not being followed.

Additionally, Saikia pointed to the alleged absence of CCTV surveillance, calling it a breach of EC directives requiring continuous camera coverage of sealed doors, corridors and security zones.

He expressed objection to a statement issued by the district administration dismissing the concerns, asserting that a formal representation detailing the lapses had already been submitted to the Chief Electoral Officer and Chief Election Commissioner on April 14.

Saikia warned that maintaining rooms with "simple lock and key" mechanisms in proximity to EVM strongrooms compromises the integrity of the entire security setup and undermines the sanctity of the electoral process.

Polling for Assam's 126 Assembly constituencies was held on April 9, with counting scheduled for May 4.

Assam CM Himanta asks Pawan Khera to surrender as SC denies relief

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday asked Congress leader Pawan Khera to surrender.

Sarma, who is campaigning for the BJP in West Bengal, said Khera could not get away by running away from the law.

"I think Pawan Khera should surrender before the law. The more you run away from the law, the bigger the problem becomes," the Assam Chief Minister said.

"I will just tell him to come to Guwahati and surrender," he further stated.

Barely a few days ahead of the April 9 Assam elections, Khera had claimed that Sarma's wife possesses passports of three countries, owns luxury properties in Dubai and has investments worth several lakh crore rupees in the United States.

The claims made her lodge an FIR against him with the Crime Branch police station

in Guwahati and it registered a case.

Even as the Assam Police were searching for him, he approached the Telangana High Court and it had on April 10 granted him one-week transit anticipatory bail.

The Assam government moved the Supreme Court challenging the bail and it stayed the high court order two days ago.

On Friday, the apex court refused to entertain Khera's plea for interim protection from arrest and asked him to approach a competent court in Assam to seek anticipatory bail.

Earlier, Sarma had dismissed Khera's claims outright, and sniffed a Pakistani angle to it.

He claimed that the "fraud and fabricated" documents that the Congress leader had relied on while making the serious claims were "supplied from a Pakistani social media group."





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UNSPECIFIED GROWTH TRAJECTORY

While the people of India, have been introduced to an ambitious vision of the Government of India to transform the nation into a fully developed, self-reliant and globally influential country by the 100th anniversary of its independence. The roadmap so drawn focuses on economic prosperity, sustainable growth, innovations, social inclusion and robust infrastructure targeting to \$30-40 trillion economy with high per capita income. Key pillars identified include economic transformation, empowered citizens, world class infrastructure and technology, Good governance, national security and environmental sustainability. The focus areas demanding core care include youths and innovations, Agriculture, MSMEs, social development and global leadership. Achieving the target of Viksit Bharat on centenary throws challenges to closely address several structural, social and economic grey areas like economic inequality, low female labour participation, educational gaps and necessity to balance rapid industrialization with net zero commitments.

While the progress is underway, grey areas and structural challenges present significant risks to this vision. Keeping the national objective restricted to Government departments, officials and higher political leadership may lack comprehensive approach and on ground involvement of the people across the societal spectrum that would impede cohesive efforts in this direction. It is pertinent to widen scope of approach and identify weak corners to deal with. We have already passed through three quarters of the centenary and it therefore calls for a close and coordinated practical policy reforms. Few grey areas are dwelt upon in the following paragraphs.

Socio-Economic Disparities. Indian society faces socio-economic disparities that lacks inclusivity and equity. Benefits of economic growth has not proportionately reached all sections of the society particularly marginalized communities that requires balancing rapid economic growth across the nation so that rural and urban population get benefit of it. There are inbuilt constitutional provisions of reservations for socially marginalized people that requires review so that ground reality match with the official records. A balanced and sustainable effort to empower all citizens economically through healthy Government schemes on long term basis to create an environment developing economy to move towards developed economy. Despite rising GDP, the country continues to face income inequality that ultimately affect Human Development Index by on an average of 30 percent.

Demographic Factors. Leverage of demographic dividend needs massive job creation and unrestricted female participation in the job market that apparently is low in the present context and needs to be boosted up through policy framework and other social initiatives. Unbridled rise in the rate of unemployment across the spectrum poses significant challenge for the economy to meet the target especially in case of women workers whose potentiality remains unexploited owing to social structure of the Indian society. To overcome regional disparities, rural and urban area criticalities and to create an environment for prosperity to reach across the demographic divide is a major challenge as female labour force participation hovers around 20 percent.

Economic and Infrastructure Gaps. To achieve an economy of \$30 trillion, it requires massive sustainable investment across the country balancing gap noticeable in Urban and rural India. Public Private Participation in major industrial hubs unrestricted to big towns and cities through policy framework may create employment opportunities and resolutely attract professionals to rural areas for a balanced skill development and infrastructural growth across the nation. It may also discourage Rural-Urban divide resulting in bridging the gap that poses a significant challenge in this direction.

Digital Sovereignty. Emerging intervention of Artificial Intelligence and technology calls for a robust cyber security and data security against emerging threats in the field. Our policy framework as on date remains insufficient to deal with these recent interventions and calls for updated guidelines to adopt the emerging field of AI in our day to day life so that the system become robust to deal with these challenges especially in the field of software technology. Involving AI step by step in a coordinated and controlled manner may enhance the productivity rather than posing a challenge to obstruct the path of development in all the economic activities.

Governance and Bureaucracy. A transparent and system friendly information symmetry for upgrading public services for meeting developed nation standards is critical. A healthy policy framework paves way for good governance and efficient bureaucracy is required for a nation to achieve required growth across the spectrum. An analytical glance of GDP growth rate for last decade shows that it stayed in single digit hovering around 6-8% except for 2019 and 2020 where it worked out between 3-6% due to Covid-19. However, to attain \$30-40 trillion, it needs extra ordinary performance to achieve and retain the growth rate in higher double digit scale throughout, a big challenge for quality of governance and dedicated bureaucracy.

