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PERSPECTIVE
The best friendships tend to be with the people with whom you can openly be weird.

UKNA-Linked Drug Dealer Killed in Police Encounter Near Assam-Manipur Border

KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

SILCHAR: A dreaded drug dealer allegedly linked to the United Kuki National Army (UKNA) was shot dead during a counter-operation carried out by Cachar Police near the Assam-Manipur border late on Thursday night.

According to police sources, the operation was launched in the dense forest and hilly areas of Bomapuji under Jirihat Police Station in Lakhimpur constituency following specific intelligence inputs about the movement of armed drug traffickers in the region.

The deceased has been identified as Sailen Dongal, a resident of Manipur. Police said he was allegedly involved in the May 5 firing incident at Diglang during an anti-drug operation in which police constable Sharif Hussain Qazi sustained bullet injuries.


During the late-night operation, the police team reportedly came under attack, leading to an exchange of fire. In the retaliatory action, Sailen Dongal was killed on the spot, officials said.

Police sources further claimed that Dongal had links with the United Kuki National Army (UKNA) and was actively involved in cross-border drug trafficking activities along the Assam-Manipur border areas.

Security forces have intensified search operations in the surrounding forest region to trace other suspected associates who may have escaped under the cover of darkness.

Further investigation into the case is underway.

WHO SAID WHAT



"The relationship between the American and Chinese people goes all the way back to America's founding... two and a half centuries later, that first connection has grown into one of the most consequential relationships in world history."
- President Donald J. Trump

Hostages Freed in Manipur After Naga, Kuki Groups Issue Ultimatums; Uncertainty Remains Over Those Still Detained

IMPHAL

Several hostages belonging to both the Naga and Kuki communities were released overnight and on Friday morning amid rising tensions and fresh violence across Manipur's hill districts, following ultimatum notices issued by organisations representing the two communities.

Sources said six individuals, including four women and two men, who were allegedly held captive by a Naga group in the Ireng Naga area, were safely handed over to authorities on Thursday night. In a separate development, eight more hostages - six women and two men - reportedly held by Naga groups in Senapati district were released and handed over at the Makhan Baptist Church compound around midnight.

On Friday morning, twelve women from Konshakul village, who were allegedly detained by a Kuki group at Leilon Vaiphei, were also released at Makhan. Sources added that two Salesian brothers were freed safely later in the morning.



Authorities further confirmed that two hostages allegedly held by Naga groups within Senapati jurisdiction had already been released on Thursday, May 14. One of them was handed over to the police, while another Kuki woman was reportedly released considering her age and gender.

However, officials and community sources indicated that the exact number of hostages released so far could not be independently verified at the time of filing, as confirmations from different locations continued to emerge through the day.

The releases came shortly after both Naga and Kuki organisations issued separate ultimatum notices demanding the immediate release of members of their respective communities.

The Joint Tribes Council Manipur (JTTCM), representing the Inpu, Liangmai, Rongmei and Zeme communities, had on Thursday issued a 12-hour ultimatum seeking the release of an alleged Naga hostage before 6 am on May 15. The council warned of possible escalation and stated that the Kuki community would be held responsible for any fallout arising from non-compliance.

Simultaneously, Kuki Impi Manipur (KIM) issued what it described as a "final and non-negotiable ultimatum", demanding the release of over 25 alleged Kuki hostages in Senapati district and six others reportedly held in the Ireng Naga area before 5 am on Friday.

The developments come amid renewed violence in Manipur that has reportedly claimed at least four lives in recent days, intensifying tensions in several vulnerable hill areas.

Earlier, Manipur Home Minister Govindas Konhoujam had stated that more than 38 individuals from both the Naga and Kuki communities were allegedly being held hostage by different groups across the state.

Despite the latest releases, uncertainty continues over the number of people still allegedly being held by different groups, as authorities have not yet issued any updated official figures.

Security forces remain on heightened deployment across sensitive areas, while civil society organisations and community leaders continue efforts to secure the safe return of those still reported missing or detained.

Centre Gives Manipur Violence Inquiry Panel Six More Months to Submit Report



NEW DELHI

The Centre has extended the tenure of the Commission of Inquiry probing the 2023 ethnic violence in Manipur by another six months, setting a new deadline of November 20, 2026, for submission of its report.

A notification issued on May 14 said the three-member panel, headed by former Supreme Court judge Justice Balbir Singh Chauhan, has been directed to complete the inquiry and submit its findings "as soon as possible but not later than the 20th November, 2026."

The commission was constituted on June 4, 2023, shortly after large-scale ethnic violence erupted across Manipur following a "Tribal Solidarity March" organised in the hill districts on May 3 that year. The march was held in protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status.

The clashes triggered one of the worst episodes of ethnic unrest in the state's recent history, leaving more than 260 people dead and displacing thousands. Widespread arson and violence destroyed homes, shops and public infrastructure, while tensions

between the Meitei and Kuki communities continued to simmer long after the initial outbreak.

The latest extension is the fifth granted to the inquiry panel. Earlier extensions were issued in September and December 2024, followed by two more in May and December 2025. The commission's previous deadline was May 20, 2026.

The inquiry panel was initially chaired by former Gauhati High Court Chief Justice Ajai Lamba, who stepped down from the post with effect from February 28 this year. Justice Chauhan took over as chairperson on March 1.

According to its terms of reference, the commission is examining the sequence of events that led to the violence and whether there were lapses or dereliction of duty by authorities or individuals responsible for maintaining law and order.

The panel is also tasked with assessing whether adequate administrative and security measures were taken to prevent the violence and contain the situation after clashes broke out. Complaints and representations submitted by individuals and organisations are also being reviewed as part of the inquiry process.

Tensions in Manipur had been escalating even before the May 2023 violence, particularly over eviction drives targeting villages located in reserved forest areas. The drives had sparked protests in several districts and deepened existing ethnic fault lines in the state. While announcing the inquiry in 2023, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs had described the situation as a matter of "public importance", citing the scale of the violence, loss of life and destruction witnessed across Manipur.

Manipur MP Bimol Akoijam Criticises Centre Over Continued Violence in State

IMPHAL

Congress MP from Manipur, Bimol Akoijam expressed concern over two separate incidents of violence in the state that left four people dead and several others injured, while accusing the Centre of failing to show "sufficient interest" in resolving the crisis.

Speaking on May 14, Akoijam said an ambush in Kangpokpi district on Tuesday claimed the lives of three church leaders belonging to the Thadou community. Five others were also reportedly injured in the attack.

He further referred to another incident that took place around 6:30 pm in Noney district, where a man from the Chiru community, a minority tribal group in the state, was allegedly killed by unidentified armed assailants.

According to the Congress MP, both attacks were carried out by unknown armed men, highlighting what he described as the continuing breakdown of law and order in Manipur.

Akoijam said the ongoing unrest could have been contained earlier if timely intervention had taken place. He alleged that the Government of India had failed to act with adequate urgency since the violence first erupted in the state.

The MP maintained that stronger and earlier action by the Centre could have prevented the prolonged instability and repeated incidents of violence witnessed across Manipur over the past several months.

The fresh incidents have once again raised concerns over the fragile security situation in the state, where sporadic violence and ethnic tensions have continued despite heightened deployment of security forces and multiple rounds of peace appeals.

