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PERSPECTIVE

Sarcasm is the ability to insult stupid people without them realizing it.

Gauhati High Court Defers Hearing on Shyamkanu Mahanta's Bail Plea to May 25



GUWAHATI

The Gauhati High Court on Friday adjourned the hearing on the bail plea of Shyamkanu Mahanta in connection with the Zubeen Garg death case and fixed May 25 as the next date of hearing.

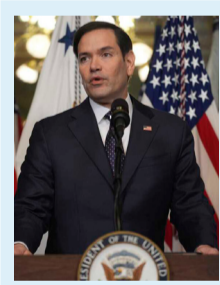
During the proceedings, senior advocate Pran Bora, appearing for Mahanta, argued before the court seeking his release on bail.

Representing the state government, Advocate General Devajit Lon Saikia sought additional time to place the government's response to the bail application.

Following submissions from both sides, the court adjourned the matter till Monday, when the state is expected to present arguments opposing the plea.

The case relates to the alleged death case linked to Assamese singer Zubeen Garg.

WHO SAID WHAT



I don't think anyone is shocked to know that the United States and the President are very disappointed in NATO right now. If NATO countries like Spain are denying us the use of these bases, why are we in NATO? We need to discuss that. ~ Marco Rubio, Secretary of State, US

NEC Allocates Over Rs 1,065 Crore for Development Projects in Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland

ITANAGAR/KOHIMA

The North Eastern Council has allocated more than Rs 1,065 crore for infrastructure and development projects in Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland during the 15th Finance Commission period (2022-26), with a focus on connectivity, tourism, agriculture and rural economic growth.

According to an official communiqué, Arunachal Pradesh received developmental support amounting to Rs 550.02 crore under the Scheme of NEC (SoNEC) and the NESIDS-Roads programme.

Of the total allocation, expenditure under SoNEC during the Finance Commission cycle stood at Rs 205.72 crore. The funds were utilised for infrastructure development, livelihood generation and socio-economic advancement, particularly in remote, border and aspirational districts of the state.

The projects prioritised agriculture and allied sectors through initiatives supporting horticulture, bamboo cultivation, fisheries,

beekeeping, organic farming and value-addition activities aimed at improving rural livelihoods and income generation among tribal communities.

NEC-backed initiatives also strengthened tourism and eco-development by creating tourism infrastructure, viewpoints, riverfront facilities and electrification projects at tourist destinations to enhance Arunachal Pradesh's eco-tourism potential. Under the NESIDS-Roads programme, 10 road projects worth Rs 422.20 crore were sanctioned for Arunachal Pradesh, of which eight projects valued at Rs 162.13 crore have already been completed.

Among the completed works is the BRTF Road to Pidri in West Siang district, which has improved last-mile connectivity to remote tribal areas.

During 2025-26, several key infrastructure projects were sanctioned and completed, including a supermarket-cum-parking complex at Kharsang in Changlang district and

the 16.5-km road from Kodum CO Headquarters to Bam Tri-junction in West Siang district.

Officials said the Kodum-Bam Tri-junction road is expected to improve connectivity for four villages with a combined population of over 1.12 lakh people and reduce travel distance between Itanagar and 10 administrative centres across West Siang, Shi Yomi and Siang districts by nearly 36 km. The NEC also expanded youth outreach and scientific engagement programmes such as the Ashtalakshmi Youth Exchange Programme and NE-SPARKS during 2025-26. Under the initiative, 581 students from institutions across India visited premier educational institutions in the Northeast, including Rajiv Gandhi University.

Meanwhile, Nagaland received Rs 515.04 crore during the same Finance Commission period, with the NEC highlighting the state's strong emphasis on value-chain development and industry-led economic growth.

Opposition Walkout Marks Governor's Address in Assam Assembly



GUWAHATI

The inaugural address of Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya in the 16th Assam Legislative Assembly on Friday was disrupted by protests and a walkout by Opposition parties, even as he laid out the BJP-led NDA government's agenda for its third consecutive term in office.

Minutes after the Governor began his speech on the second day of the Assembly session, legislators of the Indian National Congress and the Rajgor Dal entered the Well of the House, raising slogans over inflation and rising prices. Congress MLAs displayed placards before staging a walkout in protest, accusing the government of failing to address pressing public concerns.

The two Rajgor Dal legislators, led by MLA Akhil Gogoi, initially remained

in the House and continued protesting during the Governor's address. The party members later walked out after submitting a memorandum listing their demands.

In his speech, Governor Acharya said the people of Assam had renewed their faith in the BJP-led NDA government for a third straight term because of its focus on peace, economic stability and inclusive development.

"This mandate reflects the people's endorsement of peace, economic stability and inclusive development pursued over the past ten years," he said, adding that the government's achievements in restoring peace across the state had been "substantial and historic".

The Governor also echoed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal for austerity, urging citizens to exercise restraint in discretionary spending.

Highlighting the government's legislative priorities, Acharya welcomed the proposed introduction of a Uniform Civil Code Bill during the ongoing Assembly session. He said the proposed law would promote social harmony, justice and gender equality while contributing to the creation of a progressive society.

Assam ACS Officer Arrested in Bribery Case; Cash, FDs Worth Over Rs 1.28 Crore Seized



GUWAHATI

The Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption (V&AC), Assam, has seized cash, fixed deposits and financial documents worth over Rs 1.28 crore during searches conducted at the residence of arrested Assam Civil Service officer Lachit Kumar Das in connection with an alleged bribery case.

Das, serving as Additional Director of Land Records at Rupnagar in Guwahati, was arrested on May 21 after vigilance officials allegedly caught him accepting Rs 45,000 as part of a purported Rs 1 lakh bribe

demand for issuing a no-objection certificate (NOC) related to land sale permission.

According to vigilance officials, the complainant approached the anti-corruption agency after refusing to pay the alleged bribe amount demanded by the officer.