Sustainability and Infrastructure. Financing Green transition to achieve net zero by 2070 requires massive investment and financial gaps significantly noticeable for clean energy and green hydrogen production would ultimately affect this critically. Rapid urbanization along with climate risks pose serious threat to the sustainability of long term development efforts. Also the uneven development across the nation would hinder the national goal of collective prosperity.

Addressing these grey areas requires going beyond high level growth targets and to focus on inclusivity and information sharing across social structure of the country. It is quite clear that for "Viksit Bharat" to become a reality, it is must to look beyond GDP figures and address deep rooted socio-economic inequalities, institutional inefficiencies and environmental sustainability. A comprehensive plan to rejuvenate the education system, revamp policy framework, align pattern of governance and enhance information flow till last beneficiary so that it could work through a preset trajectory of growth to become "Viksit Bharat" by 2047 and prove to the world that India made Indians empowered by the turn of centenary.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Energy is contagious: either you affect people or you infect people. - T. Harv Eker

WAR IN IRAN WHERE IS INDIA?



DR. D.K. GIRI

Iran war has entered into the phase of ceasefire. On request from international quarters, Donald Trump has put off the bombing of critical resource hub and infrastructure. Only Trump knows how long he will maintain that position. The entire world knows that Trump likes to ham and haw and is capable of changing his mind without any reason. As the President of the most powerful country, Donald Trump has disastrously disrupted the world economy, security and politics by his undependable and untenable approach.

Be that as it may, it is in order that we discuss the durability of the ceasefire leading to an end of the war. Donald Trump as his wont would like to end the war as soon as possible. Perhaps like Vladimir Putin in Ukraine, Trump expected to have a quick operation in beating Iran into submission. That was not to be. The conditions put forward by both warring parties; America and Iran are not acceptable to either. It will require highly skillful mediation to get them on the same page. It is now next to impossible to predict how Trump will respond at a particular time. And Pakistan, hosting the negotiation meetings is merely a facilitator rather than a mediator. More on this a bit later.

There are various theories on why America went into the war against Iran. We have discussed it more than once in this column. The main actor in this Iran drama is Israel. But America has taken the cudgel to back Israel in its battle against Iran and communicate the proceedings to the world. Although, obviously, Donald Trump is not doing it so well, in fact, doing it quite badly. His flip-flops, about turns, statements on shifting sands and so on will certainly become part of the political folklores. But the regime in the United States does not consist of President alone although he is in the forefront. That said, Trump has two able and articulate deputies in the government - Mark Rubio, the Secretary of State and J.D. Vance, the Vice President. The latter is representing America on the next negotiation meeting with Iran in Islamabad.

Talking of the war aims of the US, Mark Rubio has made a convincing and a formidable statement on 8 April. He said in a presser, "Iran wanted nuclear weapons. There was zero doubt about it. If they wanted what they claim, the nuclear energy like many countries have done, they should have imported the fuel and built the nuclear reactors above the ground. That is what they have not done. They have built the reactors and the facilities deep in the mountain away from the public glare. They want to enrich that material. They want to develop into nuclear weapons. They were entitled to have nuclear energy, and the world has agreed to that, not to acquire weapons. But Iran has turned it down every time. At the same time, they have built a conventional shield consisting of drones and missiles that will deter any attack on their nuclear weapon

infrastructure. They had on the verge of acquiring that capability which will make them immune from any attack on their nuclear programmes. This was an intolerable risk. In fact, this was the last chance to dismantle that conventional shield that is why America took the military step."

The above is a persuasive argument for the war. Admittedly, many countries especially India would like to talk about dialogue and diplomacy and international law not war. But there are occasions in international relations, war becomes unavoidable. It is said that war is failure of diplomacy and vice-versa meaning diplomacy begins when war is inconclusive. However, has that war objective been accomplished? Is the ceasefire an excuse for re-strategising and rebuilding?

The moot question in this piece is where India is in this war which is closer in many ways than the war in Ukraine. Frankly, New Delhi has let itself down once more. When the world expects India to step up, New Delhi dithers. The slips between the cup and the lip, lost opportunities have been experienced since the times of Pt. Nehru. Modi regime which seems determined to undo the mistakes of Nehru ends up repeating them. To illustrate, during Covid, an international disaster caused by China, the world expected India to be an alternative manufacturing hub given its demography and democracy, but New Delhi could not even come close to it.

On Ukraine war, India could initiate the mediation as New Delhi claims to be neutral having strategic autonomy etc. That did not happen. In Iran war, the same expectation surfaced again. In fact, the Prime Minister of Finland, a credible, often neutral country,

Alexander Stubbs openly exhorted Prime Minister Modi to plunge into a mediator role. On the contrary, that position went to Pakistan of all the countries, a terrorist hub.

One could decipher the main reason for India's failure to occupy the stage on mediation. India traditionally has presented a moral profile in international politics but has not built on it. At the same time, New Delhi has not emphasised on building capabilities which is the sine qua non of geo politics, surely the real politik. America has thrived on its capability in utter denial of international norms and laws; so have Russia and China. India tried to shift from a moralist, self-righteous position to a pragmatic stance by beginning to decouple from its traditional ally Russia and engage with America. But again, New Delhi got caught in moralistic postures and fouled up the relations with Trump.

At the cost of repeating, Narendra Modi breaking diplomatic traditions and protocols endorsed the candidature of Trump in the presidential election in a much-advertised public meeting called Howdy Modi. Trump supported India solidly in his first term. Modi regime, especially the Foreign Minister failed to understand Trump's personality and therefore to deal with him. Modi's visit to Israel just before the war, a right step, has backfired as the External Affairs Minister failed to build on it. Disappointingly, the main Opposition party, Congress, instead of attacking Modi on alienating Trump and United States, is misfiring by accusing Modi of kowtowing to Trump. So, Modi has become a frenemy to United States and vice-versa.