Heavy Rainfall Causes Waterlogging in Sribhumi and Guwahati, Disrupting Traffic and Daily Life



GUWAHATI

Heavy rainfall that lashed several parts of Assam on the night of May 14 triggered severe waterlogging in multiple areas of Guwahati and Sribhumi, disrupting normal life and causing major traffic congestion.

In Sribhumi, continuous rainfall submerged several low-lying localities, with roads and residential areas inundated under rainwater. Waterlogging was reported from different parts of the town, affecting vehicular movement and hampering routine public activities.

Meanwhile, Guwahati witnessed widespread artificial flooding after a single night of intense rainfall, once again exposing the city's recurring urban flood problem during the monsoon season.

Several roads and residential localities experienced heavy water accumulation, leading to long traffic snarls and severe disruption in daily commute for office-goers, students and other commuters.

Vehicles were seen moving slowly through flooded stretches, while pedestrians struggled to navigate submerged roads and waterlogged footpaths in several parts of the city.

Residents blamed inadequate drainage infrastructure and clogged drains for worsening the situation, alleging that poor maintenance of drainage networks continued to aggravate flooding after every spell of heavy rain.

The downpour also affected movement across key commercial and residential zones, with many commuters reportedly stranded in traffic for extended periods due to inundated roads and slow-moving vehicles.

Locals expressed concern over the recurring nature of artificial flooding in Guwahati and urged authorities to adopt long-term measures to improve drainage systems, enhance water discharge capacity and mitigate urban flooding during the monsoon season.

Dimapur Ranks 10th in NER District SDG Index 2023-24

DIMAPUR

Dimapur district has secured the 10th position among 121 districts in the 2023-24 North Eastern Region District SDG Index, recording a composite score of 76.29 and registering a sharp improvement from its previous ranking in the 2021-22 edition.

The district had earlier scored 63.67 and ranked 76th among 103 districts, marking a major leap in overall performance under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) assessment framework.

Presenting the district's SDG profile during a review meeting on SDG India Index 4.0 and NER District SDG Index 2.0 held at the Deputy Commissioner's conference hall in Dimapur on Thursday, Imitjungla Lemtur said the assessment measured progress using 84 indicators mapped across 50 SDG targets.

According to officials, the index followed the methodology of the SDG India Index, assigning equal weightage to all goals. Districts were categorised into aspirants, performers, front-runners and achievers based on their overall scores.

Dimapur recorded particularly strong performances across several sectors, including SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean En-



ergy), where it scored 91, SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) with 97, SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) with 86, SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) with 87, and SDG 13 (Climate Action) with 88.

The report highlighted major improvements in infrastructure and public services, including 100 per cent village

electrification, full mobile network coverage in villages, universal access to improved drinking water sources and verified open defecation-free status across villages.

In the education sector, the district reported progress in the availability of computers in schools, improved numbers of trained secondary-level teachers

and reduced dropout rates at the lower secondary level.

Health indicators reflected high levels of institutional deliveries and skilled birth attendance. However, officials noted that areas such as infant mortality and healthcare infrastructure still require further improvement.

The district profile also recorded gains in sanitation coverage, banking access, completion of housing projects under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and internet connectivity.

At the same time, officials identified reduced inequalities, forest cover, healthcare services and municipal solid waste treatment as sectors needing continued policy attention and intervention. The review meeting was attended by heads of departments and officials from various departments under the Dimapur district administration.

In her opening remarks, Diana Patton said the SDG India Index 2023-24 covered 17 goals, 70 targets and 115 indicators. She urged all departments to ensure accurate and updated data submission and work collectively to further improve the district's SDG rankings and development performance.

Two Mizoram Men Arrested in Assam's Cachar Over Alleged Unauthorised Biometric Data Collection

SILCHAR

Police in Assam's Cachar district have arrested two men from Mizoram for allegedly collecting facial biometric data of local residents without valid authorisation while claiming association with an American multinational company. The arrests followed a police investigation into a biometric registration exercise conducted earlier this week at a marriage hall in Silchar, where local youths were reportedly invited to participate in facial recognition and biometric scanning sessions in exchange for small payments.

Cachar Additional Superintendent of Police (Crime) Rajat Pal said the accused had allegedly collected biometric information from youths "by offering them small amounts of money without proper authorisation or clear documentation". The two accused were identified as Vanlalrinchhana (33) and Raymond Vatha Chozah (34), both residents of Mizoram who had reportedly been staying in Silchar for several months.

According to police, more than 200 residents - most of them youths - had already submitted facial

recognition data and biometric impressions before the operation came under scrutiny.

"They collected facial recognition data and biometric impressions of more than 200 residents, mostly youths, but they are unable to show any valid reason for the exercise," Pal said. Police initially detained the duo for questioning before formally arresting them. A case has been registered at Silchar Sadar Police Station under cheating charges along with relevant provisions of the Information Technology Act. Investigators are also examining the nature of the alleged connection with the American company referenced during the registration exercise. Several participants reportedly told police they had been informed that the programme was part of a "special scheme" linked to a US-based multinational firm. The incident has triggered concerns over the unauthorised collection and handling of sensitive biometric information, especially involving young participants who may not have been fully informed about how their personal data would be stored, processed or used.



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TRUMP-XI SUMMIT

This week President Trump will be meeting Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing for a supposed historic summit. The last time the two met was in Busan, South Korea, in Oct last year. The meeting comes while the Iran war continues, where the US is seeking to subdue China's closest Middle East ally, Iran. China and Iran, had in 2021, inked a 25-year cooperation agreement wherein, in lieu of cheap oil, China would invest USD 400 billion in energy and infrastructure projects. This is presently on hold.

Despite sanctions, China continued to procure over 80 percent of Iran's oil, to the tune of 1.4 million barrels a day, mostly through shadow fleets of carriers. In return China provides goods, technology and investments. China had also supported Iran with intel on US bases as also deployment of its aircraft in the Middle East, enabling Iran to target them with accuracy. Damages to US bases and radars in the region would cost billions in repair.

The US economy is also degraded. Inflation is rising as is public anger in the Government's handling of the war and economy. Trump cannot afford additional shocks which could emerge in case China further sells US bonds. China is no longer the largest holder of US bonds having dropped its holding from 768 billion to 682 billion in just one year. These were procured by European nations. Further selling could impact the dollar as the US and Europe are no longer on the same page. China also cancelled purchase of 500 US Boeing aircraft impacting jobs.

Following the Oct 2025 meeting with Xi in South Korea, Trump reduced sanctions on China, which have since been declared illegal by US courts, once Beijing agreed to a one-year pause on export controls for critical minerals, including gallium, germanium, and graphite. Beijing also agreed to purchase additional US farm products. There are reports that China has not stuck to its side of the bargain on farm products.

With the Iran war Trump threatened to impose additional sanctions if China supplied weapons to Iran or refused to remove retaliatory tariffs. China also continues to procure Iranian oil despite threats of tariffs. Recently, Trump sanctioned five Chinese refineries for procuring Iranian oil. In counter, China imposed its 'blocking rules' wherein it ordered its citizens and companies to disregard US sanctions. It is now openly challenging the US because it is aware that it holds the cards.