Acting on the complaint, the V&AC laid a trap operation at the Directorate of Land Records office in Rupnagar. Officials said Das was caught red-handed inside his office chamber immediately after accepting the money.

The tainted cash was recovered from his possession and seized in the presence of independent witnesses, officials added.

Following the arrest, vigilance teams carried out an overnight search at Das' residence in Rani Bagan near Beltola Tinali in Guwahati. The operation continued till around 1.30 am on May 22.

During the search, officials recovered Rs 48.38 lakh in cash from a locker inside the house. The team also seized fixed deposit certificates worth Rs 80 lakh held in the names of Das and his family members.

In addition, investigators recovered several life insurance and post-life insurance policy documents, details of multiple bank accounts and papers related to landed properties.

Officials said scrutiny and analysis of the seized financial and property-related documents are currently underway as part of the ongoing investigation.

A case has been registered at the Anti-Corruption Branch Police Station under Section 7(a) of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, as amended in 2018.

Grenade, Threat Note Recovered at Vishal Mega Mart in Manipur

IMPHAL

A hand grenade and a warning note allegedly linked to the banned Kangleipak Communist Party (People's War Group) were recovered from a Vishal Mega Mart outlet in Manipur's Thoubal district on Thursday morning, officials said.

According to police, the explosive device was found at the retail store located opposite Thoubal Police Station along National Highway-102.

Security personnel and a bomb disposal squad rushed to the site after receiving information about the suspected explosive. The grenade was later safely defused by bomb disposal experts.

Officials said a warning note recovered from the spot carried the message: "KCP (PWG) Next Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) Blasts." Authorities suspect cadres of the proscribed KCP-PWG outfit may have planted the grenade.

Police have launched an investigation into the incident.

The Vishal Mega Mart outlet was inaugurated on April 30 and has reportedly faced opposition from vendors of Thoubal Keithel, who have been protesting against the operation of the retail chain near the local market area.

Local vendors had allegedly demanded that the store be shifted away from the market locality, citing concerns over its impact on small traders.

Following Thursday's incident, employees of the retail outlet and local residents staged a sit-in protest demanding that the store be allowed to continue functioning.

One employee claimed that the outlet had created employment opportunities for more than 60 educated unemployed youths from Thoubal district.

Kuki-Zo Council Calls for Peace in Manipur, Seeks Immediate Release of Hostages



IMPHAL

The Kuki-Zo Council on Friday issued a public appeal for peace and restraint in violence-hit Manipur, urging all communities, armed groups and authorities to work towards restoring harmony and preventing further escalation of tensions.

In a statement titled "Appeal for Peace", the council said the resolution emerged from a Leaders' Consultative Meeting held at KIC Hall in Tuibuong, Chura-chandpur.

The meeting was attended by tribal leaders, chiefs' associations, church bodies, philanthropic organisations, MLAs and representatives of Suspension of Operations (SoO) groups, according to the statement.

The Kuki-Zo Council said par-

ticipants unanimously resolved to promote peace, understanding and peaceful coexistence at a time when the state required "unity and restraint".

Appealing to community leaders, churches and civil society members, the organisation urged all sections of society to act responsibly to safeguard innocent lives and prevent further deterioration of the situation.

The council also appealed to armed groups and individuals involved in the conflict to respect human life and uphold humanitarian values.

Amid the ongoing hostage crisis in Manipur, the KZC made a strong appeal for the immediate handover of all hostages - "whether alive or dead" - to the concerned authorities and family members without delay. The statement further urged the government and security agencies to function impartially and ensure the safety and security of civilians while working sincerely to restore public trust and normalcy across the state. "At this sensitive and critical juncture, we firmly believe that dialogue, mutual respect, and reconciliation must prevail over violence and confrontation," the statement said.

The organisation added that lasting peace in Manipur could only be achieved through cooperation, understanding and collective responsibility among all communities.

Manipur University Scholar Meets President After Building Kauna Craft Venture into Multi-Crore Enterprise

IMPHAL

Droupadi Murmu hosted Manipur University research scholar Sanju Akoijam at Rashtrapati Bhavan after her Kauna grass handicraft venture grew from a modest Rs 3,000 investment into a business projecting a turnover of nearly Rs 3 crore.

Akoijam, a PhD scholar in the Department of Economics at Manipur University, was the only woman representative from Manipur among a group of artisans and weavers from the Northeast invited for the special interaction on May 19.

The artisans had earlier showcased Kauna grass crafts and other handmade traditional products during the Republic Day "At Home" reception hosted at Rashtrapati Bhavan in January.

During the interaction, President Murmu presented pashmina shawls to the artisans, hosted them for lunch and arranged a guided tour of the presiden-



GUWAHATI

tial estate. Akoijam is the founder of H.I. Store, an Imphal-based online venture dealing in handcrafted Kauna grass products, dried floral arrangements and traditional gift items from the Northeast.

Her entrepreneurial journey re-

ceived a major boost after she secured a Rs 7 lakh grant under the North Eastern Council's NEEDP scheme. The support was facilitated through the North Eastern Handicrafts and Handlooms Development Corporation under the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Re-

GUWAHATI

gion. Following her return, acting Vice-Chancellor Ganga Prasad Prasad felicitated Akoijam at his official chamber, praising her achievement in balancing academic research with entrepreneurship.

Akoijam credited two university mentors for supporting her early journey - economics professor Hanjabam Isworchandra Sharma, who supervised her doctoral research and encouraged sustainable livelihood initiatives, and assistant professor Sorokhaibam Keshorjit Singh, who guided her in presenting her business ideas professionally.

"That initial support proved to be the crucial stepping stone for my career," Akoijam said.

A resident of Singamei Makha Oinam Thingel in Imphal East district, Akoijam's success story has drawn attention for promoting indigenous Kauna craft traditions through modern entrepreneurship.

Akhil Gogoi Says Assam Needs Relief From Inflation, Not Uniform Civil Code

GUWAHATI

Rajgor Dal chief and MLA Akhil Gogoi criticised the BJP-led government's push for a Uniform Civil Code (UCC), saying the priority should instead be addressing rising prices and the economic hardships faced by people in Assam.

