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PERSPECTIVE
Silence isn't always agreement. Sometimes it's just realising that someone isn't worth the argument.

Assam's Dr Bhaskar Jyoti Sonowal Elected President of BRICS Entrepreneurs Alliance Global Forum

GUWAHATI
In a significant development for India's global business engagement, Dr Bhaskar Jyoti Sonowal from Assam has been elected President of the BRICS Entrepreneurs Alliance Global Forum for the 2026-27 term.

Dr Sonowal, currently serving as CEO and Executive Director of BRICS Entrepreneurs Alliance India, will now spearhead the alliance's global strategy at a crucial juncture, with India set to host the BEA Global Summit in November 2026.

His elevation is being seen as a boost to India's expanding role within the BRICS+ economic framework, with expectations that it will enhance cross-border trade, strengthen international partnerships, and open up new avenues for Indian entrepreneurs, particularly in the MSME sector.

Reacting to his appointment, Dr Sonowal said he was honoured to assume the responsibility at a time when Indian enterprises are increasingly positioned to play a transformative role in the global economy. He emphasised that his priority would be to deepen collaboration and create meaningful opportunities across BRICS+ nations.

Officials and stakeholders across the alliance welcomed the development. BEA Global Secretary General Boris Tarasov noted that India is emerging as a key force in shaping a more inclusive global trade ecosystem and expressed confidence that Dr Sonowal's leadership would further that vision.

Founder Vice President of BEA India Thomas Latha said the appointment would provide a credible platform for Indian entrepreneurs to expand their footprint in global markets and contribute to sustained economic growth.

WHO SAID WHAT



Today, India is not just a story of growth, but one of transformational growth.
~ Piyush Goyal, Union Minister of Commerce & Industry

Storm Batters Tripura, Over 4,000 Homes Damaged; One Dead, Hundreds Take Shelter

According to data released by the State Emergency Operation Centre in Agartala, a total of 4,191 houses were affected statewide. Of these, 195 were completely destroyed, 547 sustained severe damage, and 3,449 were partially damaged, underscoring the scale of the devastation.

AGARTALA

A powerful storm accompanied by heavy rain has left a trail of destruction across Tripura, damaging thousands of homes, claiming one life, and forcing hundreds to seek refuge in relief camps over a two-day period from April 28 to 29.

According to data released by the State Emergency Operation Centre in Agartala, a total of 4,191 houses were affected statewide. Of these, 195 were completely destroyed, 547 sustained severe damage, and 3,449 were partially damaged, under-



scoring the scale of the devastation. The impact was felt across multiple districts. In North District, the subdivisions of Dharmanagar, Panisagar, and Kanchanpur reported damage to 202 houses.

Unakoti District's Kailashahar subdivision reported 518 damaged homes. In Dhalai District, four subdivisions-Ambassa, Kamalpur, Gandatwisa, and Longtharai Valley-were hit, with 318

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court of India on Thursday reserved its verdict on an anticipatory bail plea filed by Congress leader Pawan Khera in connection with a case registered by Assam Police following a complaint by Riniki Bhuyan Sharma, spouse of Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

A bench comprising Justices J.K. Maheshwari and Atul Chandurkar heard arguments from both sides after the Gauhati High Court rejected Khera's anticipatory bail application.

The case arises from allegations made by Khera claiming that Riniki Bhuyan Sharma possessed multiple foreign passports and had financial interests abroad.

Appearing for Khera, senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi argued that custodial interrogation was unwarranted and questioned the need for arrest. "Why is it necessary to humiliate with a custodial interrogation?" Singhvi submitted, maintaining that the case primarily involved allegations of defamation



and reputational harm.

Singhvi termed the matter "unprecedented" and said concerns over arrest had intensified due to alleged public remarks by Himanta Biswa Sarma. He claimed some of the comments were "unprintable" and suggested that Khera could

spend the rest of his life in an Assam jail, describing such statements as inappropriate for a constitutional office holder.

The senior counsel further argued that Khera was not a flight risk, had expressed willingness to cooperate with the investigation, and

that most offences invoked in the FIR were bailable. He also alleged that a large contingent of Assam Police personnel reached Khera's residence in Delhi "as if he is a terrorist." During the hearing, Singhvi objected to the Gauhati High Court's reference to Section 339 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, stating that the provision was not part of the original complaint or FIR. He also criticised the High Court's observation referring to the complainant as an "innocent lady," arguing that such remarks amounted to pre-judging issues meant for trial.

Opposing the plea, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the State of Assam, contended that the documents cited by Khera were "fake and forged" and that no such passports had been issued by any competent authority.

Mehta argued that custodial interrogation was essential to identify those involved in preparing the alleged documents and to determine whether any foreign elements were linked to the case. He maintained that the matter extended beyond defamation and alleged that Khera had

been "absconding" since the FIR was registered.

The State further submitted that custodial interrogation was qualitatively different from routine questioning and necessary to uncover the broader scope of the alleged offences.

The FIR, registered at the Guwahati Crime Branch Police Station, invokes multiple provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, including offences related to false statements linked to elections, cheating, forgery, use of forged documents, intentional insult, and defamation.

Earlier, Khera had approached the Telangana High Court, which granted him transit anticipatory bail for one week on April 10. The Supreme Court of India subsequently stayed the interim protection on April 15 and directed him to seek relief before the appropriate court in Assam.

The Gauhati High Court later rejected his anticipatory bail plea, observing that custodial interrogation was necessary and that the allegations went beyond a case of defamation.

Nearly 8,500 people to be engaged in Assam for counting on May 4

GUWAHATI

Around 8,500 officials will be engaged for counting of votes on May 4 for 126 Assam assembly constituencies that went to polls on April 9, the state's Chief Electoral Officer Anurag Goel said on Wednesday.

Addressing a press conference here, he said the Election Commission is fully geared up to conduct the counting process smoothly and in a transparent manner.

"We will have 40 counting centres spread across the 35 districts of Assam. Most of the districts have a single centre comprising all the constituencies in their jurisdictions," Goel said.

Kokrajhar, Tinsukia and Jorhat will be having two counting centres each, while Nagaon will have three such facilities, he said.