China has expanded its oil procurements with pipelines from Russia and Central Asia as also enhanced oil supplies from South America and Africa. The advantage which the US held over global supplies of oil, by overthrowing the Maduro Government in Venezuela, no longer exists. US taking over Venezuela has impacted China as it had provided an oil-backed USD 100 billion loan to it. China will seek repayment. Russian oil is also no longer under sanctions.

For Trump, when US vulnerability is increasing, a conflict with China is the last that he needs. Stopping exports of rare earths, interrupting supply chains or selling US bonds would all impact the US. Thus, Trump will have to dance to Xi's tune. Added would be concerns if China looks to procure farm products from Brazil instead of the US.

The QUAD summit, scheduled to be held last year, is now postponed and is unlikely to happen in the near future. No one in the US talks about the QUAD. Rhetoric against China by Trump's team has also reduced. This is all being done to appease Xi.

The US in the Iran war has expended a large amount of its munitions including missiles for its Patriot systems. Added has been supplies to Ukraine from its reserves. Pentagon had to move naval forces and marines from its bases in SE Asia to the gulf to enhance force levels. This includes 2000 marines and an amphibious assault ship from Japan as also THAAD anti-missile defence systems from South Korea. Thus, US deployment in SE Asia has weakened.

The war also exposed shortcomings in US bases located in the Middle East, which would have been studied by China. It would have also noted reduced stockpiles of US weaponry. An important aspect in ongoing negotiations with Iran is control over Hormuz. In case the US accepts Iranian control, China could claim the same over the Straits of Taiwan, as also the South China Sea. It would anyway have planned blockading of the Taiwan Straits in case it launches operations on Taiwan.

With weakened US military power, Trump cannot risk China attempting to regain its claimed territories in SE Asia. Thus, it will be Trump seeking assurances from China that it will not invade any nation during his tenure. He had done so during his last meeting with Xi in Seoul and announced the same proudly. It will be repeated.

Xi would also bargain hard. Trump would be forced to reign in statements from the Japanese leadership, delay sales of weapons to Taiwan and promise Xi that Taiwan will make no move which could force China's hand. Iran will dominate talks as China would want to secure its investments as also see an end to the conflict. Hence, it would be Xi who would lay down Red Lines for Trump on Iran.

The Iran war has changed dynamics of US military and economic power. While Trump may continue screaming from the rooftops on having won the conflict, China would be aware of what transpired and the impact the war has had on the US. It is Washington seeking talks and not Tehran. The US is no longer as powerful as it claims.

Thus, Trump would not be visiting Beijing as head of a powerful state seeking to push China to bend, but of a nation desiring that China does nothing while the US rebuilds itself. Further, for Trump to secure his popularity at home, he will request Xi to procure more US agricultural products and re-commence purchasing Boeing aircraft.

It will be Trump seeking guarantees and additional procurements and in return would have to accept Beijing's terms, though while speaking to the press, he may project a picture of gain, the reality is that he will be bending to Beijing's demands. China will be choosing the tune for Trump to dance.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

There's a thin line between losing & winning. Losing breeds winners. The main recipe to success is through failures & hardships! - E A Adeboye

VIJAY STARTS WITH MASSIVE GOODWILL



T N ASHOK

The rise of Vijay from matinee idol to Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu is not merely a political victory. It is a civilisational rupture in the political history of southern India.

For nearly seven decades, Tamil Nadu was governed by the iron logic of Dravidian politics — a powerful ideological movement born from anti-caste struggles, Tamil linguistic pride, rationalism and social justice. The movement first dismantled the post-Independence dominance of the Indian National Congress in 1967 through the charismatic rise of C. N. Annadurai and later evolved into a fierce two-party duopoly led by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. Generations believed the Dravidian fortress was politically indestructible.

And then came Vijay. Only two years after launching the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam, the actor-politician has done what seemed impossible: he has broken the political architecture built successively by giants such as M. Karunanidhi, M. G. Ramachandran and J. Jayalalithaa.

His party emerged as the single largest force in the Assembly, and with the support of ideologically diverse allies, Vijay now heads the government with the backing of roughly 120 legislators in the 234-member Assembly.

The implications are historic. Tamil Nadu has not witnessed such a dramatic political transfer of power since the Dravidian movement itself uprooted Congress dominance nearly sixty years ago. But the central question now haunting the state is simple: Who exactly is Vijay the politician?

For millions of young voters between 18 and 40 years of age, he represented rebellion against exhausted political structures. To the urban middle class, he appeared modern, clean and uncorrupted. To the poor, he projected empathy. To Tamil nationalists, he spoke of dignity. To welfare-driven voters, he promised continuity without dynastic politics. Yet electoral charisma and governance are two entirely different theatres.

Vijay's greatest challenge begins now. Unlike the Dravidian giants before him, Vijay did not rise through decades of grassroots agitation, student movements, trade unions or ideological training.

Karunanidhi was forged in the fire of Tamil nationalist rhetoric and script-writing. M. G. Ramachandran cultivated a messianic welfare image over decades. J. Jayalalithaa combined administrative ruthlessness with populist authority.

Vijay's rise is different. His movement was born in the era of social media, political fatigue and demographic impatience. Young voters no longer wanted ideological sermons. They wanted speed, jobs, technology, transparency and dignity in governance.

Tamil Nadu today is among India's most industrialised and urbanised states. It boasts one of the country's highest literacy levels, strong healthcare indicators, a vast manufacturing ecosystem and a globally connected diaspora economy. From automobile manufacturing in Chennai to semiconductor ambitions, renewable energy corridors and IT exports, the state is deeply embedded in India's economic future.

This is not a state that can be run merely through cinematic symbolism. The expectations on Vijay are therefore enormous. His voters do not merely want welfare. They want upward mobility.

They want jobs in artificial intelligence, semiconductor parks, electric vehicle manufacturing, biotechnology and advanced services. They want world-class infrastructure without corruption. They want global investments while preserving Tamil identity. They want social justice without political in-

timidation.

In many ways, Vijay's mandate resembles the aspirations-driven politics that transformed younger democracies globally — where personality overtakes party machinery and emotional trust outweighs traditional ideology.

But emotional mandates are fragile. The arithmetic that brought Vijay to power may also become his biggest vulnerability.

His government survives through support extending across ideological extremes — Left parties advocating labour-driven welfare economics, centrist secular formations, caste-based regional outfits representing oppressed communities, and parties with varying shades of cultural conservatism. Managing such contradictions requires extraordinary political skill.

The Dravidian majors survived because they possessed something Vijay's fledgling party currently lacks: institutional depth. The DMK and AIADMK built enormous district-level patronage networks over decades. They controlled local bodies, labour unions, student organisations, cinema influence and welfare delivery systems.

Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam is still structurally young. Its emotional connection with voters is undeniable, but its administrative ecosystem remains largely untested. Can Vijay prevent factional wars within his own ranks? Can first-time legislators handle bureaucratic complexities? Can celebrity-driven mobilisation evolve into durable governance? These questions will define his survival.

A 120-member support base in a 234-member Assembly may appear stable numerically, but coalition governments in India often collapse not because of arithmetic, but because of ambition, ego and ideological distrust. And Vijay enters office without prior ministerial or administrative experience.