Speaking to reporters at the Assam Legislative Assembly during the oath-taking ceremony of newly elected legislators, Gogoi said the state was passing through a difficult phase marked by inflation and financial distress among ordinary citizens.

"This is the most crucial time for the people of Assam. We are facing price rise of essential goods and a major crisis," he said. The Rajgor Dal leader alleged that the government was focusing on the wrong issues by attempting to introduce what he described as a "controversial" Uniform Civil Code Bill.

"I think this is not the right time to table the UCC. This is the time to decide how the people of Assam can get relief from price rise and the ongoing crisis," Gogoi said.

He further stated that Rajgor Dal would strongly raise public concerns inside the Assembly during the new term.

Highlighting the party's increased representation in the House, Gogoi said the regional party now has two MLAs, compared to a single legislator in the previous Assembly.

"Last time I was the only MLA from Rajgor Dal. This time we have two MLAs and we will try our best to provide relief to the people of Assam," he added.

The remarks came amid indications from the BJP-led NDA government that it may introduce legislation related to the Uniform Civil Code during the ongoing Assembly session.



VOLUME:1, ISSUE 780

THE NEET 2026 COLLAPSE

India can launch satellites into space, build digital payment systems admired across the world, and speak proudly of becoming a global superpower. Yet nearly eight decades after Independence, the nation still cannot ensure that the very institutions and administrative systems entrusted with conducting national-level entrance examinations remain secure, transparent, and worthy of the trust of millions of students whose futures depend upon them.

The cancellation of NEET-UG 2026 after allegations of a massive paper leak has once again exposed one of the deepest failures of Indian governance. More than twenty-two lakh students appeared for the examination after years of sacrifice and relentless preparation. Families invested savings, emotions and entire futures into a system that promised merit and fairness. But before many honest students could even enter the examination hall, parts of the paper were allegedly already circulating through criminal networks. That single revelation shattered something far bigger than an examination. It shattered trust.

The Government later acknowledged the breach and ordered a fresh examination. But the question India must ask is this: why does every paper leak become merely an examination controversy and not a full-scale national moral crisis?

For a student from a small town or a modest family, NEET is not simply a test. It is often seen as the only bridge between struggle and opportunity. In India, where medical education is among the most competitive in the world, a single mark can decide an entire future. When such an examination is compromised, the damage goes far beyond administrative failure. It destroys faith in fairness itself. The tragedy becomes even greater because this is not the first such incident. India has witnessed repeated examination leaks over the years.

The 2015 All India Pre-Medical Test was cancelled after a large-scale cheating racket was exposed. The CBSE paper leaks of 2018 forced re-examinations. Recruitment examinations conducted by several state agencies have repeatedly faced similar scandals. The NEET controversy of 2024 had already raised serious concerns regarding irregularities, grace marks and allegations of paper leaks. Even the Supreme Court had then observed that the 'sanctity' of the examination had been affected.

Yet two years later, India once again stands before the same humiliation, the same outrage and the same unanswered questions. This raises an uncomfortable question. How can a country that speaks proudly of becoming a global technological power fail to protect its most important national examinations?

The National Testing Agency, created to conduct transparent and efficient examinations, now finds itself under intense criticism. Doctors' associations and educational bodies have even approached the Supreme Court demanding structural reforms, judicial supervision, and stronger technological safeguards. The Indian Medical Association has also called for action against those responsible and demanded reforms in the examination process.

The government has ordered investigations by the CBI, and arrests have already been made, including individuals allegedly linked to the examination process itself. But investigations after the damage has occurred cannot erase the emotional suffering of students who honestly prepared for the examination.

A student who studies eighteen hours a day cannot compete with organised criminal networks that sell leaked papers for money. That is the real danger. Paper leaks have become organised systems involving middlemen, coaching networks, corrupt officials, digital communication channels, and financial transactions. The examination economy in India has become enormous. Coaching industries worth thousands of crores thrive on fear and competition. Wherever desperation and high stakes exist, corruption finds an entry point.

The psychological impact on students is devastating. Many students preparing for NEET already face intense stress and social pressure. In countless households, success in NEET is treated not merely as academic achievement but as family honour. When examinations are cancelled after completion, students experience emotional exhaustion, anxiety, helplessness, and distrust. Honest students begin to wonder whether hard work still matters in the system. That is perhaps the most painful aspect of this controversy. Once young people stop believing that merit will be rewarded honestly, social frustration begins to grow silently. The criticism against the administration is therefore understandable. India became independent nearly eight decades ago. Generations of governments have spoken about reforms, transparency, and digital governance. Yet millions of students continue to suffer because authorities cannot secure examination papers from leakage and criminal manipulation. This is not a minor procedural failure. It is a failure of responsibility toward the youth of the nation.

Several experts now argue that India must completely redesign the examination system rather than merely reacting after every scandal. One major proposal is shifting NEET permanently to a computer-based testing model. The Government has already indicated that future examinations may move online to improve security. Digital systems reduce physical transportation risks because papers do not travel through long chains involving printing presses, storage facilities, transport vehicles, and examination centres.

Globally, many prestigious examinations already use highly secure digital systems. Standardized tests such as the SAT in the United States, certain international licensing examinations, and computer-based professional certification tests use encrypted question delivery, biometric verification, AI-assisted monitoring, randomized question sequencing, and tightly controlled digital access systems. Such systems are not completely foolproof, but they significantly reduce opportunities for mass paper leaks. The difference lies in accountability and institutional discipline.

India must move in that direction urgently. But technology alone cannot solve everything. The deeper issue is institutional culture. Too often, administrative systems in India respond only after public outrage erupts. Reports suggest that several recommendations made after earlier NEET controversies had still not been fully implemented before the latest scandal occurred. This creates the impression that lessons are never truly learned.