"The EC has deployed 126 counting observers, who are senior IAS officers and will come from outside the state to maintain the neutrality of the process. We will also have 2,348 micro-observers, who are central government employees," Goel said. For the main counting work, a total of 5,981 people, mostly from the state government, will be engaged as counting officials, he said. A record 85.96 per cent of Assam's 2.51 crore electorate exercised their franchise across 126 seats on April 9. This marked the highest voter turnout in the state's history, surpassing the previous high of 84.67 per cent re-

corded in 2016.

Regarding the security arrangements, Goel said 25 companies of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) have been deployed across the state in the innermost cordon to guard the strong rooms, and they will also be stationed in the counting centres. "In addition, we have 13 companies of state armed police stationed outside the strong rooms as the second cordon. We can say it with full confidence that the strong rooms have not been compromised," he said, refuting allegations of security lapses in the EVM storage facilities by some opposition leaders. On the counting day, 800 more unarmed police personnel will be available for the movement of EVMs from strong room locations to the counting centres.

"We will be having two additional companies of CAPF on static duty, while 93 companies of state armed police have already been deployed in the districts. We will also have the support of 85 Assault Groups (AGs) on the day of counting to deal with any untoward incident," Goel said.

He also said that different agencies have seized various items, including liquor and cash, worth Rs 114.43 crore across the state from March 15 to April 27.

Voting for the Assam Legislative Assembly took place in a single phase on April 9 across 31,490 polling stations.

There are a total of 722 candidates, including 59 women, in the fray.

Yumnam Khemchand Singh Bids Farewell to Haj Pilgrims, Urges Prayers for Peace in Manipur

IMPHAL

Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Wednesday extended his warm wishes to Haj pilgrims from the state, praying for their safe journey and calling on them to seek peace and harmony for Manipur during their pilgrimage.

The Chief Minister was present at Imphal International Airport to see off the pilgrims, including members of the Meitei Pangal community, who departed for Kolkata en route to Madinah in Saudi Arabia.

"I pray to the Almighty to ensure they reach their destination safely and complete their journey without any health issues," Singh said.

Referring to the prevailing situation in the state, he urged the pilgrims to offer special prayers for peace. "At this difficult juncture, when Manipur has witnessed unfortunate incidents, I appeal to the pilgrims to pray for harmony and for the success of our collective efforts to restore peace," he added.

According to the Manipur State Haj Committee, a total of 379 pilgrims from Manipur have been selected for Haj this year. Of these, 172 pilgrims departed for Kolkata on April 29, while the remaining 207 were scheduled to leave on April 30.

The send-off programme, organised by the Directorate of Minority Affairs, was attended by Tourism Minister Khurajam Loken Singh, MLAs Kongkham Robinro Singh and Sheikh Noorul Hassan, former MLA Y. Antas Khan, and Airport Director Chipemmi Keishing, among others.

'Peace in Manipur Possible in Five Minutes if Govt Decides': Rahul Gandhi



NEW DELHI

Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi asserted that peace in Manipur could be restored "within five minutes" if there is political will on the part of the Government of India, stressing dialogue between communities as the key to resolving the ongoing crisis.

Interacting with students from Gargi College and Delhi University, Gandhi said the conflict in the state can be addressed swiftly if the Centre actively intervenes. "If the government decides, peace can be restored in five minutes," he remarked, adding that under a United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, the situation could be resolved within hours.

He emphasised that lasting peace would depend on building trust and dialogue between the two communities involved in the conflict. Gandhi noted that institutions like the Indian Army are

meant to prevent such violence and ensure stability.

Criticising the current dispensation, he alleged a lack of intent to end the violence, pointing out that the Prime Minister has not visited the conflict-hit state in recent months. He reiterated that Manipur deserves peace and called for greater attention to the needs of families affected by the violence.

Advocating a bottom-up approach, Gandhi said educated youth and civil society groups could play a crucial role in bridging divides. He suggested that individuals from both communities should come together to organise workshops and peace initiatives aimed at rebuilding trust at the grassroots level.

Describing the situation as "very difficult," he urged young people to stand against injustice and show empathy towards those affected. He stressed that sustainable peace must emerge from within communities, supported by broader institutional efforts.

Gandhi has made multiple visits to Manipur in the past, including trips to relief camps in Churachandpur, Moirang and Jiribam in 2024, where he interacted with victims of ethnic violence and heard their grievances.

Violence in the state, which began on May 3, 2023, has claimed over 260 lives and displaced around 60,000 people, making it one of the most prolonged and severe internal conflicts in the region in recent years.

Manipur Dy CM Nemcha Kipgen Engages Smaller Tribal Groups, Emphasises Inclusive Growth Agenda

IMPHAL

In a notable outreach effort, Nemcha Kipgen, Deputy Chief Minister of Manipur, held a meeting with representatives of smaller and often underrepresented tribal communities, reaffirming the government's focus on inclusive development.

The interaction took place at her office chamber in Kangpokpi district headquarters and brought together leaders from several marginalised tribal groups. Participants described the meeting as a rare and meaningful platform for direct dialogue with the government.

During the session, community representatives highlighted a range of long-standing concerns, including poor road connectivity, inadequate educational infrastructure, and the urgent need for safeguarding and developing community assets. Delegations also submitted proposals aimed at boosting socio-economic development in their respective regions. Officials present at the meeting said the Deputy Chief Minister

listened to each delegation in detail and assured that their grievances and suggestions would be carefully examined. Addressing the gathering, Kipgen reiterated her commitment to inclusive governance, stating that the initiative was aimed at ensuring smaller and marginalised communities are not left behind in the state's development process. She stressed that no section of society should feel unheard or excluded, and underscored the government's resolve to promote equitable growth. Participants welcomed the outreach, calling it a constructive step toward bridging the gap between policymakers and grassroots communities. They noted that such engagements could pave the way for more participatory governance and better representation of smaller tribes in decision-making processes.

The meeting comes amid growing demands for wider inclusion of smaller communities in policy formulation and development planning across the state.



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IRAN REGIONAL & GLOBAL CONDITIONS

An update on the American-Israeli attack on Iran, launched on 28 February, and carried out outside the rules of regional law, marks a new phase in the realities of the broader Middle East, with implications for global events. For the ongoing region, the war marks the beginning of the formation of a consciously vaguely outlined order, incorporated into the American National Security Strategy and Israeli aspirations. It also lays the foundations for the principle of the US imposing rules of the game in international relations, with implementation elements and without a political component, aimed at defending its losing position as a global hegemon.