Every new Chief Minister in Tamil Nadu eventually confronts the same reality: the state's bureaucracy is immensely sophisticated, powerful and politically aware. Tamil Nadu's administrative machinery is often regarded among the most efficient in India. Welfare systems, healthcare delivery, school meal programmes, transport networks and industrial facilitation mechanisms have evolved over decades through institutional continuity.

For Vijay, this bureaucracy can become either his greatest ally or his greatest obstacle. If he empowers com-

petent technocrats, decentralises decision-making and surrounds himself with policy professionals rather than film loyalists, he could surprise critics. But if governance slips into personality cult management, instability could emerge rapidly. This is why the composition of Vijay's "talent team" will matter immensely.

Observers across political and corporate circles are closely watching whom he appoints in finance, industries, education, technology, policing and welfare administration. Will he bring in economists and technocrats? Will he rely on political veterans borrowed from alliance partners? Will cinema associates dominate governance? Or will he build a hybrid model combining youthful energy with bureaucratic experience?

The answers may determine whether Vijay becomes a transformational leader or merely a transitional phenomenon. Tamil Nadu has historically blurred the boundaries between cinema and politics more successfully than any other Indian state. Yet even within that history, Vijay's ascent is unique.

Unlike M. G. Ramachandran, he did not inherit an ideological movement. Unlike J. Jayalalithaa, he did not emerge under the mentorship of an established political titan. He built his political momentum during an era when traditional party structures were weakening and digital emotional mobilisation was becoming dominant. His speeches carefully fused Tamil pride, anti-corruption messaging, youth aspiration and moral symbolism without committing fully to any rigid ideological doctrine.

That ambiguity helped expand his appeal. But governance punishes ambiguity. Soon, Vijay will have to take positions on contentious national issues: federalism, language policy, caste reservations, industrial land acquisition, environmental protests, private investment, welfare expenditure and relations with the Union government in New Delhi.

Every decision risks alienating one segment of his coalition. Another delicate challenge awaits Vijay in his relationship with the government at the Centre.

Tamil Nadu's politics has historically been defined by tensions between regional assertion and national power. Dravidian parties mastered the art of confrontation and cooperation simultaneously with governments in New Delhi.

Vijay must now learn that balancing

act quickly. If he appears too confrontational, investment flows and administrative cooperation may suffer. If he appears too conciliatory, he risks losing the emotional Tamil nationalist energy that powered his rise.

This balancing act becomes even more difficult because Vijay's support base is ideologically diverse. Some allies demand aggressive federal resistance. Others prefer pragmatic cooperation with the Centre.

Holding these forces together will require political maturity rarely demanded so early from a first-time Chief Minister.

Yet despite all uncertainties, something profound has undeniably occurred in Tamil Nadu. A younger generation has rewritten the political map.

For decades, Tamil Nadu politics revolved around memories of giants from another era. Now an entirely new generation — shaped by the internet, global

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

India has always given priority to dialogue and diplomacy for resolving issues. Keeping Hormuz free, open and safe is our top priority.

In this matter, adherence to international laws is essential. India stands with the UAE in every situation and will continue to do so in the future as well. India is ready to provide every possible support for the restoration of peace and stability at the earliest.

~ Narendra Modi, PM of India.



migration, private-sector ambition and cultural fluidity — has asserted itself electorally.

Vijay became the vehicle for that generational transfer. His victory is therefore larger than cinema, larger than personality and perhaps even larger than ideology itself. It reflects the impatience of a state that wants both welfare and wealth creation, both Tamil identity and global integration, both social justice and economic acceleration.

Whether Vijay can deliver all of this remains uncertain. History offers warnings. Charismatic leaders often struggle once symbolism collides with governance. Coalitions fracture. Administrations stumble. Expectations become impossible to satisfy. But history also occasionally produces disruptive figures who redefine political systems entirely.

Today, Tamil Nadu stands at that uncertain threshold. The Dravidian era is not dead — its social justice legacy remains deeply embedded in the state's political DNA. But its monopoly over power has unquestionably been broken.

And standing at the centre of this political earthquake is a soft-spoken actor who has now inherited one of India's most complex and aspirational states. The applause of the campaign trail has ended. The burden of governing Tamil Nadu has begun.



Jyotiraditya Scindia to attend Sikkim Statehood Day celebrations on May 16



GANGTOK

Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia will attend the Sikkim Statehood Day celebrations during his visit to Sikkim on May 16.

According to official information, Scindia will also lay the foundation stone for various projects under the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDNER) during the visit.

The Union Minister is also scheduled to launch the flagship USP Organic Farming Project aimed at promoting sustainable and organic agricultural practices in the state.

Sikkim Statehood Day is observed annually on May 16 to commemorate the state's merger with the Indian Union in 1975.

Earlier, Union Minister for Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) and Communications, Jyotiraditya Scindia, will arrive in Sikkim on Thursday on a three-day official visit to review key infrastructure, tourism and connectivity projects across the state.

According to the scheduled itinerary, the Union Minister will land at Bagdogra Airport this evening at around 7 PM before proceeding to Namchi in South Sikkim for an overnight halt.

On May 15, Scindia will begin his engagements with a visit to Temi Tea Garden, the lone tea estate of Sikkim and one of the state's major tourist attractions. He is also scheduled to inspect the ongoing Bhaleydungta Skywalk Project in Yangang and review

the progress of the ambitious tourism infrastructure project.

Later in the day, the Union Minister will attend the Sikkim Premier League at Bhaichung Stadium. Following the event, he will travel to Gangtok and visit Orchidium, the tourism and cultural attraction that was recently visited and appreciated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his Sikkim tour.

On May 16, Scindia will proceed to the strategic Indo-China border area at Nathula Pass, where he is expected to inspect facilities being developed for the resumption and management of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra.

The Minister will review the acclimatisation centres constructed at Hangu Lake and 17th Mile for Kailash Mansarovar pilgrims. The facilities

were virtually inaugurated earlier by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his recent visit to the state. He will also inspect the under-construction parking infrastructure at Nathula, which is being developed with a capacity to accommodate nearly 1,000 vehicles to ease congestion and improve tourist management in the border region.

Later the same day, the Union Minister will attend the 51st State Day celebrations in Gangtok as the Guest of Honour.

The visit of the Union Minister is being seen as significant for Sikkim, particularly in the sectors of tourism, connectivity, border infrastructure and development of pilgrimage facilities, with several centrally-supported projects currently underway in the Himalayan state.

Assam University's O. Amarjit Singha Selected for India Squad in ISTAF Sepak Takraw World Cup 2026

OUR CORRESPONDENT

SILCHAR: Assam University's Sepak Takraw player O. Amarjit Singha has been selected to represent India at the ISTAF Sepak Takraw World Cup 2026 to be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

The selection was officially confirmed by the Sepak Takraw Federation of India (STFI) through a communication sent to the Assam Sepak Takraw Association. Amarjit secured his place in the final Indian squad following his impressive performance at the All India Inter-University Sepak Takraw Tournament (Men) 2025-26, hosted by Assam University in March this year.