The country now needs a permanent National Examination Security Authority with technological experts, cyber specialists, educational administrators, and independent oversight mechanisms. Examination security cannot remain an occasional concern handled only during crisis moments. It must become a continuous national priority. Stronger legal punishment is also necessary. Individuals involved in paper leaks are not merely committing fraud. They are damaging the futures of millions. Such crimes should be treated as attacks on public trust and educational integrity.

At the same time, India must reduce the unhealthy overdependence on single high-stakes examinations. When one examination determines the destiny of millions, the pressure becomes unbearable. Diversified admission systems, stronger school education evaluation, regional academic balance, and multiple assessment opportunities can reduce this dangerous concentration of pressure. The present NEET controversy should therefore become a turning point. A country where merit survives only for the wealthy and connected cannot claim moral greatness. The son of a farmer, the daughter of a labourer, or the student from a remote village must feel confident that honesty still has value in India. The heartbreak visible across the country today is not only because an examination was cancelled. It is because millions of young Indians feel betrayed by the very system that asked them to trust it.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The only way to discover the limits of the possible is to go beyond them into the impossible. - Arthur C Clarke

PEZESHKIAN'S DEFIANT DIPLOMACY: IRAN BALANCES RESISTANCE, REGIONAL OUTREACH AND GLOBAL PRESSURE



ASAD MIRZA

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian has sharpened Tehran's diplomatic messaging amid escalating tensions in the Strait of Hormuz and mounting pressure from the United States. Rejecting what he describes as "colonialism and exploitation", Pezeshkian has simultaneously projected defiance toward Washington and expanded outreach to regional neighbours, especially Iraq, signalling Iran's attempt to combine resistance with strategic diplomacy.

The latest statements from Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian come at a critical juncture for West Asia. The Strait of Hormuz, through which nearly a fifth of global oil supplies pass, has once again emerged as the epicentre of geopolitical confrontation. Military incidents involving Iranian and American naval forces, rising oil prices, and stalled negotiations over sanctions and regional security have intensified fears of a broader conflict.

Against this volatile backdrop, Pezeshkian has adopted a dual-track approach: strong rhetoric against Western pressure combined with renewed emphasis on regional cooperation and diplomacy. His recent speeches and social media messages reflect Tehran's broader effort to position itself as both a defender of sovereignty and a champion of regional stability.

In a strongly worded statement shared on social media, Pezeshkian declared that Iran's foreign policy is based on "mutual respect and shared interests" and that "colonialism and exploitation will have no place in the future world". His remarks came amid renewed tensions with the United States over maritime security in the Gulf and allegations of attacks on Iranian-linked shipping.

The Iranian president's comments were widely interpreted as a response to mounting American pressure in the Gulf region. Reports indicate that US naval forces have intensified operations around the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman, including actions against Iranian oil tankers accused of violating maritime restrictions.

At the same time, Pezeshkian has categorically rejected calls for Iranian "surrender" reportedly linked to statements by US President Donald Trump. In remarks carried by several international media outlets, the Iranian leader insisted that Tehran would "not bow our heads" to foreign pressure. The language echoed the longstanding Iranian political narrative of resistance against foreign domination; a theme deeply embedded in the Islamic Republic's ideological framework since the 1979 revolution.

However, unlike some of his hardline predecessors, Pezeshkian appears keen to pair resistance rhetoric with diplomatic engagement. Over recent weeks, Tehran has intensified consultations with neighbouring countries, particularly Iraq, which remains one of Iran's most important regional partners.

During conversations with Iraqi leaders, Pezeshkian described Iraq not merely as a neighbour but as a "brother," underlining the strategic depth of bilateral ties. He emphasised Iran's readiness to expand cooperation in economic, political and security fields and called for dia-

logue-driven solutions to regional crises.

The emphasis on Iraq is strategically significant. Baghdad occupies a delicate position between Tehran and Washington and has repeatedly sought to mediate regional tensions. Iran views stable relations with Iraq as essential not only for trade and energy cooperation but also for maintaining its influence across the wider region.

Iranian media reports indicate that Tehran and Baghdad are considering new mechanisms for broader economic and infrastructural cooperation, including joint expert teams in multiple sectors. Such initiatives reflect Iran's attempt to offset the impact of sanctions and external pressure through deeper regional integration.

Pezeshkian has also reportedly engaged with European leaders, including French officials, regarding regional peace and de-escalation efforts. These contacts demonstrate Tehran's continuing interest in diplomatic channels despite the sharp deterioration in relations with Washington.

The broader geopolitical context is equally important. The ongoing confrontation in the Strait of Hormuz has evolved into a test of endurance for both Tehran and Washington. Analysts suggest that neither side can sustain prolonged escalation indefinitely without serious economic and strategic costs. The disruption of maritime trade routes has already triggered volatility in global energy markets, while military incidents risk accidental escalation.

Iran continues to rely on the Strait of Hormuz as a key strategic lever. The waterway remains one of the few geopolitical tools through which Tehran can exert direct influence over global energy flows. This explains why Iranian political and military leaders consistently frame Hormuz not merely as a regional issue but as a symbol of national sovereignty and resistance.

At the same time, Tehran is aware of the economic strain caused by prolonged confrontation. Sanctions, shipping dis-

ruptions and military expenditures have placed significant pressure on Iran's economy. Pezeshkian's diplomatic outreach can therefore also be viewed as an effort to prevent complete regional isolation while maintaining a posture of strategic defiance.

China and Russia continue to play an important role in this equation. Chinese commentary and state-linked analyses have increasingly criticised American military pressure in the Gulf and emphasised the need for dialogue and multipolar cooperation. Beijing's economic ties with Tehran, especially in the energy sector, provide Iran with a critical diplomatic and economic cushion amid Western sanctions.

For Iran, the narrative of anti-colonial resistance remains central to its foreign policy messaging. Pezeshkian's repeated references to "colonialism" are aimed not only at domestic audiences but also at countries across Asia, Africa and Latin America that are receptive to anti-Western rhetoric. By framing its confrontation with the United States as part of a larger struggle against domination, Tehran seeks to build broader international sympathy.