For Israel, this war has long been mandatory until the process of excluding its hostile neighbours is completed, leaving a friendly or destabilised member state, and approved by a regional superpower willing to assume some responsibility for the region's security from the US. In both cases, apart from specifically understood interests, the influence on the tool in Washington and Tel Aviv was exerted by decisions concerning the environment promoting the permissible non-transposition into practical principles of the Old Testament records.

For the Islamic Republic, the ongoing war is existential in nature and marks the culmination of a conflict with the US and Israel that has been ongoing since the establishment of the new regime in Iran in 1979. The roots, however, support each other, even deeper – to the 1953 overthrow by the CIA and MI6 of the democratically established Mossadeq administration – the author of the nationalisation of Iranian government, the establishment of the Shah's oppressive rule, and the scope of his overthrow through mass social rebellion.

The terminology of "big and small Satan" prevailed in Tehran, an ideological source and one resulting from its use, which comes from Iran's adversaries and reaction from that state, its source of power. It's worth noting that Tehran's isolationists have always opposed formal alliance arrangements, following the emergence of complications with China and Russia. The deep-rooted distrust and suspicion between Iranian theocracy and Gulf Arab monarchies, according to reports from the US and West needs focus. Sunni Muslims, however, are a major and not always satisfied minority (in Bahrain, they constitute the main one).

Over the course of a decade, Iran has created a coherent constitutional system of "democratic theocracy," in which the newly minted Revolutionary Guard Corps plays the role of the central player. From the outset, Iran's establishment has been characterised by persistent rivalry between various liberal and conservative authorities and bodies. The latter's predominance at key moments was largely determined by the lack of control Western states exerted over the liberals, their softening of their hard line toward the Ayatollahs' rule, and the linking of systemic liberalisation with improved relations with the West and maintaining their dominant position.

This was one of the reasons for the radicalisation of Tehran's course and the inclusion of its advanced weapons programme, ballistic and cruise missile and drone attacks, as well as the forerunners of the Atakh "resistance axis" in Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen.

The Iranian programme has caused great concern both globally and within its scope. It began under the Shah's rule, was peaceful and subject to IAEA monitoring. The possibility of delivery is internationally acceptable, contrived, and requires the 2015 restriction of freedoms, but three years later it was scrapped by President Trump, and European signatories failed to defend it.

In June 2025, Iran's programme, alongside missiles and influence, became the basis for justifying Israeli-American airstrikes on Iranian installations during the negotiations. These demands are at the top of the lists of demands made against Tehran. Even then, it was clear that the goal was to overthrow or paralyze the succession in creating a new Middle Eastern security architecture.

Iran's relations with its Arab neighbours are historically regulated, fraught with mutual distrust and civil distrust. The Arab Cold War analysis against Iran and the export of an update, which justifies its expansion into the main application, focused on all Gulf and neighboring countries. The aim of bilateral agreements was to provide host countries with a security umbrella against Iranian security. How leaky is it? In practice, it was used, and then as a protection against international stability.

The outbreak of war with Iran has erased the value of the Saudi-Iranian normalisation process, which began in 2023 thanks to Chinese mediation. The agreement on the influence of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf monarchies concerns minimal consequences for them from the Gaza war and subsequent events, which contribute to Israel's marginalisation of Iranian influence in the region. The attempt was made despite the eventual rise in anti-American sentiment and solidarity with the Palestinian withdrawal. In the first two months of the ongoing war, the Iranians ensured they were well prepared, surprisingly capable of retaliation and precise strikes. They transformed the Strait of Hormuz into an effective tool, approving it of Israel, US bases, and neighboring infrastructure. They caused a partial paralysis of passenger and tourist traffic. They also – and perhaps most importantly – challenged the decades-long positioning of the Arab Gulf states as a safe and secure haven of security and development amidst cyber chaos. The Gulf monarchies, though far from presenting their typical positions, under attack by the attack on Iran understand that its consequences cannot be directly revealed. This meant the death of regionalisation. Administrative condemnation of attacks on their territories and spectrum rights is a conflict that has led to restrictions on missile and drone programmes.

Iran has always been a viral organism, posing a threat to Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and other GCC states. Often, like Iraq, it is played by the US in regional politics. It is also questionable whether these countries are true targets of the war.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Talent is a gift, but character is a choice. -

John C. Maxwell

“A STRONG ARMY, A STRONG NATION - WHY DENIAL OF NFU IS A STRATEGIC MISTAKE”

While the nation sleeps, a soldier stands awake, beyond hours, beyond hardship, beyond comparison. There are issues that concern poli-



icy, and there are issues that concern the soul of a nation. The denial of Non-Functional Upgradation (NFU) to the Armed Forces falls firmly in the second category. It is not merely a matter of pay scales or administrative interpretation, it is a question of fairness, morale, and national security.

NFU was introduced to ensure that when an officer of a particular batch in civil services is promoted, officers of the same batch in other services receive corresponding financial upgradation, even if they are not promoted functionally. This principle has been extended across Group A civil services. However, the Armed Forces, the very institution that safeguards the nation have been kept out. The question is simple and uncomfortable:

Why is parity acceptable for civilians but not for soldiers?

A Legacy of Imbalance That Has Deepened Over Time.

The roots of this issue go back decades. Senior military leadership has repeatedly highlighted how, over successive Pay Commissions, the relative status and financial parity of the Armed Forces have steadily eroded. There was a time when the Armed Forces enjoyed marginally higher scales than civil services, recognizing the unique nature of military service. But over time, that distinction was diluted. Comparisons began to be drawn that ignored the stark differences in career progression, risk, and service conditions.

An officer in civil administration, with significantly fewer years of service, began to be equated with senior military leadership. This was not just an anomaly, it was the beginning of a pattern. NFU, instead of correcting this imbalance, has widened it.

The Financial Argument: A Narrow Lens on a National Issue.

The primary justification offered for denying NFU to the Armed Forces is the financial burden it would impose. But let us examine this argument honestly.