Amarjit is scheduled to leave from Delhi with the Indian contingent on May 13 after completing a national coaching camp. The prestigious ISTAF Sepak Takraw World Cup 2026 will be held from May 16 to May 23 in Malaysia.

The International Sepak Takraw Federation (ISTAF), established in 1982, is the global governing body of the sport. The ISTAF World Cup is regarded as one of the premier international tournaments in Sepak Takraw and follows a grand prix format aimed at expanding the sport's global reach and popularity.

Congratulating the athlete on his achievement, Vice Chancellor of Assam University, Prof. Rajive Mohan Pant, described Amarjit's selection as a proud moment for the university and a reflection of the growing sporting talent emerging from the Northeast. He also highlighted the important role played by university-level sports programmes in nurturing athletes capable of competing on the international stage.

Director of the Assam University Sports Board, Prof. Tineshowri Devi, also extended her best wishes to O. Amarjit Singha and Team India for the upcoming World Cup in Malaysia.

Assam Govt. initiate action against Principal of Model College Deithor

SUSHANTA ROY

DIPHU: Pursuant to a complaint petition lodged by several students and civil society organizations, dated May 11, seeking action against Dr. Dipok Kumar Bora, Principal Govt. Model College Deithor, Karbi Anglong.

The Under Secretary to the Govt. of Assam Dispur vide official communication dated 13/05/2026 has officially directed the Director of Higher Education, Assam to examine the matter and take appropriate action as per law.

Earlier the Karbi Students Association (KSA) and the Karbi Anglong Women Justice Forum (KAWJF) jointly submitted a memorandum to the Chairperson of the Assam State Commission for Women today, urging immediate intervention in the alleged sexual assault of a minor girl

at Deithor.

The memorandum was submitted through a senior officer at the Commission's office in Guwahati. The delegation was led by KSA General Secretary Barnabas Killing along with his team.

Representatives from KAWJF, including President Beulet Beypi, General Secretary Presila Terangpi, and other members, were also present.

The organizations have demanded that the Commission take immediate cognizance of the serious allegations against Dr. Dipok Bora, Principal of Deithor Government Model College, Karbi Anglong.

They called for a fair, impartial, and time-bound investigation into the matter, followed by strict legal action against the accused as per the provisions of the law.

Shillong Launches Locality Grading Drive with Cash Awards for Cleanliness and Civic Participation

SHILLONG

The Shillong Municipal Board on Thursday launched a new locality grading initiative aimed at improving cleanliness, waste management and environmental responsibility across neighbourhoods in Shillong, with top-performing localities set to receive cash awards of up to Rs 12 lakh.

The initiative was unveiled during the CM Connect Public Consultative Meet held at U Soso Tham Auditorium in the presence of Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma, Deputy Chief Minister Sniawbhalang Dhar, government officials, community leaders, artists and residents from various parts of the city.

Under the programme, localities will be assessed on parameters including cleanliness, waste segregation, civic participation and environmentally sustainable practices.

Officials said the best-performing locality will receive Rs 12 lakh, while the second and third-



ranked localities will receive Rs 10 lakh and Rs 8 lakh respectively. Additional incentives will also be awarded for active civic engagement and environmental initiatives.

Addressing the gathering, Chief Minister Conrad Sangma said the CM Connect initiative was conceived as a platform to strengthen communication between citizens and the government.

"A true democracy can only function when the government remains connected to its citizens," he said, stressing that public feedback should continue to shape

governance and policy making.

The chief minister said the CM Connect platform is supported by a centralised grievance redressal mechanism integrated with the 1971 call centre, where public complaints are recorded, monitored and escalated if delayed.

He added that the system would eventually be linked with MLA Connect and DC Connect initiatives to strengthen accountability and improve grassroots-level service delivery.

Sangma also acknowledged persistent civic challenges related to waste management, road conditions and urban infrastruc-

ture, while urging citizens to collaborate with the government to achieve long-term improvements.

Deputy Chief Minister Sniawbhalang Dhar highlighted the importance of public participation, especially among young people, in ensuring the success of the initiative. He reiterated the government's emphasis on inclusive urban development, citizen-centric governance and youth empowerment. During the programme, the government also launched the Chief Minister's Artist Engagement Scheme aimed at promoting murals and street art across the state. Selected local artists were provided mobilisation advance cheques worth Rs 20,000 each.

An interactive session was later held where residents raised concerns regarding water supply, drainage, street lighting, CCTV surveillance, road maintenance and electricity disruptions. Officials from different departments responded by outlining ongoing infrastructure and development projects across the state.

Centre Removes IAS Officer Padma Jaiswal From Service After 16-Year Arunachal Corruption Probe

KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

NEW DELHI: The Central Government has removed senior IAS officer Padma Jaiswal from service over allegations of financial irregularities linked to her tenure in Arunachal Pradesh nearly two decades ago. The decision follows a departmental inquiry that stretched over 16 years and is being viewed as one of the rare instances where such a severe disciplinary action has been taken against a serving IAS officer.

Jaiswal, who is currently serving as Special Secretary in the Administrative Reforms Department of the Delhi Government, said she was unaware of any dismissal order. "I am not aware of any such development or any dismissal order being passed," she was quoted as saying

by The Indian Express.

A 2003-batch Arunachal Pradesh-Goa-Mizoram and Union Territories (AGMUT) cadre officer, Jaiswal served as the Deputy Commissioner of West Kameng district in Arunachal Pradesh between 2007 and 2008, with headquarters in Bomdila. The case dates back to February 2008, when residents lodged complaints accusing her of misusing her official position and diverting public funds. She was suspended in April 2009, though the suspension was later revoked in October 2010.

A probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation later allegedly uncovered a criminal conspiracy involving Jaiswal and certain subordinate officials, including the then Financial Advisor and office cashier. Investigators claimed treasury funds were withdrawn

in cash on a "returnable basis" under her direction.

According to the investigation, three Government Deposit at Call Receipts (DCRs) were allegedly liquidated to generate multiple demand drafts amounting to Rs 28 lakh. The probe further alleged that the siphoned public funds were used to purchase immovable properties in the names of her close relatives.

Based on the findings, the Ministry of Home Affairs initiated major penalty proceedings under Rule 8 of the All India Services (Discipline and Appeal) Rules, a provision invoked in cases involving grave misconduct and violations of official integrity.

A departmental chargesheet had been issued against Jaiswal in 2009, but the inquiry reached its conclusion only recently. The inquiry report reportedly found

evidence of misuse of public funds, abuse of official position, and violations of the All India Services Conduct Rules.

Following recommendations by the Union Public Service Commission, the Ministry of Home Affairs enforced the penalty of "removal from service" after receiving final approval from the President, formally ending Jaiswal's civil services career.

The prolonged timeline of the case, stretching from the original complaint in 2008 and the chargesheet in 2009 to the inquiry's conclusion in 2026, has also drawn attention from legal and administrative observers. Concerns have been raised over the lengthy disciplinary process within the All India Services framework, particularly in cases involving senior officers accused of corruption and abuse of office.

Weakening Barak Dyke Sparks Flood Fears for Thousands of Families in Cachar



edly began sliding ahead of the monsoon season, triggering allegations of poor-quality restoration work and official negligence.