A word on Pakistan's surprising elevation to a facilitator, Pakistan has sucked up to Donald Trump by

proposing him for the Nobel Prize. Trump likes such adulation. Islamabad may be active as a proxy of China. By many accounts, Beijing seems to be the big winner in this war. The elaboration on this thesis is for another article. Objectively, Pakistan's proximity to Iran and its existing diplomatic channels made it an ideal conduit for communication. To be sure, Pakistan's role is seen more as a facilitator than a full-fledged mediator with limited access and influence. But for now, Pakistan has edged India on Iran war. New Delhi has a lot to think about it. Maybe they will do so after the state elections where Prime Minister is actively campaigning.

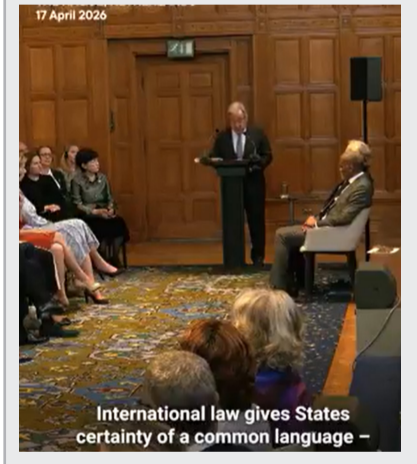
DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

In an increasingly multipolar world, we must choose a future governed by the rule of law, not driven by raw power.

Let's strengthen a world governed by justice, recommit to the peaceful settlement of disputes, respect the judgments of the @CIJ_ICJ

& uphold the principles of the @UN

Charter. ~ Antonio Guterres, Secretary- General, United Nations



International law gives States certainty of a common language -



Women's quota Bill defeat a 'Black Day': Himanta Biswa Sarma targets Opposition

Himanta flags 'demographic shift' in Assam, Bengal; calls for joint anti-infiltration task force



GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday launched a sharp attack on the Congress-led opposition after a Constitution amendment Bill proposing 33 per cent reservation for

women in legislatures was defeated in the Lok Sabha.

Reacting to the development, Sarma termed April 17 a "Black Day" and accused opposition parties of being "anti-women." In a post on X, he said the defeat of the legislation reflected a lack of political will among opposition members to ensure greater representation for women in Parliament and state assemblies.

The proposed Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill sought to operationalise 33 per cent reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and state legislatures ahead of the 2029 general elections. It also included provisions to expand the strength of the Lok Sabha from 543 to

816 seats, linked to a delimitation exercise based on the 2011 Census.

Despite securing 298 votes in favour, the Bill failed to pass after falling short of the required two-thirds majority, with 230 members voting against it out of a total 528 votes cast.

The proposed expansion of seats was aimed at facilitating the implementation of the reservation quota, with similar increases envisaged for state and Union Territory assemblies.

The Bill's defeat has triggered a fresh political confrontation, with the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party accusing the opposition of blocking a key reform aimed at women's empowerment. Opposition parties, however,

have raised concerns over linking the implementation of reservation to delimitation and census processes.

The development is expected to intensify political debate in the run-up to future elections, with both sides trading charges over commitment to women's representation in governance.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma raised concerns over what he described as a changing demographic pattern in Assam and West Bengal, calling for a coordinated response among eastern and northeastern states to tackle illegal infiltration.

Addressing a public gathering in Malda, Sarma claimed that post-census data could reflect a further rise

in the Muslim population, projecting figures of around 32 per cent in West Bengal and 36 per cent in Assam. He alleged that such changes are linked to continued illegal migration from Bangladesh. The Chief Minister stressed the need for a joint task force involving Assam, West Bengal, Tripura and other neighbouring states, warning that isolated efforts would not be sufficient to address cross-border infiltration. "Unless there is coordinated action, Bangladeshis will continue to enter India," he said.

Sarma further claimed that the Muslim population has been increasing by 4-5 per cent in each census cycle, adding that similar trends are visible

in both Assam and West Bengal.

Appealing to residents of West Bengal, he said safeguarding national interests required collective responsibility, and emphasised the need for collaboration among states such as Assam, West Bengal, Tripura and Meghalaya.

He also cautioned that failure to act in a coordinated manner could have long-term implications, alleging that unchecked infiltration may destabilise the region.

The remarks come amid continuing political debate over census data, migration and demographic trends in border states, where the issue remains highly sensitive.

Eastern Nagaland bodies back Frontier Territory MoA

MON

The Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation (ENPO), along with eight tribal councils and Eastern Naga political workers, has unanimously resolved to stand by the Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) on Frontier Nagaland Territory signed on February 5.

The decision was taken during a consultative and coordination meeting held in Mon town, attended by key tribal bodies including the Konyak Union, Chang Khulei Setshang, United Sangtam Likhum Pumji, Phom Peoples' Council, Yimkhiung Tribal Council, Khiamniungan Tribal Council, Tikhir Tribal Council and Eastern Sumi Hoho.

Reaffirming the historic Tuensang Summit declaration of December 18, 2007, which declared Eastern Nagaland a "Peace Zone," participants pledged to safeguard the future of younger generations by upholding the MoA signed between the Government of India, the Government of Nagaland and ENPO. The meeting underscored the importance of unity in ensuring peace, justice through equality, and maintaining fraternity and integrity, while working towards comprehensive socio-economic development in Eastern Nagaland on par with the rest of Nagaland.

Participants also resolved to align collective efforts to address challenges that may hinder growth and prosperity in the region, signalling a coordinated push for stability and development.

The resolution was formally signed by ENPO president Chingmak Chang and general secretary Honang Konyak.

TTAADC poll verdict a 'learning opportunity', says Tripura CM Manik Saha



AGARTALA

Manik Saha said the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) accepts the outcome of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) elections with humility, describing the result as an opportunity for introspection and improvement. The BJP secured four seats in the 28-member council, prompting the Chief Minister to acknowledge the mandate while expressing confidence in a stronger comeback. In a message shared on social media, Saha thanked party workers for

their efforts during the polls.