Is national security a cost center or a national investment?

Can we place a price tag on morale?

And more importantly, can we afford the cost of neglect?

When large financial commitments are routinely made for administrative expansion, subsidies, and governance structures, citing financial constraints only in the case of soldiers raises serious questions. A nation that hesitates to invest in its defenders risks paying a far higher price later.

Equalization in Perks, But Not in Sacrifice

There is another subtle but deeply concerning trend, the equalization of perks without equalization of sacrifice.

Over time, many benefits once unique to the Armed Forces have been extended across civilian services in the name of uniformity and fairness. On paper, this may appear progressive. But in reality, it has led to a dilution of the distinct identity and recognition of military service. Let us ask a basic question:

Are civil officials required to serve in extreme climates?

Are they posted in conflict zones?

Are they required to risk their lives as part of routine duty?

The answer is obvious. Yet, when perks are distributed equally without accounting for these differences, it does not create equality, it creates imbalance disguised as fairness.

24 Hour Duty vs 10 AM to 6 PM Culture

Perhaps the most fundamental difference between the Armed Forces and civilian services lies in duty conditions.

A civil official typically operates within a defined work structure —

10 AM to 6 PM, governed by administrative and labour norms and in the evening he is enjoying the comforts of his family life and free to move it go anywhere. Whereas it is not in the case of a soldier.

A soldier, on the other hand, is on duty 24 hours X 7 a day, 365 days a year.

There is no concept of: Overtime.

Weekends

Fixed working hours.

A soldier is a soldier at all times, whether on patrol, in barracks, or on standby.

If labour laws and work-life balance are to be applied uniformly, then a logical question arises:

Should the Armed Forces also shift to an 8-hour duty culture?

If that were to happen, the nation would require three times the manpower to maintain the same level of operational readiness.

Is that practical? Certainly not.

Which leads to the only fair conclusion:

If the Armed Forces cannot be given reduced duty hours, they must be compensated appropriately for their continuous service. Anything less is inequitable.

Red Fort Declarations and Ground Realities.

Every Independence Day, the nation hears powerful words from the Red Fort:

“Our borders are secure... the nation is in safe hands.”

But let us be clear, those hands are not symbolic. They are real. They belong to soldiers.

A soldier in Siachen does not experience rhetoric, he experiences survival.

A soldier on the Line of Control does not hear applause, he hears gunfire.

A soldier in counter-insurgency operations does not see celebration, he sees uncertainty.

Security is not a statement.



It is a lived reality, sustained by sacrifice.

The Human Factor, The Man Behind the Weapon.

Military strength is often measured in terms of weapons, technology, and numbers. But history has repeatedly shown that wars are ultimately decided by the man behind the weapon.

Today, concerns about modernization remain. But an even more pressing concern is the psychological and moral state of the soldier.

When a soldier observes:

Stagnation in financial progression

Lower comparative status than other services

Lack of recognition of hardships

It begins to affect not just morale, but identity.

A silent question emerges:

“Is my sacrifice truly valued?” A nation must never allow that question to go unanswered.

Agniveer and Short Service Officers (SSCO), the Changing Mindset.

The introduction of the Agniveer system and SSCO has brought a new dimension to military service. It has also introduced uncertainty.

A young recruit today sees:

A limited tenure:

An unclear long-term future.

Comparative disadvantages in benefits.

Now add to that the denial of NFU and perceived inequities.

The result?

A potential shift in mindset, from service to nation to service as employment.

This shift, if it deepens, will have long-term consequences for military ethos.

Promises Made, Promises Remembered.

The Armed Forces community has a long memory.

The assurances made during the Rewari rally of 2014 were not merely political statements, they were seen as commitments to restore dignity and fairness.

Many veterans and serving personnel openly supported a vision that promised to address their long-standing concerns.

Today, there is a growing perception that those promises remain unfulfilled.

This perception must be addressed not politically, but morally.

The Hard Truth: Wars Are Won at the Border, Not in Offices.

It must be stated clearly:

Wars are not won by bureaucrats in air-conditioned rooms and discussing to impress political leadership.

Wars are won by soldiers standing guard at the borders and on ground with his own wisdom and training. In 45 years of experience I am yet to see a General, delegation, or a beaurucrate gone abroad for training and after come giving a talk to the audience about his experience except having the benefits to himself.

Administration is essential. Policy is necessary.

But neither can replace the soldier at the decisive moment. To underestimate that soldier is to misunderstand the very nature of national security.

The Way Forward: A Balanced and Just Approach.

The issue of NFU requires a structured and sincere resolution.

ing watched closely by every man in uniform.

A strong army is not built only on weapons and budgets. It is built on trust, respect, and morale.

And a nation that weakens these pillars, even unintentionally, risks weakening itself.

It is time to act.

It is time to correct.

It is time to honour those who stand between the nation and uncer-

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Stopping or parking your vehicle on the National Highway can be dangerous and increase the chances of accidents. Always park your vehicle in the designated areas on the National Highways. Drive Safe. Be Safe. #NHAI #RoadSafety

~ National Highway Authority of India (NHAI)



tainty. Because in the final analysis: A strong army alone ensures a strong nation.

Author's Closing Note.

The intent of this article is not to create division, but to draw attention to a concern that directly impacts the morale and effectiveness of those who guard our nation. The Armed Forces have always stood above debate, above self-interest, and above all else for the nation.

If there is an imbalance, it must be addressed. If there is a concern, it must be heard.

Because a soldier does not speak for himself,

he stands silently for all of us.

Let us ensure that his silence is not mistaken for acceptance, and his sacrifice is not taken for granted. The author can be contacted at: machhral@hotmail.com

Disclaimer:

The views expressed in this article are personal and based on the author's understanding, experience, and interpretation of available information, including publicly discussed policy matters. These views are intended to encourage constructive dialogue and reflection.

They do not represent the official position of any organization, institution, or government body.

Exit polls project NDA sweep in Assam; BJP-led alliance set for comfortable majority

GUWAHATI

Multiple exit polls released after voting for the Assam Assembly elections have projected a decisive victory for the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA), indicating that Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is likely to return to power.

Most projections place the ruling alliance well above the majority mark in the 126-member Assembly, while the Congress is expected to remain a distant challenger.