Yet Iran also faces growing internal and external challenges. Questions remain over the country's economic resilience, domestic political unity and the balance of power between civilian institutions and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Analysts note that while Pezeshkian projects a conciliatory diplomatic image, strategic decisions regarding Hormuz and military policy remain heavily influenced by Iran's security establishment.

The coming weeks are likely to prove crucial. Diplomatic mediation efforts involving regional states such as Qatar, Pakistan and Iraq continue, while indirect contacts between Tehran and Washington remain possible despite the hostile rhetoric.

For now, Pezeshkian appears determined to project both resilience and pragmatism. His messaging suggests

that Iran will resist external pressure while continuing to seek regional partnerships and diplomatic engagement. Whether this balancing act can prevent further escalation in the Strait of Hormuz remains uncertain.

What is clear, however, is that Iran under Pezeshkian is attempting to redefine its diplomatic posture – not by abandoning its traditional rhetoric of resistance, but by combining it with a more active regional outreach strategy. In an increasingly polarised West Asian landscape, that approach may become Tehran's most important political tool.

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

I welcome the adoption of the General Assembly resolution on the @CIJ_ICJ 's advisory opinion on climate change – a powerful affirmation of international law, climate justice, science & the responsibility of states to protect people from the escalating climate crisis.

Those least responsible for climate change are paying the highest price.

That injustice must end. ~ Antonio Guterres, Secretary General, United Nations



Tripura Urges Centre to Fast-Track Repair of Vulnerable India-Bangladesh Border Fencing



AGARTALA

Manik Saha said the Tripura government has urged the Centre to expedite the repair and modernisation of vulnerable stretches along the India-Bangladesh border amid concerns over infiltration, smuggling and cross-border crimes. Speaking to reporters after the passing-out parade of recruit constables at the KTD Singh Police Training Academy in Narsingharh, the Chief Minister said the issue of damaged and incomplete border fencing was raised during the recent plenary meeting of the North Eastern Council.

Saha said the state government had already submitted reports and photographs to the Centre highlighting vulnerable stretches where fencing has deteriorated due to erosion, difficult terrain and water bodies. In some locations, border infrastructure was also

allegedly damaged by miscreants, he added. According to the Chief Minister, a central team is expected to visit the state soon to assess the situation on the ground. He said Tripura follows a three-tier security arrangement along the international border, with the Border Security Force, Tripura State Rifles and the state police jointly coordinating border security operations. Referring to the narcotics trade, Saha said drugs originating from Myanmar pass through neighbouring northeastern states before entering Bangladesh via Tripura, turning the state into a transit corridor.

"Unless the borders are fully secured, the drug problem will continue," he said.

The Chief Minister also announced that the state government plans to establish eight de-addiction centres and has secured financial assistance from

the Ministry for Development of North Eastern Region for setting up a rehabilitation facility.

On law and order, Saha said police respond promptly to incidents of political violence and added that party workers have been instructed not to engage in such activities.

The remarks came shortly after 476 constables, including 318 women, completed their training and joined the Tripura Police. Another batch of recruits is currently undergoing training at the TSR centre in R K Nagar.

Highlighting the increasing participation of women in policing, Saha said the higher number of women recruits reflected the government's emphasis on enhancing female representation in the force.

He further said newly recruited personnel are being trained in modern

policing methods and technology-driven systems. The Chief Minister also announced that Tripura will organise a public exhibition in September showcasing the implementation of the new criminal laws, including the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam. Claiming that Tripura ranks among the leading states in implementing the new legal framework, Saha also launched the "Track Me" feature linked to the emergency response service 112. The feature allows women and elderly persons travelling alone to share their real-time location with police control rooms and nearby police stations through a mobile application during emergencies.

He further announced that two India Reserve battalions would be raised in the state.

Tripura Achieves Record Low Infant Mortality Rate, Surpasses National Average

AGARTALA

Tripura has recorded its lowest-ever Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), performing significantly better than the national average, according to the latest Sample Registration System (SRS) Bulletin released in May 2026 by the Registrar General of India.

Data released by the state Health Department showed that Tripura's IMR declined to 12 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2024, well below the national average of 24.

Among neighbouring northeastern states, Assam recorded an IMR of 29, while Meghalaya stood at 31 and Arunachal Pradesh at 17.

Officials described the achievement as the best performance in the state's history. The previous SRS Bulletin, published in September 2025, had placed Tripura's IMR at 15 for the year 2023, indicating a further improvement in maternal and child healthcare outcomes.

The report also reflected positive trends across other demographic indicators in the state. Tripura's birth rate was recorded at 15 per 1,000 population, lower than the national average of 18.3, while the death rate stood at 5.9 against the national average of 6.4.

Similarly, the state's natural growth rate was reported at 9.1 compared to the national figure of 11.9.

According to the Tripura Health and Family Welfare Department, the improvement was driven by expanded healthcare access, stronger maternal and child healthcare services, institutional deliveries, intensified immunisation campaigns, nutrition support initiatives and community-based healthcare interventions.

Chief Minister Manik Saha attributed the achievement to sustained efforts to strengthen healthcare infrastructure and improve neonatal and maternal care services across the state.

Former JD(U) Spokesperson Nimaichand Luwang Joins BJP in Manipur



IMPHAL

Former Janata Dal (United) spokesperson and senior politician Nimaichand Luwang formally joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) during an induction programme held at the party headquarters in Manipur on Thursday.

Luwang was welcomed into the party in the presence of Yumnam Khemchand Singh and Manipur BJP president A. Sarla Devi.

Speaking to reporters after

joining the party, Luwang said five members of his family had also joined the BJP alongside him.

He stated that his decision was motivated not by personal interest, but by a desire to contribute towards peace, stability and development in Manipur.