Residents of Gobindapur Part-II said the weakening stretch of the dyke could collapse during heavy rainfall, potentially inundating several nearby villages and causing widespread damage to homes, agricultural land and livelihoods.

"We are living under a jeopardised situation near the affected site. With the rise in water level during the monsoon, our homes may get washed away," a local resident said, expressing concern over the deteriorating condition of the embankment.

The embankment forms part of a larger restoration project undertaken under the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) scheme of the Assam Water Resources Department.

According to details displayed at the site, the project - titled "Permanent Restoration of Breaches at Shantipur Area Along with Improvement, Stabilisation and Restoration of Other Damaged Reaches of the Dyke on the Right Bank of River Barak from Gonigram to Katigorah (from Samuburai to Siddipur)" - was sanctioned at a total cost of Rs 45 crore.

Of the total allocation, Rs 17.62 crore was specifically earmarked for restoration and anti-erosion measures, including 5,284 metres of earthwork and 600 metres of anti-erosion

protection.

Locals said the work order for the project was issued on February 4, 2023, to Dochania & Company Pvt. Ltd., with completion scheduled for April 30, 2023.

However, despite the substantial expenditure and the project being officially marked for completion nearly three years ago, villagers alleged that the present condition of the dyke reflects serious lapses in execution and monitoring.

"Even though work was carried out in the area, the quality appeared poor, which is evident from the recent sliding of soil along the dyke, raising fears of a major breach during heavy rain," residents alleged.

The incident has intensified public anger in the area, with villagers demanding a high-level inquiry into the alleged negligence and accountability for the condition of the embankment.

Several residents also appealed to Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to personally intervene and order a detailed investigation into the project. Meanwhile, Katigorah MLA Kamalakshya Dey Purkayastha said he was scheduled to inspect the affected site on Thursday and hold discussions with the concerned authorities.

"Necessary steps for repair, restoration and strengthening of the embankment will be taken after assessing the ground reality," the MLA said.

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More than 5,000 families in Cachar district are facing growing fears of flooding after a major portion of a key embankment in Katigorah report-

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NEET UG re-exam to be held on June 21 after paper leak row; NTA announces fresh date



NEW DELHI

The National Testing Agency (NTA) on Friday announced that the re-examination for NEET-UG 2026 will be conducted on June 21, days after the medical entrance test was cancelled over allegations of a paper leak.

In a post on X, the NTA said the decision had been taken with the approval of the Government of India and urged candidates and parents to rely only on official communication channels for updates related to the examination.

"The National Testing Agency, with the approval of the Government of India, has scheduled the re-examination of NEET (UG) 2026 on Sunday, 21 June 2026," the agency said.

With the schedule now out, candidates can expect the agency to release admit cards four to five days before the examination.

The NTA has earlier clarified that no additional fee will be charged from candidates for the re-conduct of the NEET UG 2026 examination. Students who had already registered for the May 3 exam will be eligible to appear for the June 21 test without making any fresh payment.

The NEET (UG) 2026 exam for admission to undergraduate courses in medical colleges, held on May 3, was cancelled amid allegations of paper leak.

The decision was taken with the approval of the central government after allegations of a paper leak

and other irregularities surfaced.

"Based on the inputs subsequently examined by NTA in coordination with the central agencies, and the investigative findings shared by the law enforcement agencies and to ensure that there is transparency in the system, the National Testing Agency, with the approval of the Government of India, has decided to cancel the NEET (UG) 2026 examination conducted on 3 May 2026," the NTA said.

The government asked the CBI to carry out a comprehensive inquiry into the "irregularities."

The cancellation left lakhs of medical aspirants uncertain about admissions, counselling schedules and preparation timelines.

Centre hikes petrol, diesel prices by Rs 3 per litre each amid West Asia conflict-driven crude surge



NEW DELHI

Fuel prices were raised by Rs 3 per litre on Friday, marking the first hike in more than four years, as state-run oil companies grapple with mounting losses triggered by soaring global crude prices amid the ongoing West Asia conflict.

The increase came 16 days after assembly elections concluded in Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

Fuel prices had remained unchanged through the polling period despite a sharp spike in international oil prices following the US-Israel attack on Iran on February 28 and Tehran's retaliation, which effectively shut down the Strait of Hormuz, a key

route through which nearly a fifth of the world's oil and gas supplies transit.

In Delhi, petrol prices rose to Rs 97.77 per litre from Rs 94.77, while diesel increased to Rs 90.67 from Rs 89.67 per litre, according to industry sources.

In Mumbai, petrol now costs Rs 106.68 per litre and diesel Rs 93.14. Kolkata saw petrol prices climb to Rs 108.74 and diesel to Rs 95.13 per litre. In Chennai, petrol prices increased to Rs 103.67, while diesel rose to Rs 95.25 per litre.

Fuel rates vary across states depending on value-added tax structures.

This is the first revision since rates were cut by Rs 2 per litre each in March 2024 ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. Before that, prices had remained

frozen since April 2022, when fuel retailers suspended daily revisions after crude prices surged following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Global crude oil prices, which were in the USD 70-72 per barrel range before the West Asia conflict, had surged past USD 120 per barrel at the peak of tensions. Prices have since eased slightly but continue to hover between USD 104 and USD 110 per barrel.

The sustained rise in crude prices sharply widened losses for fuel retailers. Industry sources said oil companies were losing Rs 14 per litre on petrol, Rs 42 per litre on diesel and Rs 674 per LPG cylinder before Friday's hike.

Petrol will now cost Rs 97.77 per litre in Delhi, while diesel has been

hiked to Rs 90.67 per litre.

Earlier this week, Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said state-run retailers were losing nearly Rs 1,000 crore daily, adding that quarterly losses could wipe out the profits earned over an entire year.

He pegged cumulative losses at around Rs 1 lakh crore.

To soften the impact on consumers, the Centre had reduced excise duty on petrol and diesel by Rs 10 per litre each on March 27.

Private retailers, however, had already raised prices. Nayara Energy increased petrol prices by Rs 5 per litre and diesel by Rs 3 in March, while Shell raised petrol prices by Rs 7.41 and diesel by Rs 25 per litre from April 1. In Bengaluru, Shell currently sells petrol at Rs 119.85 per litre and diesel at Rs 123.52.

Domestic LPG prices were also raised by Rs 60 per cylinder in March, though officials said rates remain below actual costs.

Industry sources described Friday's hike as a calibrated move aimed at partially easing pressure on oil companies without causing a major inflationary shock.

However, economists warned that higher fuel prices would have a broader impact on inflation through increased transport, freight and logistics costs.

India's retail inflation, measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), rose to 3.48 per cent in April 2026 from 3.40 per cent in March, while wholesale price inflation touched a 42-month high of 8.3 per cent, driven largely by higher fuel and energy costs.

State-owned Indian Oil Corporation, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited had absorbed heavy losses after suspending daily price revisions in April 2022 to shield consumers from global crude volatility.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently urged citizens to cut fuel consumption and make greater use of public transport and work-from-home options to reduce India's oil import burden and ease pressure on foreign exchange reserves.

INTERNATIONAL

BRICS foreign ministers meet in India as Iran war; oil prices and divisions test the bloc's unity



NEW DELHI

BRICS foreign ministers, including from Iran and Russia, met in New Delhi on Thursday, where India warned of "considerable flux" with conflict driving economic uncertainty and energy insecurity.