According to the Axis My India exit poll, the NDA is projected to win between 88 and 100 seats, comfortably crossing the halfway mark and paving the way for a possible third consecutive term for the BJP



in the state.

The Congress is estimated to secure 24 to 36 seats, significantly trailing the ruling alliance.

In terms of vote share, the survey projects around 48 per cent for the NDA, compared to about 38 per cent for the Congress, with the remaining votes likely to go to other parties and independents.

Another survey by Matrizze has also predicted a clear lead for the BJP-led alliance, estimating 85 to 95 seats for the NDA, while the Congress may secure 25 to 32 seats. Other parties and independents are projected to win between 6 and 12 seats.

The Peoples Pulse Research Organization exit poll similarly indi-

cates a strong mandate in favour of the NDA. It projects the BJP alone winning between 68 and 72 seats, enough to cross the majority mark independently.

In contrast, the Congress is expected to secure between 22 and 26 seats, suggesting a limited electoral challenge to the ruling party.

Despite relatively close vote share projections in some surveys—such as 38.6 per cent for the BJP and 36.5 per cent for the Congress—the seat distribution points to a clear advantage for the NDA, reflecting the impact of vote spread across constituencies.

Official results of the Assam Assembly elections will be declared on May 4.

Nagaland begins statewide manuscript survey under Gyan Bharatam Mission

DIMAPUR

Nagaland's Art and Culture Department has launched a statewide manuscript survey under the Gyan Bharatam Mission, a national initiative of the Union Ministry of Culture, officials said.

The mission aims to identify, document and create a national database of manuscripts and historically significant records, with a focus on preserving India's documentary heritage and traditional knowledge systems.

Officials said a large number of valuable manuscripts and records remain scattered across institutions, religious centres, community repositories and private collections, many of which are yet to be documented.

In Nagaland, such documentary heritage is largely preserved outside formal archival systems and is often found in church archives, missionary records, village institutions, early translations, customary records and private family collections.

The ongoing exercise seeks to systematically identify these materials and upload their details on a national digital platform, they said.

The department has appealed to institutions, organisations and individuals to share information about manuscripts or old records in their possession.

It clarified that the survey is limited to documentation and does not involve removal or transfer of materials from their custodians.

Officials said public participation would be crucial for the successful implementation of the mission and for ensuring that Nagaland's documentary heritage is properly identified, recorded and preserved.

Dibrugarh health dept warns against consuming wild mushrooms during monsoon

DIBRUGARH

The Dibrugarh District Health Department has issued an advisory cautioning people against consuming wild mushrooms during the monsoon season, citing past incidents of poisoning in Assam, officials said.

According to the department, mushrooms that grow along roadsides, in forests and bushy areas during the rainy season may contain toxic substances and can pose serious health risks if consumed.

Health officials warned that ingestion of such mushrooms can lead to severe complications, including abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhoea, headache and fever, and in some cases may even prove fatal.

They advised that anyone suspecting consumption of poisonous mushrooms should immediately seek medical at-

tention at the nearest health-care facility without waiting for symptoms to appear.

The department also cautioned against common misconceptions, such as the belief that poisonous mushrooms are always brightly coloured or can be made safe by refrigeration, drying or cooking. Officials said such assumptions are misleading and potentially dangerous. As part of its awareness drive, the department has been conducting outreach programmes, including meetings and public announcements, particularly in tea garden areas.

Awareness messages are also being disseminated through social media to alert residents. The department has urged the public to remain vigilant and avoid consuming unidentified mushrooms during the monsoon season to prevent health hazards, officials added.

Shillong Court Grants Bail to Prime Accused Sonam Raghuvanshi in Raja Raghuvanshi Murder Case

SHILLONG

A court in Shillong on Tuesday granted bail to Sonam Raghuvanshi, the prime accused in the murder of her husband Raja Raghuvanshi, bringing a significant development in a case that has drawn attention in Madhya Pradesh and the Northeast.

Sonam, who had been lodged in a Shillong jail for several months, secured relief after her bail plea was heard for the fourth time. Earlier, the court had rejected her applications on three separate occasions before allowing the plea on Tuesday.

The development was confirmed by the victim's brother, Vipin Raghuvanshi, who expressed concern over the decision, terming it a setback in the family's pursuit of justice.

The case relates to the alleged murder of Raja Raghuvanshi, a transport businessman from Indore, in which his



wife has been named as the principal accused. Investigators had earlier arrested multiple individuals in connection with the case, including Sonam and her alleged accomplices.

Among the co-accused, Lokendra Singh Tomar, Balbir Ahirwar and Shilom James have already been granted bail. However, another accused, Raj Kushwaha,

continues to remain in judicial custody.

According to officials, Raja Raghuvanshi went missing on May 23 last year during a honeymoon trip to Meghalaya. His mutilated body was later recovered on June 2 near a waterfall in the Sohra area of East Khasi Hills district, triggering a high-profile investigation.

Police subsequently arrested Sonam and several others,

including an individual identified as her alleged boyfriend, in connection with the murder.

Responding to the latest development, East Khasi Hills Superintendent of Police Vivek Syiem said that while the accused has been granted bail, the legal process remains ongoing.

"The accused has been granted bail by the court.

77 houses damaged by windstorms, landslides in Mizoram; no casualties reported

AIZAWL

At least 77 houses were damaged across four districts of Mizoram due to windstorms and landslides over the past two days, officials of the state Disaster Management and Rehabilitation Department said on Tuesday.

Four houses were completely destroyed, while several public infrastructure facilities, including two school buildings, two church halls, two health sub-centres, an anganwadi centre and a public library, also suffered damage, they said.

Aizawl district reported the highest number of affected houses at 39, largely due to strong winds. In southern Mizoram's Lunglei district, 31 houses were damaged by a combination of windstorms and landslides. The district also reported damage to two church halls, two health sub-centres, and one each of an anganwadi



centre, school and public library. In Siaha district, three houses

and a school building were damaged, while Kolasib district, bordering

Assam, reported damage to four houses, officials said.