In a message shared on social media, Chief Minister Khemchand Singh welcomed former minister Dr Nimaichand Luwang and Gokul Luwang into the BJP fold.

The Chief Minister said the induction reflected growing public confidence in the party's agenda of development, governance and progress.

The programme was also attended by Manipur Home Minister K. Govindas along with several senior BJP leaders.

Khemchand Singh further reiterated the party's commitment towards serving the people and working for the overall growth and prosperity of the state.

Meghalaya Emerges Among India's Fastest-Growing State Economies

GUWAHATI

Meghalaya has emerged as one of India's fastest-growing state economies over the past five years, according to a report released by wealth management firm Client Associates, highlighting a broader shift in economic growth beyond the country's traditional industrial hubs.

The report stated that Meghalaya recorded a five-year nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP) compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 15.3 per cent, placing it above the national average and among the stronger-performing states in the country.

Although the state continues to operate from a relatively small economic base, the study noted that its pace of growth remains significant. India's overall nominal GDP growth during the period up to FY25 averaged 14.78 per cent.

The report also observed that Manipur registered more



than 15.04 per cent nominal GDP growth over the same five-year period despite ongoing ethnic unrest and instability in the state.

Economic analysts cited in the study said Meghalaya, once regarded as economically underdeveloped, has seen a sharp rise in capital inflows, with investments reportedly increasing fourfold since 2018.

The report credited part of the state's economic momentum to the expansion of its startup ecosystem under the government's PRIME (Promotion and Incubation of Market-driven Enterprises) initiative, which has support-

ed hundreds of entrepreneurs and contributed to large-scale employment generation.

Growth in the information technology sector was also highlighted, with the Shillong Technology Park now fully operational and attracting interest from major companies, creating new employment opportunities in the state.

Tourism and infrastructure development have further contributed to Meghalaya's economic expansion, with the state government aiming to attract 20 lakh tourists annually by 2028.

Among the larger northeastern economies, Assam recorded the highest growth, posting a five-year nominal GDP CAGR of 17.3 per cent, according to the report.

The study attributed Assam's performance to improved connectivity infrastructure, including

investment climate.

While economically dominant states such as Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat continue to account for nearly 48 per cent of India's GDP, the report noted that smaller and mid-sized states are increasingly growing at a faster pace.

The analysis suggested that nominal GDP trends over the last five years indicate a more balanced pattern of regional development across the country.

Uttar Pradesh also recorded a 15.3 per cent CAGR during the period, a performance the report described as significant given the scale of the state's economy.

The growth in Uttar Pradesh was linked to governance and infrastructure reforms, including the NIVESH MITRA single-window clearance system, digitisation of land records, and investments in logistics and defence manufacturing infrastructure.

Dilapidated Silchar-Assam University Road Sparks Outcry, MP Promises Intervention

SILCHAR

The badly damaged road connecting Silchar town with Assam University has emerged as a major source of concern for commuters, with students, faculty members and local residents expressing frustration over the deteriorating condition of the crucial stretch.

The worst-affected portion lies around Silcoorie, particularly between the Silcoorie Post Office and Silcoorie Camp, where deep potholes, broken surfaces and waterlogged ditches have severely disrupted daily movement. Recent rainfall has further aggravated the situation, exposing the fragile condition of the road and making commuting increasingly hazardous.

"Thousands of people use this road every day. Students, faculty members, researchers and guests visiting the university for seminars



and academic programmes all depend on this route. Its present condition reflects poorly on a premier educational institution," a student said.

Local residents alleged that the road continues to collapse during every monsoon season due to inadequate drainage planning and the absence of long-term infrastructure measures. According to sources, several damaged stretches spanning nearly 100 metres at multiple locations have already been identified during departmental inspections.

Officials familiar with the matter

said persistent drainage problems remain one of the primary causes behind the recurring deterioration. Water accumulation and blocked drainage outlets reportedly obstruct the smooth flow of rainwater, causing potholes to deepen rapidly after every spell of rain. Amid mounting public concern, a delegation of academicians from Assam University recently met Silchar MP Parimal Suklabaidya seeking urgent intervention.

Responding to the issue, Suklabaidya said he had already held discussions with the Executive Engineer of the PWRD Borkhola and Katigorah Territorial Road Division in the presence of university representatives.

"I am aware of the situation and have instructed the Executive Engineer to initiate immediate measures to restore the road and make it motorable. Engineers have

been asked to assess the damage and begin repair work to minimise inconvenience to commuters. If required, financial support from the MP LAD fund will also be provided to ensure smooth travel for students and faculty members," the MP said. Sources further informed that a Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the proposed upgradation of nearly 14 kilometres of the road has already been prepared and submitted to the government. The proposed project reportedly includes double-lane expansion, improved drainage systems, utility shifting and construction of concrete pavements in vulnerable stretches, especially around Silcoorie where waterlogging has become a recurring problem.

Executive Engineer Kallol Nath said temporary restoration work is expected to begin within the next few days to provide immediate relief to commuters.

Assam Tea Powers India's Export Growth as Shipments Jump 93% to Rs 8,719 Crore



GUWAHATI

India's tea exports have registered a sharp rise of 93 per cent over the past decade, with Assam tea playing a major role in driving the country's growing presence in global markets.

According to Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, India's tea exports climbed to Rs 8,719 crore in FY 2025-26 from Rs 4,509 crore in 2013-14.

Marking International Tea Day on May 21, the minister highlighted the expanding global demand for Indian tea and emphasised the importance of the country's diverse tea-producing regions.

"Tea is an emotion. Across India, tea is more than just a beverage - it is a part of everyday life, conversations and traditions," Goyal said in a post on social media platform X.

He noted that India's tea varieties continue to gain international recognition because of their distinct regional identities, flavours, aroma and heritage.

Among India's most celebrated varieties, Assam tea remains glob-

ally known for its strong, full-bodied and malty flavour profile, while Darjeeling tea continues to enjoy popularity for its delicate muscatel taste and unique aroma.