War in Iran and the related fuel crisis are dominating discussions in the two-day gathering.

India, which holds the BRICS chair this year, was hosting the foreign ministers from the expanded bloc, which now includes Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates - countries at odds over the conflict launched by the United States and Israel on February 28.

"We meet at a time of considerable flux in international relations," India's Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said, in his opening speech, before closed meetings began.

Among the foreign ministers attending were Iran's Abbas Araghchi and Russia's Sergei Lavrov.

"Ongoing conflicts, economic uncertainties, and challenges in trade, technology, and climate are shaping the global landscape," Jaishankar added.

"There is a growing expectation, particularly from emerging markets and developing countries, that BRICS will play a constructive and stabilising role."

Disruptions around Gulf shipping routes and the Strait of Hormuz continue

to drive volatility in oil and gas markets, increasing pressure on energy-importing economies, including India.

"Development issues remain central," Jaishankar added. "Many countries continue to face challenges on energy, food, fertiliser and health security, as well as access to finance."

The conflict involving Iran has added strain to India's economy, heavily reliant on Middle Eastern energy supplies and fertiliser imports, and has cast uncertainty over New Delhi's growth outlook.

India, the world's third-largest oil buyer, normally sources about half of its crude through the Strait of Hormuz,

a vital waterway that has been repeatedly blocked since war began.

Ship-tracking and import data show that India has partially plugged the gap by turning to old allies, expanding promising ties and reviving suppliers it had not tapped in years.

The biggest backstop has been Russian crude - a fuel source New Delhi spent much of the past year trying to pivot away from under stiff US tariffs.

Jaishankar met with Lavrov on Wednesday evening.

"Our political cooperation is even more valuable in an uncertain and volatile global environment," Jaishankar said in remarks at the meeting, adding that discussions included "trade and investment, energy and connectivity."

BRICS was created in 2009 as a forum for major emerging economies seeking greater influence in institutions dominated by Western powers.

The grouping, originally comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, has since expanded, as members sought to boost the bloc's global political and economic influence. It now includes Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates.

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi was not attending - with US President Donald Trump in Beijing on Thursday.

India will hold a leaders' summit later this year, and the foreign ministers will also meet with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the foreign ministry said.

With deep divisions among some members, including over the Middle East war and criticism of Western powers, it was not clear whether a joint statement would be released at the meeting's end.

"We will let you know as things progress," India's foreign ministry spokesman Randhir Jaiswal told reporters.

World shares mostly gain as investors watch Trump-Xi summit



HONG KONG:

World shares were mostly higher Thursday after Wall Street set more records, as investors closely monitored takeaways from U.S. President Donald Trump's summit with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in Beijing.

Trump met with Xi at the Great Hall of the People and they talked about U.S.-China relations and Taiwan, but analysts did not expect major breakthroughs.

U.S. futures edged higher. In early European trading, Britain's FTSE 100 was up 0.3% to 10,351.36, after the U.K. reported its economy expanded at a faster-than-expected pace at 0.3% for March despite impacts from the war in Iran. France's CAC 40 rose 0.6% to 8,057.64, and Germany's DAX gained 1.4% to 24,462.22.

supported by robust corporate results. South Korea's Kospi closed 1.8% higher at 7,981.41 at a fresh record helped by technology-related stocks on the artificial intelligence boom.

The Shanghai Composite index lost 1.5% to 4,177.92. Hong Kong's Hang Seng flatlined at 26,389.04.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 edged up 0.1% to 8,640.70.

Taiwan's TaieX was up 0.9%, and India's Sensex climbed 1.1%.

Oil prices were mixed, with no clear ending to the Iran war after more than two months. Some were hoping the Trump-Xi meeting could bring results, after U.S. officials said Beijing could use its close economic ties with Tehran to press Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

On Thursday, the White House said Trump and Xi discussed enhancing U.S.-China economic cooperation. Both sides also agreed that the Strait of Hormuz must remain open. Brent crude, the interna-

tional standard, was up 0.2% at \$105.87 per barrel. It was around \$70 a barrel before the war in Iran started late February. That also came after the International Energy Agency said Wednesday that supply losses from the Strait were "depleting global oil inventories at a record pace."

Benchmark U.S. crude was down 0.2% to \$100.86 per barrel.

Investors are also watching for updates on China's imports of Nvidia's advanced H200 chips, after Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang was confirmed to be a part of Trump's China trip alongside other top executives including Tesla's Elon Musk and Apple's Tim Cook. The U.S. business leaders met with Chinese Premier Li Qiang Thursday afternoon.

On Wednesday, technology stocks led Wall Street gains. The benchmark S&P 500 climbed 0.6% to 7,444.25 and reached another all-time high. The Dow Jones Industrial Average edged down 0.1% to 49,693.20, while the technology-heavy Nasdaq composite rose 1.2% to 26,402.34 and set its own record.

In other dealings, the yield on the U.S. 10-year Treasury edged down to 4.46% from 4.47% though still significantly above around 3.97% from before the Iran war began. A report Wednesday showed that U.S. wholesale prices surged in April, fueled by impacts from the Iran war-caused energy shock. On Wednesday, the U.S. Senate also confirmed Kevin Warsh, Trump's nominee, to lead the Federal Reserve. He would be taken over from Jerome Powell, who had been criticized by Trump repeatedly for not cutting rates faster or deeper.

The U.S. dollar rose to 157.91 Japanese yen from 157.86 yen. The euro was trading at \$1.1709, down from \$1.1711.

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The 2026 West Bengal Assembly election will likely be remembered as one of the most consequential political upheavals in post-Independence India. In a dramatic reversal of fortunes, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) captured power in Bengal with a commanding majority of 207 seats in the 294-member Assembly, while the once-dominant All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) was reduced to around 80 seats.

More than a routine change of government, the verdict marked the collapse of a political order that had shaped Bengal for fifteen years under Mamata Banerjee. For a leader who once appeared politically invincible and emotionally inseparable from Bengal's identity, the defeat carried enormous symbolic weight. The loss of Mamata Banerjee herself from Bhabanipur - her political bastion - to Suwendu Adhikari, a former confidant turned principal adversary, underlined the scale of the transformation.

Bengal's political history has long been defined by extended periods of dominance followed by sudden and sweeping upheavals. The Congress once governed the state with near-complete authority in the decades following Independence, guided by leaders such as Bidhan Chandra Roy, whose administrative discipline and developmental vision shaped modern Bengal in the aftermath of Partition. But by the late 1960s, food shortages, labour unrest and political instability weakened Congress dominance, paving the way for coalition experiments and eventually the rise of the Left Front.

The Left Front's victory in 1977 inaugurated one of the world's longest-serving elected communist governments. Under Jyoti Basu and later Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, the Left introduced transformative land reforms through Operation Barga and strengthened Panchayat Raj institutions, creating a durable rural support structure that sustained its rule for over three decades.

Yet longevity eventually became a burden. The same organisational network that once empowered rural communities hardened into an inflexible party machinery. Economic stagnation, industrial decline, rising unemployment and violent controversies surrounding Singur and Nandigram steadily eroded the Left's moral authority. Public resentment against cadre domination and bureaucratic rigidity created the conditions for Mamata Banerjee's dramatic rise in 2011.