He also congratulated the Tipra Motha Party for its performance, stressing that democratic outcomes must be respected. "While we accept the people's mandate with humility, we see this as an opportunity to learn and come back stronger," he said.

Reaffirming the party's commitment, Saha said the BJP would continue to work towards development, unity and the welfare of the people with renewed determination, while focusing on strengthening its outreach in tribal areas.

Internet suspended in Chirang, Kokrajhar after clashes during eviction along India-Bhutan border



GUWAHATI

The Government of Assam has suspended mobile internet and data services in Chirang and Kokrajhar following violent clashes triggered by an eviction drive along the India-Bhutan border.

According to an official notification issued by Additional Chief Secretary Ajay Tewari, the decision came after reports of unrest in Chirang district, where forest officials detained 25 Adivasi individuals during an eviction operation at Runikhata on April 16.

The situation escalated as clashes broke out between protesters and forest personnel, with reports of government vehicles being set ablaze and attempts made to torch the Range Officer's office. Incidents of firing were also reported, with tension continuing in the area.

Authorities expressed concern that the unrest could spill over into adjoining regions, including Kokrajhar, posing a threat to public safety and law and order.

The notification cited the risk of misinformation and inflammatory content being circulated via social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, X, YouTube and Instagram, which could further aggravate the situation.

Invoking provisions of the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, and the Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, 2017, the government ordered the immediate suspension of mobile internet services in the affected districts until further orders. However, voice calls and fixed-line broadband services will remain operational. Authorities warned that any violation of the order would invite legal action under relevant provisions of the law.

'No alternative to talks for peace': Yumnam Khemchand Singh

IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Friday stressed that dialogue remains the only path to lasting peace, as he reached out to communities during his maiden visit to Ukhrul district after assuming office.

Calling for reconciliation, the Chief Minister said while every community may have "good and bad elements," the overwhelming desire among ordinary citizens is for peace and stability.

During an emotional interaction at Thawai Kuki village, Singh was moved by a woman who broke down while recounting the hardships faced amid ongoing tensions. "I am a human being. My heart was truly touched. There is no other option



other than dialogue for the restoration of peace," he said.

Manipur has remained affected by ethnic violence between Meitei

and Kuki communities since May 2023, triggered after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' in the hill districts opposing the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status.

Urging communities to coexist peacefully, Singh emphasised the long-term impact of violence on younger generations. "One should think of the future generations, as violence gravely affects children," he said.

He also assured residents that steps would be taken to resume normal classes in schools and improve the supply of potable water in affected areas.

En route to Ukhrul, the Chief Minister stopped at Sharkaphung, a Tangkhul Naga village, where he was received by local leaders and residents. Taking note of demands

for infrastructure development, he directed officials of the Public Works Department to examine the construction of a bridge in the village and assured that the project would be taken up this year.

Singh also visited Shangkai, Shokvao, and Ramva villages along the Imphal-Ukhrul road, where locals highlighted issues such as drinking water shortages and poor connectivity.

At Shangkai, women raised concerns over the lack of potable water, prompting the Chief Minister to assure immediate intervention and prioritisation of the issue.

Reiterating his appeal, Singh urged all communities to move beyond divisions and work collectively towards restoring peace and normalcy in the state.

Manipur child rights panel flags 'grave violations', urges restraint in use of force



IMPHAL

The Manipur Commission for Protection of Child Rights has issued a statutory advisory expressing serious concern over recent incidents in the state, flagging what it termed "grave violations of child rights" and calling for restraint in handling public protests.

In its latest order, the Commission said it had taken suo motu cognisance of an incident in which a pre-nursery student, aged below four years, was injured due to tear gas shelling in a residential locality at Singjamei Kakva Ashem Leikai on the night of April 16. The child, who was reportedly not part of any protest, was near his residence when the incident occurred. The panel noted that the injury was allegedly caused by indiscriminate use of force by combined security personnel.

The Commission also referred to two earlier cases in which it had taken suo motu cognisance - the alleged sexual assault and murder of a minor internally displaced girl whose body was recovered beneath Singjamei Bridge in Imphal East, and the killing of two minor children in a rocket bomb attack while they were asleep in Tronglaobi village of Bishnupur district. It said spot inquiries had already been conducted in both cases.

Observing that the incidents point to serious threats to the life, safety and dignity of children, the Commission said it would continue strict monitoring until due process is completed and justice ensured.

In its advisory to authorities, the panel urged all concerned agencies to exercise maximum restraint while dealing with democratic and non-violent protests, particularly in residential areas. It cautioned against indiscriminate use of force, including tear gas shelling, warning that such actions can result in civilian injuries, property damage and widespread panic, especially among children.

The Commission emphasised that all actions by security forces must be proportionate and in strict adherence to established protocols, with the best interests and safety of children as a priority.

Issuing a parallel appeal to the public, the panel advised against involving young children in protests or exposing them to volatile situations that could lead to harm, intimidation or psychological trauma.

The advisory was issued by MCPCR Chairperson Keisam Pradipkumar, with copies sent to the Director General of Police, the Director of Social Welfare, and the Information and Public Relations Department for wider dissemination.

Indian Oil Corporation Limited allays fuel shortage fears in Assam, Manipur

GUWAHATI/IMPHAL

Indian Oil Corporation Limited on Friday assured that there is no shortage of LPG, petrol or diesel in Assam and Manipur, attributing recent queues and public anxiety to panic buying triggered by the ongoing West Asia crisis.

Addressing a press conference in Guwahati, IOCL Executive Director and State Head Nitin Bhatnagar said fuel supplies across Assam remain stable and adequately stocked, dismissing fears of disruption.

"The supply status of domestic LPG cylinders and petroleum products is completely normal. There is adequate stock and no cause for panic," he said, speaking on behalf of oil marketing companies.

According to IOCL data, Assam has 1,737 fuel retail outlets, including 1,461 operated by oil marketing companies and 276 private outlets, supported by nine supply locations. The state records an average daily consumption of 2,935 kilolitres of petrol and 3,670 kilolitres of diesel.