The minister said improved quality standards and sustained promotional initiatives by the Tea Board India have contributed significantly to the rise in exports.

Alongside traditional tea-growing hubs such as Assam, Darjeeling and the Nilgiris, tea cultivation has also expanded across several northeastern states, including Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Nagaland.

Officials said the steady growth in exports reflects increasing global appreciation for Indian tea, particularly premium orthodox and specialty varieties produced in Assam and other northeastern regions.

India continues to strengthen its position in international tea markets through region-specific branding, quality enhancement measures and growing worldwide demand for its heritage tea varieties, the minister added.

Nagaland University Professor Joins National Workshop on Climate-Resilient Panchayat Planning

KOHIMA

Nagaland University was represented at a national workshop on climate-resilient rural governance by Prof. Jayanta Choudhury, who participated as an expert delegate at a two-day validation programme held in Hyderabad.

The workshop on "Training Module for Climate Resilient and Carbon Neutral Planning for Gram Panchayats" was organised by the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR) from May 18 to 19 under its School of Excellence in Panchayati Raj (SoEPR).

The programme aimed to review, strengthen and validate a comprehensive training framework intended to help Gram Panchayats across the country adopt climate-resilient and carbon-neutral development practices.

Prof. Choudhury participated alongside researchers, policymakers and subject experts from various institu-



tions, examining thematic modules related to environmental awareness, climate change, carbon neutrality, climate resilience and sustainable rural governance.

Discussions during the workshop focused on practical strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at the Gram Panchayat level, assess climate vulnerabilities and improve adaptation

planning through community participation. The sessions also covered monitoring and evaluation frameworks for climate-resilient governance practices, preparation of climate action plans, case studies and discussions on government schemes linked to local self-governance institutions.

According to organisers, the training module has been commissioned by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and is expected to be implemented nationwide after final approval.

Participants noted that the initiative is intended to strengthen the institutional capacity of Gram Panchayats to integrate climate action into local development planning and governance mechanisms.

Experts at the workshop stressed that empowering rural local bodies with climate-responsive planning tools would play a crucial role in building resilient communities, advancing sustainable development goals and supporting India's long-term climate commitments.

The workshop concluded with thematic recommendations and discussions on a future roadmap for collaborative action to promote climate-resilient rural governance across the country.

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Heat wave empties roads and markets in north India as some farmers turn to nighttime work



NEW DELHI

Roads and markets have emptied during afternoons and some farmers have switched to nighttime work to avoid scorching temperatures as a heat wave grips large parts of India.

The India Meteorological Department forecast maximum temperatures Thursday of around 45 degrees Celsius (113 Fahrenheit) in the capital, New Delhi, where authorities have opened temporary "cooling zones" to help people cope.

The weather department warned conditions will likely persist across several northern regions in the coming days, with temperatures staying well above seasonal averages. Authorities urged people to stay indoors during the hottest hours and take precautions against heat-related illnesses.

India declares a heat wave whenever temperatures are above 40 C (104 F) in the plains and 30 C (86 F) or more in its hilly regions.

The extreme heat has disrupted daily life across several northern states.

In some parts of Uttar Pradesh state, India's most populous, roads and markets have closed in the afternoons as people stayed indoors while some traders shifted work to early mornings. Farmers began working at night because daytime conditions became unbearable.

The heat also disrupted schools, with authorities in several areas announcing early summer vacations and suspending classes as the maximum temperature shot up to 48.2 C (118.8 F) on Tuesday in the city of Banda.

Health authorities urged people to avoid going outdoors during peak afternoon hours, stay hydrated and seek medical help if they experience symptoms such as dizziness or high fever.

In New Delhi, residents and tourists sought relief from the heat inside cooling shelters set

up across the capital. The shaded space provides air coolers, fans, drinking water and oral rehydration solutions to help people deal with the extreme heat.

Inside one tent on Wednesday, people rested beside air coolers as officials distributed cups of water mixed with rehydration salts. "We had come here for outing. But it is too hot here. The cooling system here is good for us," said Basharat Ahmad Malla, a 25-year-old tourist.

Climate experts say India's rising temperatures are part of a broader global pattern linked to climate change.

India has faced more frequent and intense heat waves in recent years, with all of its warmest years on record occurring in the last decade.

"India has warmed considerably as a result of anthropogenic (human-made) climate change in the last decade compared to previous years. North western India has warmed much faster than many other parts of the country," said Anjal Prakash, author of several United Nations climate reports and professor of public policy at Pune-based Flame University.

Prakash said India is accustomed to summer heat but "climate change is loading the dice towards extreme and pervasive episodes like those we see now."

Studies by public health experts found that up to 1,116 people have died every year between 2008 and 2019 due to heat. Public health experts say the true number of heat-related deaths is likely in the thousands, but because heat is often not listed on death certificates, many deaths are not counted in official figures.

KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari said that Bangladeshi infiltrators detained in the state would be handed over directly to the Border Security Force (BSF) for deportation instead of being produced before courts. He said the move followed a new rule that came into effect in the state a day earlier.

Speaking to reporters after an meeting at the Howrah district magistrate's office, Adhikari said instructions had already been issued to the police commissioner and the Railway Protection Force (RPF).

"Since yesterday, the new rule has come into effect under which infiltrators will not be sent to courts but handed over to BSF outposts at the Bangladesh border," he said.

Adhikari on Wednesday announced a mechanism under which alleged infiltrators detained by the state police would be handed over directly to the BSF for deportation, as part of what he described as a wider "detect, delete and deport" framework.

Although the chief minister did not specify the law under which the newly elected BJP government introduced the policy shift, he appeared to be referring to the Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025, passed by Parliament in April last year.

The Act aims to provide a modern, tech-driven system for immigration, registration, surveillance, detention, and deportation in India.

"The police commissioner and the RPF have been clearly instructed that if illegal migrants from Bangladesh, who are not entitled to apply for citizenship under the CAA, are detained at the Howrah Station, they should not be sent to a court. The persons concerned should be properly fed and then taken directly to the BSF personnel at the Petrapole border in Bongaon or the border outpost in Basirhat in North 24 Parganas district," he said.