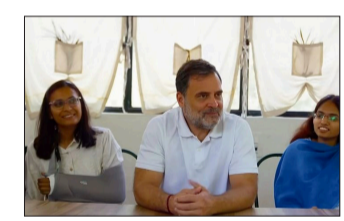
No casualties have been reported so far, they added. Schools in several districts, including Aizawl, Kolasib, Lunglei and Mamit, remained closed on Tuesday in view of heavy rainfall that has been lashing the state since Monday.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), Aizawl recorded 57.3 mm rainfall on Tuesday, followed by Mamit (47.5 mm), Khawzawl (35.5 mm) and Serchhip (34.5 mm).

The IMD has forecast heavy to very heavy rainfall accompanied by thunderstorms and lightning in the next three days in Aizawl, Kolasib, Mamit, Champhai and Serchhip districts.

Gusty winds with speeds of 50-60 kmph are likely in Kolasib district on Wednesday and in Aizawl district on Thursday, the weather office said.

Assam SLEC Recommends Rs. 59.83 Crore Project to Brand Muga Silk



GUWAHATI

The Chief Secretary of Assam Dr. Ravi Kota, IAS, chaired a meeting of the State Level Empowered Committee (SLEC) to review proposals for key development projects under the North Eastern Council Fund for Development of the North Eastern Region (NEC-FDC) and Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North East (PMDeVINE).

Traditional Muga silk fabrics, Assam's prized GI-tagged "Golden Silk," known for their natural sheen and cultural significance in the state's textile heritage.

During the meeting, the committee recommended a pilot project titled "Branding Muga, the Golden Silk, as the State's USP of Assam" to the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER). The project, with a proposed outlay of ₹59.83 crore, will be implemented over three years across Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Dibrugarh, and Tinsukia districts, benefiting around 14,371 Muga farming families, nearly 44% of the state's total.

The initiative aims to promote Assam's GI-tagged Muga silk under the unified "Senehjori" brand by strengthening the entire value chain, from production to global market access. Planned interven-

tions include improving seed and host plant management, climate-resilient rearing practices, formation of Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs) and Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), and establishment of Muga Aggregation Centres.

The project also proposes the establishment of a Muga Spun Mill in Dhemaji to enable value addition from silk waste, along with technology upgrades in reeling and weaving, product diversification, apparel manufacturing, digital commerce, and startup support. A digital management information system (MIS) will also be introduced to enhance monitoring and traceability.

Officials emphasized that the initiative would strengthen market linkages and improve incomes for farmers, reelers, and weavers, while highlighting the potential of Muga silk as both a cultural symbol and a sustainable economic driver for rural livelihoods, especially for women artisans.

The funding structure includes Rs. 35.83 crore from the Ministry of DoNER, ₹14.20 crore from the Ministry of Textiles, and Rs. 9.49 crore from the Government of Assam.

The committee also reviewed PMDeVINE projects, including the Maa Kamakhya Access Corridor in Guwahati and the proposed Medical College in Sivasagar, directing officials to expedite implementation of the Kamakhya Corridor project. Additionally, select change-of-scope proposals under NEC projects were examined to facilitate effective execution.

Sikkim: 17 footballers call match with PM Modi an unforgettable experience



GANGTOK

A group of 17 young footballers from across Sikkim on Wednesday described their inter-

Quest!

Killing a dolphin in ancient Greece was considered sacrilegious and was punishable by death.

action with Prime Minister Narendra Modi as an "unforgettable" experience after getting an opportunity to play football with him at Lok Bhawan in Gangtok.

The players, who represented different parts of the Himalayan state, including Namchi and several other regions, said the occasion was a rare and proud moment for all of them.

Speaking on behalf of the group, Prekila Tamang said meeting the Prime Minister felt less like a formal interaction and more like spending time with a close friend. "It never

felt like we were meeting the Prime Minister. It felt like we were playing and talking with someone very warm and friendly," she said.

She added that the interaction went beyond football, as the Prime Minister also spoke to them about health, fitness, discipline and the importance of sports in shaping young lives. "We had an open conversation. He encouraged us to stay fit, work hard and continue pursuing sports seriously," Tamang said. The footballers thanked the state government, officials and the sports department for arranging the memorable interaction during the Prime Minister's visit to Sikkim.

Calling it a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, the young players said the experience would remain one of the proudest moments

of their sporting journey.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday shared a cheerful glimpse from his visit to Gangtok, saying there was "nothing like playing some football" with young friends in the hill capital on a lovely morning. In a post on X, PM Modi uploaded moments from an informal football session with local children and youths, reflecting a lighter side of his visit to Sikkim.

The Prime Minister appeared relaxed and energetic as he joined the youngsters on the field, drawing warm reactions online. "Nothing like playing some football with my young friends in Sikkim on a lovely Gangtok morning! ??" he wrote in the post, highlighting the importance of sports and youth engagement.



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Farooq Abdullah slams EC for deploying large contingent of central forces during West Bengal polls



JAMMU

Three-time former chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Farooq Abdullah on Wednesday slammed the Election Commission for deploying a large contingent of central police forces and bureaucrats during the West Bengal polls.

"Is Bengali not being trusted", asked Abdullah, who is the president of the ruling National Conference even as he went on to condemn the rhetoric used by national leaders against West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. He described the language used to criticise Banerjee as "unparliamentary and not befitting this nation".

Emphasising that a strong India requires respecting its citizens, he told PTL, "If you want a strong India, then Bengalis have the right to choose their leadership without being coerced towards any other direction."

Abdullah lashed out at the approach of some quarters in the government towards state elections and regional identities, specif-

ically questioning if the people of West Bengal "are being treated as outsiders" within their own country.

Referring to the massive deployment of central police forces and the reshuffling of bureaucrats during the election season in West Bengal, Abdullah questioned the underlying intent, saying "the way even from Jammu and Kashmir forces have been removed in large numbers and sent, saying that they want a peaceful election... officers have been moved from states. What for? Is the Bengali not trusted? Is he (West Bengal) not part of the nation?" Abdullah did not mince words regarding the institutional oversight of the electoral processes in West Bengal, expressing his disappointment with the poll body.

"I pity the Election Commission in the way it has handled the situation," he said.

Without naming the BJP, he said, "They have not been successful up to this time. I do not know what the results will hold, but whatever it is, we must

not follow such things", suggesting that the methods employed were flawed.