Officials said current stock levels are sufficient for more than 24 days for petrol and 46 days for diesel, with uninterrupted



ed replenishment from refineries ensuring smooth operations. All retail outlets are functioning normally without any sales restrictions.

On LPG supply, IOCL stated that services are being provided to around 9.3 million consumers in Assam through 604 distributors and seven bottling plants. The company also highlighted a sharp rise in digital adoption, with 84 per cent of LPG bookings now made online, com-

pared to 49 per cent two months ago.

Chief General Manager (LPG) Amarjyoti Bordoloi attributed the recent rush at distributorships to panic-driven demand and the ongoing e-KYC drive rather than any supply crunch. The Centre has mandated e-KYC for nearly 50 lakh PMUY beneficiaries and around 60 lakh inactive non-PMUY consumers who had not refilled cylinders for nine months.

He noted that earlier low compliance

levels led to confusion, prompting consumers to visit distributors physically despite the availability of e-KYC through delivery agents.

Officials also pointed to a spike in consumption patterns, with households increasing usage from an average of five cylinders annually to nearly one cylinder every 25 days following the West Asia crisis.

To check irregularities, oil marketing companies, in coordination with the state government, carried out 319 inspections over the past month, leading to the seizure of 204 LPG cylinders, registration of one FIR, and three arrests. Additionally, 88 show-cause notices were issued to distributors, with six facing suspension.

IOCL urged consumers to rely on verified information and refrain from panic buying, reiterating that supplies are sufficient to meet demand.

In Manipur, a similar outreach was conducted to reassure the public. Addressing a press briefing in Imphal, Director of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution Department K. Bono Singh said there is no shortage of fuel or LPG in the state, with nearly 11,000 cylinders being supplied daily.

Despite heightened concerns linked to global developments, officials maintained that fuel supply chains in both states remain robust and are being closely monitored to prevent any disruption.

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'India welcomes every step towards peace': MEA extends support for Israel-Lebanon ceasefire



NEW DELHI

India has officially extended its support for the recently implemented ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon, with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) saying it supports all efforts aimed at ensuring regional stability.

During a media briefing on Friday, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal addressed the recent diplomatic breakthrough, saying that "India welcomes every step towards peace."

The comments follow the commencement of a 10-day truce between Lebanon and Israel, which went into effect on Thursday. The cessation of hostilities comes as US President Donald Trump indicated he is attempting to facilitate an unprecedented inaugural meeting between the leadership of the two nations.

This development is seen as part of a broader diplomatic push by Washington to conclude

the ongoing conflict with Tehran. Iran has maintained a firm position throughout negotiations, with the leadership in Tehran insisting that a Lebanon truce must be part of any agreement.

When asked about Pakistan's involvement in the peace process between Iran and the US, Jaiswal said that New Delhi is keeping a watchful eye on the situation. He stated, "We are closely following all developments in the West Asia war."

The current hostilities in West Asia were ignited following a military offensive by the United States and Israel against Iran on February 28.

The conflict subsequently widened when Lebanon was pulled in after Hezbollah launched rocket attacks against Israel on March 2.

In tandem with India's observation, US President Donald Trump expressed hope that Hezbollah would act responsibly during this

window. In a post on Truth Social, Trump wrote, "Hope Hezbollah acts nicely and well during this important period of time. It will be a GREAT moment for them if they do. No more killing. Must finally have PEACE!"

The President described the situation as a potential breakthrough, suggesting that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Lebanese President Joseph Aoun could meet at the White House for the first time in 44 years.

While the US President remained optimistic about an agreement to "take care of Hezbollah," the situation on the ground remains complex. Prime Minister Netanyahu clarified that Israeli forces would not be withdrawing immediately.

"We will remain in a 10-kilometre security zone, which will allow us to prevent infiltration into communities and anti-tank missile fire," Netanyahu said, asserting that Israel's objectives remain the "disarmament of Hezbollah" and a "sustainable peace agreement - from a position of strength."

Despite the official truce, the transition to peace has been volatile. Reports from Lebanon's National News Agency (NNA) suggested that Israeli artillery struck towns such as Khiam and Dibbine shortly after the ceasefire took effect.

While the Israeli military remains on high alert, celebrations were reportedly seen in parts of Beirut, with fireworks marking the start of the 10-day period that Washington hopes will lead to a permanent resolution.

Women's quota bill defeated in Lok Sabha; fails to get two-thirds majority

NDA SLAMS OPPOSITION OVER WOMEN'S RESERVATION BILL DEFEAT; VOWS TO TAKE ISSUE TO WOMEN VOTERS

NEW DELHI

The Constitution Amendment Bill to implement reservation for women in legislatures in 2029 and increase the number of seats of the Lok Sabha was defeated on Friday in the Lower House after the Centre fell short of the votes required for its passage.

The government needed a two-thirds majority to secure approval for the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, but managed only 298 votes in favour, while 230 members opposed it. With 528 MPs participating in the division, the legislation required 352 votes to pass.

Following the defeat, two related bills, including one proposing delimitation and an increase in the number of Lok Sabha seats, were not taken up for voting.

The debate in the Lower House stretched late into Thursday night and continued on Friday, with the government strongly advocating 33 per cent reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, leading the government's case, sought to address concerns raised by opposition parties, particularly over the impact of seat redistribution on southern states. He said he personally assured the House that no injustice would be done to the southern region if the strength of the Lok Sabha was expanded. He urged members to back the measure, saying it should be viewed in the national interest rather than through a political lens.

With 528 MPs participating in the division, the legislation required 352 votes to pass, but only managed to get 298 votes.

'Wrath of women' looms as reservation Bill defeat sharpens political battle Union Home Minister Amit Shah also told the House that the existing representation of southern states would either remain intact or rise marginally if the number of Lok Sabha seats increased from the present 543 to around 616.