When Mamata swept to power with the slogan "Maa, Mati, Manush," she embodied resistance against the arrogance of the Left establishment. To millions, she represented democratic renewal and emotional liberation from a suffocating political order. Her government launched a series of welfare programmes that generated deep goodwill across Bengal, particularly among women, students and poorer rural households.

Schemes such as Kanyashree, Sabuj Sathi and Swasthya Sathi strengthened her image as a populist leader closely connected to ordinary citizens. In both the 2016 and 2021 Assembly elections, she reinforced her dominance while simultaneously emerging as one of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's strongest na-

tional critics.

However, beneath the emotional appeal of "Didi," another political reality was taking shape. Over time, the TMC began attracting the same accusations that had once been directed at the Left Front - local intimidation, cadre control, politicisation of institutions and suppression of dissent.

The rise of the so-called "cut-money culture," allegations of extortion linked to local party leaders, syndicate control over construction activities and accusations of corruption in mining and contracts gradually alienated sections of the electorate. What had initially appeared as a grassroots movement of empowerment increasingly came to resemble an entrenched patronage network.

Corruption scandals proved especially damaging because they undermined the TMC's carefully cultivated pro-poor image. The teacher recruitment scam became a major political flashpoint, deeply angering educated youth who believed merit had been sacrificed for political patronage. Allegations that welfare benefits were being siphoned off through local intermediaries further weakened trust among beneficiaries.

Central investigative agencies, including the Enforcement Directorate and the Central Bureau of Investigation, intensified scrutiny of senior TMC figures through arrests and investigations. Although the ruling party repeatedly described these actions as politically motivated, the allegations resonated with many voters because they aligned with growing public frustration over corruption and lack of accountability.

At the same time, concerns surrounding law and order began to hurt the TMC politically. The Sandeshkhali controversy, involving allegations of land-grabbing and sexual violence against local leaders associated with the ruling party, triggered widespread outrage, particularly among women voters. The rape and murder of a trainee doctor at RG Kar Medical College further intensified public anger and became a rallying point for spontaneous protests that cut across party lines.

For many observers, these developments fractured the emotional bond Mamata Banerjee had built with Bengal's women - a constituency that had long served as one of her strongest electoral pillars.

While the TMC struggled with anti-incumbency and governance fatigue, the BJP steadily evolved from a peripheral force into a formidable political organisation in Bengal. Its growth was neither sudden nor accidental. Beginning from a marginal presence in 2011, the BJP gradually expanded through aggressive grassroots mobilisation, ideological outreach and targeted social engineering.

North Bengal, Janglemahal and border districts emerged as key centres of saffron expansion. Scheduled Castes, especially members of the Matua community, sections of Other Backward Classes and tribal groups increasingly gravitated towards the BJP's promises of recognition, citizenship security and economic development.

Importantly, the BJP's 2026 campaign displayed far greater sophistication than in earlier elections. Rather than relying exclusively on aggressive Hindutva messaging, the party combined nationalism with governance-focused criticism and welfare promises. The concept of a "double-engine government" - political alignment between Delhi and Kolkata - appealed to voters exhausted by prolonged confrontation between the Centre and the state government.

Simultaneously, the BJP effectively amplified concerns relating to infiltration, bor-

der security and demographic change, particularly in districts adjoining Bangladesh. These narratives resonated strongly in several constituencies where identity anxieties had been steadily growing over the years.

Another controversial issue surrounding the election was the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls conducted before polling. Critics and several investigative reports alleged that nearly ninety lakh names were removed from voter lists during the exercise. Questions emerged regarding transparency, the burden imposed on economically weaker citizens to prove eligibility and the disproportionate impact on minorities and migrant populations.

In numerous constituencies, the number of deleted names reportedly exceeded the final margin of victory, fuelling debate over the integrity of the electoral process. Opposition parties accused the Election Commission of enabling voter suppression, while the BJP defended the revision as a necessary exercise to eliminate irregularities.

Nevertheless, attributing the TMC's defeat solely to institutional manipulation would oversimplify the scale of the political shift. Electoral mandates of such magnitude cannot be engineered without substantial public support. The verdict reflected a convergence of anti-incumbency, corruption allegations, organisational fatigue, governance failures and the BJP's successful ability to convert social dissatisfaction into a

statewide political movement.

Bengal's electorate appeared determined to punish a government that, in the eyes of many citizens, had gradually begun replicating the same patterns of domination it once promised to dismantle.

The implications of the 2026 verdict extend far beyond Bengal itself. Historically, Bengal has often resisted broader national political trends and maintained a distinct ideological identity shaped by intellectual culture, regional pride and strong political consciousness. The BJP's breakthrough therefore signals not only a regional transition but also the consolidation of a national political force capable of penetrating even deeply entrenched regional bastions.

For Indian federalism, the result presents both opportunities and anxieties. A politically aligned Centre and state government may improve administrative coordination, investment flows and infrastructure planning. At the same time, growing concerns regarding the expanding influence of central agencies, electoral institutions and security structures raise broader questions about institutional autonomy and the balance of power within India's federal framework.

The election also offers a cautionary lesson for regional parties across the country. Long periods in power often generate complacency unless continuously renewed through accountability, internal democracy and transparent governance. Both the Left Front and the TMC eventually suffered from over-centralisation, local authoritarianism and political insulation from criticism.

Welfare programmes alone cannot indefinitely compensate for declining institutional credibility, lack of meritocracy and perceptions of corruption. Political movements born out of popular resistance often face their greatest challenge when they transform into closed systems sustained primarily through patronage and loyalty networks.

For Assam and the wider Northeast, Bengal's political transition carries particular significance. Across the region, identity politics, welfare populism and charismatic leadership continue to shape electoral outcomes. But Bengal's verdict demonstrates that enduring democratic legitimacy ultimately depends on institutional fairness, transparency and public trust.

Once citizens begin to believe that access to employment, justice or welfare is contingent upon political allegiance rather than equal citizenship, the emotional foundation of political authority begins to erode rapidly.

The 2026 Bengal election may therefore be remembered not simply as the triumph of the BJP, but as another chapter in Bengal's long political tradition of dismantling entrenched power when it ceases to reflect public aspirations.

The Congress once appeared unshakable until it collapsed before the Left Front. The Left, in turn, seemed immovable until Mamata Banerjee overthrew it in 2011. Now the TMC has confronted the same reality: in Bengal, no political order remains permanent.

Whether the BJP can avoid repeating that historical cycle remains the central question for the future of Bengal's democracy. Electoral victories may secure power, but only ethical governance, institutional fairness and public accountability can sustain legitimacy over time.

Bengal's political culture - shaped by intellectual debate, ideological struggle and deep public engagement - has repeatedly shown that while voters may tolerate authority for decades, they rarely forgive arrogance forever.

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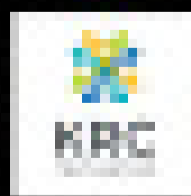


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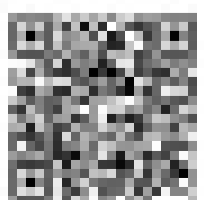


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