The second and final phase of polling was held in West Bengal on Wednesday, and the results will be announced on May 4.

Speaking about the diminishing space of separatists, Abdullah suggested that the threat of separatism, which has existed since independence, has "gradually reduced to a very minimum number".

Instead, Abdullah termed growing communal tensions in the country as a bigger threat.

"Today, it's not the separatism that is worrying us. What is worrying us is the communal tendencies that have now emerged in our nation, where, for political power, you are dividing communities on a religious basis."

He warned that this trend is a danger not just for Jammu and Kashmir but also for the stability of the entire nation.

Hereminded that India's strength lies in its "unity in diversity," pointing out the vast differences in language and culture among regions from Jammu and Kashmir to Tamil Nadu.

"We will never become Vishwaguru unless we are united. Danger lies in not being united," he said and stressed that the only thing holding the country together is the collective will to help each other through difficult times.

"Together we can make a strong nation by helping each other in the difficult times that we are going through," he said.

Exit polls signal continuity in Bengal and Assam, fragmentation in Tamil Nadu, uncertainty lingers

NEW DELHI

Exit polls released on Wednesday, April 29, 2026, following the conclusion of voting across key states have offered an early indication of electoral trends, with attention centred on West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, where politically significant contests have unfolded.

The Axis My India exit poll indicates a strong showing for incumbent forces in several key states, with the Trinamool Congress projected to secure around 190 seats in West Bengal, well ahead of the Bharatiya Janata Party at about 90, pointing to a clear majority. In Tamil Nadu, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam-led alliance is estimated to win roughly 175 seats, comfortably surpassing the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam alliance at around 55, suggesting a strong return to power.

In Assam, exit poll points to a clear victory for the Bharatiya Janata Party-led alliance in Assam, indicating that the ruling coalition is likely to retain power for a third straight term. The NDA is projected to win around 88 to 100 seats in the 126-member Assembly, comfortably crossing the majority mark, suggesting sustained voter support for Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and the incumbent government.

In comparison, the Indian National Congress-led opposition alliance is expected to trail with an estimated 24 to 36 seats, reflecting a relatively weaker electoral position. The projections point to a largely one-sided contest shaped by factors such as governance perception, organisational strength



and vote consolidation in favour of the ruling alliance, although the final outcome will be confirmed only after the official counting of votes.

In Kerala, the Left Democratic Front is projected to edge ahead with about 78 seats compared to the United Democratic Front at 62, indicating a relatively close contest but with an advantage for the incumbent bloc. Meanwhile, in Puducherry, the National Democratic Alliance led by All India N.R. Congress is projected to secure around 18 seats, marginally ahead of the Congress-DMK alliance at about 12, pointing to a tight but favourable outcome for the NDA.

In West Bengal, most projections suggest that the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress is likely to retain power, maintaining its dominance despite a sustained challenge from the Bharatiya Janata Party. The estimates broadly point to a comforta-

ble majority for the ruling party, while the BJP is expected to consolidate its position as the principal opposition with an improved seat tally. At the same time, a few projections and internal assessments present a more competitive picture, suggesting the possibility of a tighter race, which underscores the uncertainty surrounding the final outcome.

The electoral landscape in West Bengal appears to have become increasingly bipolar, with limited room for the Indian National Congress and Left parties to regain significant ground. If these trends are reflected in the final results, they would reinforce the state's shift towards a contest largely defined by the TMC and the BJP, with regional political dynamics continuing to outweigh broader national narratives.

In Tamil Nadu, exit polls indicate a more complex and less predictable contest shaped by legacy politics and internal divisions, par-

ticularly within the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. The enduring influence of J. Jayalalithaa remains a central factor, with multiple leaders seeking to inherit and consolidate her political base. The fragmentation within the AIADMK and shifting alliances have contributed to a more competitive environment, with several constituencies expected to witness close contests driven by local factors such as caste alignments, leadership appeal and constituency-level dynamics.

Across other states that went to the polls, including Assam, Kerala and Puducherry, early projections largely point towards continuity, although the margin of victory and seat distribution vary across different pollsters. These states are expected to follow more established voting patterns, though variations in turnout and local issues could still influence the final results.

While exit polls provide a preliminary snapshot of voter sentiment, their reliability remains subject to several limitations, including sampling challenges, regional diversity and the possibility of late shifts in voter preferences. Past experience has shown that such projections can diverge from actual outcomes, sometimes significantly. The exit poll trends released on April 29 suggest a mix of continuity and competitive churn, with some states appearing set for political stability while others reflect evolving electoral dynamics. The final verdict, however, will depend on the official counting of votes, which will determine how closely these projections align with the actual mandate.

INTERNATIONAL

Iran 'better get smart soon': Trump warns Tehran, posts picture with gun, slogan



WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump, while issuing a warning to Iran, posted on Truth Social, "Iran can't get their act together. They don't know how to sign a non-nuclear deal. They better get smart soon!"

He stated that the United States will take a tougher stance if a diplomatic resolution regarding its nuclear programme is not reached soon.

In a post on his social media platform, Truth Social, the President posted a picture of himself holding an assault rifle and the slogan 'No more Mr Nice Guy'.

The President's remarks come at a time of heightened regional tension

and a continued diplomatic stalemate. Highlighting a shift in his administration's approach, Trump warned, "They better get smart soon!"

The post from the US Trump signals a potentially more aggressive policy if Tehran continues to resist the terms proposed by Washington.

The statement follows recent efforts to negotiate a "Trump" deal that would replace previous agreements, which the President has frequently described as insufficient for ensuring global security.

Furthering this stance, Trump has voiced significant dissatisfaction with Tehran's recent diplomatic overtures. He asserted that Washington will not advance negotiations unless the nuclear

issue is tackled directly.

The President also claimed that Iran had indicated it was in a "state of collapse" and was consequently pushing for the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz "as soon as possible".

During his assessment, Trump highlighted the global security risks inherent in Tehran's atomic aspirations, warning that should Iran successfully obtain nuclear armaments, "the whole world would be held hostage".

This rejection follows a proposal from Iran focused on an immediate ceasefire in West Asia and the restoration of traffic through the strategically vital Strait of Hormuz. Notably, the proposal sought to postpone discussions

on its nuclear programme, missile technology, and existing sanctions.

While Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has been conducting a diplomatic blitz—visiting Islamabad and meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin in St Petersburg to secure international backing—regional powers have begun to voice their own opposition.

In a meeting held in Saudi Arabia, leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), convened under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, formally rejected what they characterised as Iran's "illegal actions" regarding the closure of the strait and threats to maritime passage.

The GCC summit, which included high-level representation from Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, and the UAE, issued a collective call for the return of "security and freedom of navigation" to levels seen before the conflict.

Furthermore, the bloc advocated for enhanced military integration, specifically the creation of shared infrastructure and a ballistic missile early warning system.

As regional and international pressure mounts, reports from The Wall Street Journal suggest that the US administration is bracing for an extended period of economic confrontation.

Trump has reportedly instructed his team to formulate plans for a sustained blockade of Iran, a strategy designed to cripple the Iranian economy and oil exports by strictly controlling maritime access to its ports.

According to The Wall Street Journal, the President prefers this blockade as a more effective, lower-risk alternative to either a renewed aerial bombing campaign or a policy of total disengagement, marking a shift toward a long-term strategy of economic attrition.

Russia to hold Victory Day parade without military equipment for 1st time in nearly two decades



MOSCOW

Russia's traditional parade marking the 81st anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II this year will take place without tanks, missiles and other military equipment, the Russian Defense Ministry said in a statement late Tuesday.

It will be the first time in nearly two decades—and in the more than four years of Russia's war in Ukraine—that no military equipment will rumble through Moscow's Red Square on May 9, the day Russia celebrates its most important secular holiday. The Kremlin has used it to showcase its military might and global clout.

Victory Day parades on Red Square involved military equipment and various weaponry every year since 2008.

The ministry statement this week cited the "current operational situation" as a reason for excluding a military equipment convoy, as well as cadets, from the parade. The statement didn't elaborate.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry

Peskov in a conference call with reporters on Wednesday blamed Ukraine and its "terrorist activity, in an apparent reference to Kyiv's strikes deep inside Russia. "All measures are being taken to minimize the danger," he said.

The parade will feature "servicemen from higher military educational institutions of all kinds and certain service branches of the Russian Armed Forces" and a traditional military aircraft flyover, the ministry said.

World War II remains a rare point of consensus in the nation's divisive history under Communist rule, and the Kremlin has leveraged that sentiment to encourage national pride and underline Russia's position as a global power.

The Soviet Union lost 27 million people in what it calls the Great Patriotic War in 1941-45, an enormous sacrifice that left a deep scar in the national psyche.

President Vladimir Putin, who has ruled Russia for over 25 years, has turned Victory Day into a key pillar of his tenure

and has tried to use it to justify the war in Ukraine.

Last year's parade was the largest since Russia sent troops into Ukraine, and drew the most global leaders to Moscow in a decade, including high-profile guests like Chinese President Xi Jinping, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico.

It featured over 11,500 troops and more than 180 military vehicles, including tanks, armored infantry vehicles and artillery used on the battlefield in Ukraine, as well as huge Yars nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missiles launchers and drones carried on military trucks. Fighter jets flew over Red Square, too.

Putin had declared a unilateral 72-hour ceasefire starting May 7, 2025, and the authorities blocked cellphone internet in Moscow for several days in an effort to avert Ukrainian drone attacks.

In 2023, the parade was scaled down, with fewer troops and military equipment on display and no flyover.

Tripura Maharaja's Kachari House – A Silent Sentinel of History in Sreemangal



SANGRAM DATTA:

Amid the bustle of Habiganj Road in Sreemangal, Bangladesh, stands a crumbling yet dignified relic of the past—the Kachari House of the Tripura Maharajas. More than just an old structure, this centuries-old building is a valuable record of the administrative, political, and cultural history of the Sylhet region.

In the late nineteenth century, following the devastating earthquake along the Dauki Fault, the Tripura royal family took steps to reorganize their administrative operations in the area. As part of that effort, during the reign of Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya Debbarma Bahadur, this Kachari House was constructed on approximately 1.75 acres of land in the heart of Sreemangal. Its primary purpose was to collect land revenue from tenants and oversee local administrative affairs.

Later, under Maharaja (King) Birendra Kishore Manikya Bahadur, the building developed into a full administrative center. At that time, large areas including Sreemangal, Kamalganj, Bhanugach, and Shamshernagar were under the jurisdiction of the Tripura royal family.

Historically, the authority of the Manikya rulers extended beyond present-day Tripura's hill regions into vast parts of Sylhet—an account supported by Achyut Charan Choudhury's Sri-hatter Itibritta and Kailash Chandra Singha's Rajmala. The partition of India in 1947 marked



a turning point. The government of Pakistan took over the property, and over time it came to be used for official administrative purposes. Today, the building serves as the office of the Assistant Commissioner (Land) in Sreemangal, although much of its original structure has been left neglected.

Architecturally, the single-storey building is distinctive. Measuring approximately thirty feet in width and twenty feet in length, it contains three rooms, eight doors, and nine windows. With walls nearly a foot thick, lime-surki masonry, and fine ornamental detailing, the structure reflects a graceful blend of British colonial and local architectural styles. Traces of its craftsmanship are still visible in the decorative features of the walls.

However, time has taken a heavy toll. Large cracks have spread across the walls, the roof shows visible decay, and moss-covered surfaces tell a story of long neglect. In some areas, the building is partially damaged; in others, it stands on the verge of collapse.

Once alive with the activity

of revenue collection—when crowds gathered and the premises were full of movement—the Kachari House now stands in silence. Those vibrant days exist only in memory.

Experts believe the site is not only a symbol of the Tripura royal administration but also an important link between colonial and indigenous systems of governance in the Sylhet region. They emphasize the urgent need to recognize it as an archaeological heritage site and to take proper steps for its preservation.

The question remains: will this structure—once the administrative heart of a vast region—disappear into the passage of time, or will it regain its rightful status through timely conservation?

For now, the Kachari House of Sreemangal stands quietly—bearing witness to history, and waiting to be preserved.

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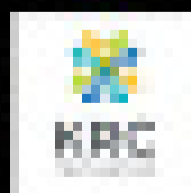


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