Both Modi and Shah accused the Congress and other opposition parties of creating obstacles to oppose the legislation and depriving women of reservation, asserting that such resistance would carry political consequences.



The rejected bill sought to fast-track the implementation of women's reservation and permit delimitation without waiting for a fresh Census. It aimed to amend provisions linked to the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, which provides 33 per cent reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and state legislatures.

The amendments were intended to operationalise the quota before the 2029 general elections. They also proposed raising the strength of the Lok Sabha to as many as 850 seats to facilitate implementation of the reservation framework.

After the voting, Union Minister Kiren Rijiju withdrew the bill, following which the Lok Sabha was adjourned till 11 am on Saturday.

When the NDA failed to secure passage of the Constitution (One Hundred and Thirty-First Amendment) Bill, 2026 in the Lok Sabha, its leaders staged a protest within the Parliament premises against Opposition parties, including the Congress, for not supporting the Bill during voting.

They accused the Opposition of being against women's reservation in legislative bodies.

Following the Bill's failure, NDA MPs convened a meeting attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to deliberate on their post-vote strategy.

According to sources, the alliance plans to continue raising the issue among women voters to highlight the Opposition's stance on women's reservation.

Sources further indicated that NDA leaders agreed to expose the Congress and other parties over what they described as an anti-women's reservation position. The BJP-led NDA reportedly fell short by 52 votes of the two-thirds majority required to pass the constitutional amendment.

Making an all-out attack on the Opposition, senior BJP leader and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh criticised the Congress for not supporting the Bill.

In a post on X, Singh said, "Today marks an extremely unfortunate day in the history of Indian democracy. During the special session of Parliament, the NDA government introduced the 131st Constitutional Amendment Bill in the Lok Sabha, aimed at providing one-third reservation for women. By voting against this bill in the Lok Sabha today, the Congress-led INDIA alliance has exposed its anti-women character."

He said the legislation was not merely a Bill but an opportunity to empower "Nari Shakti" and accord

women the dignity they deserve.

Singh added that Prime Minister Modi had appealed to all political parties to rise above partisan politics and heed the voice of their conscience, but the Opposition had sacrificed the cause of women's empowerment and dignity for narrow political interests.

"The entire nation will forever remember that the Opposition prioritised its own political self-interest over the interests of the nation and society," he said.

Union defence minister Rajnath Singh said that by voting against the Bill, the Opposition had sacrificed the cause of women's empowerment and dignity.

Criticising Congress leaders and the Opposition for celebrating the defeat of the legislation, NDA's principal strategist Amit Shah said in a series of posts on X, "How can anyone celebrate victory after betraying half the country's population — 700 million women — and forfeiting their trust?" "This celebration by the Opposition is an insult to every woman who has been awaiting her rights for decades. How many times will the Congress and its allies betray women?" he asked.

Targeting the Congress further, Shah said, "Often, the arrogant elation that appears to be a victory is, in reality, a profound defeat lying hidden beneath the surface — a truth that some fail to comprehend."

He alleged that the Opposition's stand had laid bare the contradiction between its words and deeds, and said the people would now directly seek answers from them.

Despite the Bill failing to pass in the Lok Sabha, Shah said the NDA government's resolve had only strengthened.

"The NDA government will continue to carry forward the fight for women's dignity and empowerment," he said.

He also said a "bizarre scene" unfolded in the Lok Sabha when the Congress, Trinamool Congress, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the Samajwadi Party celebrated the defeat of a Bill aimed at granting 33 per cent reservation to women.

INTERNATIONAL

Iran says Strait of Hormuz 'completely open' for commercial shipping during ceasefire



WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump and Iran's foreign minister said Friday that the Strait of Hormuz is now fully open to commercial vessels, as a 10-day truce in Lebanon appeared to hold.

The truce offered a pause in fighting between Israel and the Hezbollah militant group and could clear one major obstacle to a deal between Iran and the United States and Israel to end weeks of devastating war. But it remained unclear whether the militant group would recognize a deal it did not play a role in negotiating and which will leave Israeli troops occupying a stretch of southern Lebanon.

In a social media post, Trump said Iran announced that the Strait "is fully open and ready for full passage." Minutes earlier, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi posted on

X that the passage for all commercial vessels through the Strait "is declared completely open" in line with the ceasefire in Lebanon. He said it would stay open for the remaining period of the ceasefire.

It was not immediately clear what that meant for the US blockade of the Strait, but Trump said the blockade would "remain in full force" until Iran reaches a deal with the US to end war.

Iran announced the Strait of Hormuz is open for the "remaining period of ceasefire".

The leaders of France and the UK on Friday welcomed the announced reopening of the Strait of Hormuz but said it must become permanent.

President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Keir Starmer say they will keep planning an international mission to restore maritime security, with a meeting of military planners in London next week.

Speaking after a gathering of some 50 countries, Macron said, "We all demand the full, immediate and unconditional reopening of the Strait of Hormuz by all parties."

Starmer said the announcement by Iran and the US that the waterway is open must become "both lasting and a workable proposal".

He said France and the UK will lead a multinational mission to safeguard shipping "as soon as conditions allow".

Iranian media challenge announcement about Strait of Hormuz

Two Iranian semiofficial news agencies seemed to challenge Araghchi's announcement about the Strait.

Considered close with Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guard, the Fars news agency issued a series of posts on X criticizing what it said was a lack of clarity over the decision to reopen the waterway and a "strange silence from the Supreme National Security Council and the negotiating team."

Iran's Supreme National Security Council has recently acted as the country's de facto top decision-making body, amid doubts over the status of the new supreme leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, who was reportedly wounded early in the war.

The Mehr news agency also said the decision to reopen the Strait needed "clarification" and required the supreme leader's approval.

Oil prices fell sharply on Friday, giving a major boost to global markets and raising hopes that inflationary pressures could ease in the coming months after Iran's announcement.

Benchmark U. crude dropped 10.8 per cent to \$81.38 a barrel, while Brent crude, the international benchmark, fell 10.5 per cent to \$88.96 a barrel. The decline marked one of the biggest

single-day drops in oil prices in recent months.

Even after Friday's plunge, however, both crude benchmarks remain above the roughly \$70-a-barrel levels seen before the conflict in West Asia intensified. That suggests investors are still building some caution into prices amid fears that geopolitical tensions could flare up again.

The sharp decline in oil prices was welcomed by markets because cheaper crude can eventually lower the cost of fuel, transport and manufacturing. That can ease pressure not only on petrol and diesel prices, but also on food, airline tickets, shipping costs and consumer goods.

Wall Street reacted strongly to the move. The S&P 500 rose 1.3 per cent, while the Dow Jones Industrial Average climbed nearly 1,000 points. The Nasdaq Composite also gained 1.6 per cent.

Companies that are heavily dependent on fuel costs were among the biggest gainers. United Airlines surged 8.8 per cent, while cruise operators Norwegian Cruise Line and Royal Caribbean Group rose 7.8 per cent and 9.5 per cent respectively.

The fall in oil prices also raised hopes that inflation could cool more quickly, giving the Federal Reserve more room to cut interest rates later this year.

That optimism pushed down the yield on the 10-year US Treasury bond to 4.23 per cent from 4.32 per cent a day earlier. Lower bond yields generally translate into cheaper borrowing costs for households and businesses, including mortgages, auto loans and business credit.

Housing-related stocks also benefited. Lennar rose 5.7 per cent, while Builders FirstSource gained 7.1 per cent on expectations that lower interest rates could encourage more home purchases.

Nearly 900 Rohingya refugees dead, missing in shipwrecks in 2025: UN



GENEVA

Last year was the deadliest on record for Rohingya refugees fleeing by sea, with deaths continuing to soar in 2026, the UN said Friday, after hundreds were lost in a shipwreck earlier this month.

"In 2025, nearly 900 Rohingya refugees were reported missing or dead in the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal," the United Nations refugee agency's spokesman Babar Baloch told a press briefing in Geneva.

That marks "the deadliest year on record" for the region, according to data from UNHCR, he said.

Baloch highlighted that out of the more than 6,500 Rohingya who had attempted perilous sea crossings last year, "one in seven (were) reported missing or dead". That, he said, was "the highest mortality rate worldwide of any major route for refugee and migrant sea journeys".

The Rohingya mainly leave from huge camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar, where more than a million refugees forced to flee across the border from war-torn Myanmar's Rakhine state live in squalid conditions.

Rakhine state has been the scene of fierce fighting between the military and an ethnic minority rebel group.

The Rohingya undertake perilous sea journeys every year in search of better living conditions, travelling aboard rickety boats often operated by trafficking networks.

Rohingya refugees collect food stuff distributed by the World Food Programme (WFP) at their refugee camp at Kutupalong in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

Baloch roughly estimated that "nearly 200,000 Rohingya refugees ... have taken these dangerous sea journeys since 2012".

And, he estimated, "more than 5,000 Rohingya refugees have lost their lives during these dangerous sea journeys over a decade".

"This makes, sadly, the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal an unmarked graveyard for thousands of desperate Rohingya refugees in recent years." Baloch pointed out that most Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh wanted to return to Myanmar "once conditions allow for a voluntary, dignified and safe return".

But he stressed that "ongoing conflict, persecution and the absence of citizenship prospects leave them with little hope".

Limited humanitarian aid in Bangladesh, "compounded by insecurity in the camps and limited access to education and livelihoods",

pushes refugees towards dangerous journeys, he explained.

In recent years, more than half of those attempting such crossings have been women and children, according to UNHCR data.

This year, Baloch said, "with more than 2,800 Rohingya undertaking dangerous sea journeys between January and April 13".

His comments came days after news emerged that a boat carrying about 280 Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi migrants had capsized in the Andaman Sea.

The boat, which left the southern Bangladeshi port of Teknaf on April 4 and was on its way to Malaysia, sank due to heavy winds, rough seas and overcrowding, according to the United Nations.

Bangladeshi authorities said nine people had been rescued, while Baloch said an estimated 250 people are missing. "UNHCR is providing counselling and referrals for medical and psychosocial support to Rohingya survivors," he said.

The UN refugee agency said it was calling on states to "address the root causes of displacement, expand safe and legal pathways, and strengthen regional cooperation to save lives and combat smuggling and trafficking".

Constitutional Justice for the Northeast: Democratic Realignment, Rectification of Historical Errors, Inclusive Representation and Protection of Sixth Schedule Rights



PRAMOD BORO

The introduction and debate around the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, the Delimitation Bill, 2026, and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026 have opened a historic constitutional moment for India. For the Northeast in general, and for Bodoland, Assam, the Sixth Schedule Councils, and the many small nationalities and indigenous scheduled tribes communities of the region in particular. This moment is an opportunity to correct long-standing democratic under-representation, rectify historical errors, deepen constitutional inclusion, and secure a more balanced and compassionate federal order.

At the outset, it must be clearly stated that any national discussion on delimitation and women's representation must fully take into account the unique historical, political, demographic, cultural and strategic realities of Northeast India, a region of extraordinary diversity that shares an overwhelming international frontier and has borne a disproportionate burden of conflict, neglect, fragility and political marginalization. The Northeast should not be a peripheral appendage to be discussed only in the language of "last-mile development or the last-man's progress." It is a foundational civilizational and strategic frontier of India, and it deserves constitutional imagination equal to its importance.

1. Delimitation must correct historical under-representation in the Northeast

The proposed delimitation framework should be judged by whether it expands democratic space for communities that have historically remained under-represented in Parliament and State Assemblies. Many of the communities have struggled for recognition, voice and equitable participation. A credible delimitation framework must therefore become a mechanism for representation, peace-building and institutional trust, not merely territorial rearrangement.

There are nearly 200 communities in Northeast India, many of whom have never received adequate or proportionate democratic visibility in the national political system. In several cases, inadequate constitutional and legislative space has contributed to alienation and instability. If India is serious about durable peace and national integration, then constitutional reform must create room for meaningful political participation by all sections of the region.

2. Population alone cannot be the sole criterion for the Northeast

We strongly submit that population should not be the only deciding criterion in delimitation for Northeast India. The region's geographical vulnerability, ethnic diversity,

strategic border context, historical conflicts, and constitutional protections require a more sensitive and context-aware framework.

In this light, the case of Bodoland deserves serious national attention. With a population of approximately 40 lakh and home to 26 communities, Bodoland requires a more robust and realistic representation structure. We believe that Bodoland should have 3 Lok Sabha seats and 30 Legislative Assembly constituencies, so that democratic participation can reflect both the size and complexity of the region. The constitutional justice must take into account the diversity, harmonious co-existence, distance, vulnerability, history and the imperatives of peace equally.

3. Existing constitutional and accord-based safeguards for BTC must be respected

In this context, two issues are especially important. First, BTC is a Sixth Schedule Area. Second, given the large concentration of Scheduled Tribe population in its territory, there is a strong case for increasing ST representation within the relevant legislative arrangements. Third, the delimitation of constituencies falling under the Open Category within the BTC area should be designed in a manner that protects the legitimate representation of bona fide non-tribal citizens of the Bodoland Territorial Council. A fair and durable arrangement must protect both indigenous rights and social balance. Thus Clause 4.7 of the BTC Accord, 2003 must be honoured to the benefit of ST population of BTR, which provides that the existing status of representation of the BTC area in the State Assembly be kept intact through necessary constitutional modification.

4. Women's representation must empower women participation, expand democratic space, and enhance the Northeast's voice

We welcome the broad principle of enhancing women's political representation. The women of the Northeast have historically played a profound role in social resilience, community economy, public life, peace-building and democratic assertion. The implementation framework must be designed so that reservation women are primarily empowered. This framework can also increase the limited representation in smaller states and protected regions of Northeast India.

For this reason, we submit that existing Lok Sabha allocations in the Northeast should be increased in order to accommodate women's reservation and also enhancing our regional voice. States such as Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim, each currently having only one Lok Sabha seat, require special attention. Similarly, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura would all benefit from an enhanced seat structure if women's reservation is to be implemented in a manner that strengthens and augments representation.

5. The spirit of enhanced autonomy of the Sixth Schedule Councils must be brought

into the centre of the national conversation

An inclusive constitutional response must empower the women and communities of all Sixth Schedule Councils of Northeast India, while also enhancing their autonomy. In view of the long-pending demands of greater autonomy, and the one-time State Reorganization Act 1956, there has been limited progress in fulfilling the demands for autonomy of the people of Sixth Schedule Councils. We therefore call for suitable constitutional and legislative measures, including where necessary amendments touching Articles 81, 330 and 332, so that women and indigenous ST communities in these constitutionally protected regions receive stronger and more meaningful representation in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. The constitutional future of the Northeast must be designed with the Northeast's protected

institutions at the table.

6. The Bodoland concerns arising from the Bodo Peace Accord, 2020 must also be addressed

This constitutional moment must also be used to address long-pending matters arising out of the Bodo Peace Accord, 2020. In particular, the demands associated with Clause 3.1 require urgent and serious consideration. These include the incorporation of specific villages with high Bodo populations that remained outside the BTAD/BTC framework, and the expansion of the BTC legislative body from 40 to 60 members to ensure wider and fairer representation.

Clause 4.3 of the Peace Accord provided for the amendments to Article 280 and the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution as per the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Amendment) Bill, 2019 to improve the financial resources and administrative powers of BTC. This needs to be attended to without further delay.

These are important peace-linked democratic imperatives. The stability and long-term success of the Bodoland peace process depend upon the deepening of representative justice.

7. A call for wisdom, compassion and constitutional statesmanship

The Northeast cannot be approached with mechanical formulas or episodic attention. Its ecological fragility, ethnic plurality, border sensitivities, peace processes and institutional complexities demand wisdom, compassion, constitutional sensitivity, and consensus among political leadership and bureaucracy. India must rise above narrow partisan calculation and respond to the region with the seriousness it deserves.

Our call today is a call for a constitutional reform that is inclusive, consultative, region-sensitive and future-oriented. If delimitation, women's representation, and legislative restructuring are to reshape India's democratic map, then they must also heal old exclusions and strengthen trust in the Union.

8. Our appeal

We appeal to the Government of India, all political parties, constitutional experts, and the people of the country to recognise that Bodoland, Assam and the Northeast require a special democratic framework within the national constitutional process; the Sixth Schedule Councils must receive central consideration in any restructuring of representation; women's representation must be implemented in a way that expands the political voice of small states and protected regions; historical accords and peace commitments must be respected; and constitutional reform must become a tool for inclusion, justice, peace and balanced federalism. India's democracy will be stronger when the Northeast is fully counted and heard.

Shri Pramod Boro
Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha
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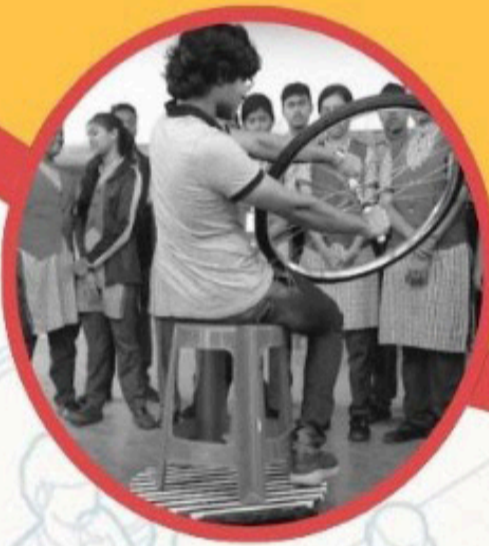
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