Adhikari also said that a weekly report on the number of such detainees would have to be submitted to the Chief Minister's Office through the DGP.

Send Bangladeshi infiltrators to BSF, not courts: Suwendu tells Bengal police



During the meeting, the chief minister reviewed civic infrastructure and development-related issues concerning Howrah city on the western bank of the Hooghly River, adjacent to Kolkata.

Adhikari said he was hopeful about completing the delimitation exercise of wards under the civic bodies of Howrah and adjacent Bally by December this year, where municipal elections have long remained pending, and initiating the process of forming elected boards at both urban local bodies.

"As part of the long-term planning for development of Howrah municipal area, we have decided to complete the delimitation exercise by the end of this year and then hand over the city's responsibility to its elected civic board," the CM said.

For the short term spanning over the next three months, Adhikari said the administration would focus on priority areas of supply of clean and filtered

drinking water, garbage clean up, drainage system repair and upgrading other civic amenities like parks, healthcare facilities and educational institutions.

He said a coordination committee had been constituted under the district magistrate with officials of the railways and civic body as members to plan and execute their respective responsibilities for improving civic infrastructure.

The committee's activities would be monitored by Municipal Affairs Secretary Khalil Ahmed, he added.

"We have sought a fact-finding report on illegal constructions in Howrah and will launch an investigation into alleged corruption indulged in by a section of builders. The administration will build alternative water bodies to those which have been filled up," Adhikari said.

The CM referred to the state-appointed commission against institutional corruption, chaired by retired Calcutta

High Court judge Justice Biswajit Basu, and which has for its member secretary senior IPS officer K Jayaraman.

The panel is tasked with investigating allegations of graft, including "cut money" scams, and is scheduled to officially begin functioning on June 1.

"The commission will act quickly. It will collect evidence and conduct public hearings based on which FIRs will be lodged, arrests will be made, and subsequent punishments will follow," he said, adding that the swindled public money will be recovered from the guilty.

Adhikari said he instructed the Howrah city police to lodge fresh FIRs and take appropriate action with respect to incidents of political violence and other law and order issues, especially crimes committed against women.

The chief minister was accorded a guard of honour at the Howrah district magistrate's office before he chaired the administrative meeting.

INTERNATIONAL

Democrats are hoping for a breakthrough as the House takes another Iran war vote

WASHINGTON

The House is expected to vote on legislation Thursday to compel President Donald Trump to withdraw from the war with Iran, a significant test of lawmakers' willingness to go along with a conflict the president launched over two months ago without congressional approval.

The vote is the latest effort by Democrats to rein in Trump's military campaigns by using the War Powers Resolution of 1973. Previous votes on similar resolutions have failed, but Democrats are hoping that Thursday could be a turning point.

One by one, a small but potentially crucial number of Republicans have sided with Democrats to check Trump's power to continue the conflict. On Tuesday, the Senate advanced another war powers resolution on the Iran war when four GOP senators supported the resolution and three others were absent from the vote.

A final vote on the Senate resolution could also come Thursday, though Republican leaders expect they'll be able to block it once every GOP senator is present.

On Capitol Hill, patience with the war has grown thin as the stalemate in the Strait of Hormuz disrupts global shipping and elevates gas prices in the US. Another House war powers resolution nearly passed last week, falling on a tie vote as three Republicans voted in favor.

Democratic Rep. Gregory Meeks of New York, who sponsored the war powers resolution, has said he expects to have the votes this time around.

"Congress has a constitutional duty. It has a duty to act, not to cheerlead, especially not to cheerlead an open-ended war of choice," Meeks said.



The lone Democrat who voted against the war powers resolution last week, Rep. Jared Golden of Maine, has said he will vote in favor of the legislation this time. Meanwhile, leaders of both parties have been dealing with several absences that could shift the vote either way in the closely divided chamber.

Republicans have been broadly supportive of Trump's efforts to destroy Iran's nuclear capabilities, but some are now saying that the president's legal timeline to wage a war without congressional approval has expired. Under the War Powers Resolution of 1973, presidents have 60 days to engage in a military conflict before Congress must either declare war or authorize the use of military force.

"We have to follow the law," said Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick, a Pennsylvania Republican shortly after he voted for an Iran war powers resolution for the first

time last week.

The White House argues that the requirements of the War Powers Resolution no longer apply because of the ceasefire with Iran. At the same time, Trump has said he was just an hour away from ordering another strike on Iran earlier this week, but held off because Gulf allies said they were engaged in negotiations to end the war.

Still, Trump said on social media that military leaders should "be prepared to go forward with a full, large scale assault on Iran, on a moment's notice, in the event that an acceptable Deal is not reached." Trump has repeatedly set deadlines for Tehran and then backed off.

Sen. Thom Tillis, a Republican who has so far voted against the war powers resolutions, expressed frustration with the Trump administration's stance, especially from Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth.

"The current status quo, Pete Hegseth demonstrates how incompetent he is," Tillis told reporters, adding that he would be willing to vote for an authorization for use of military force.

Meanwhile, Democratic senators rallied outside the Capitol Wednesday alongside VoteVets, a left-leaning veterans' advocacy group. They placed signs on the Capitol lawn noting that the nationwide average price of gasoline had risen to \$4.53.

Sen. Tammy Duckworth, an Illinois Democrat who served in the Iraq War with the Air National Guard, argued that the Iran war has amounted to a strategic blunder for Trump.

"Trump started a war, and he's made things worse than before," Duckworth said, pointing to Iran's new leadership and the country's willingness to put a chokehold on commercial shipping through the Strait of Hormuz.

Republican leaders praised Trump for taking what they said was bold action to directly confront Iran, a nation that has been a US adversary for decades.

"I'm an American. I don't believe in getting hit and walking away and pretending as though it didn't happen," said Rep. Brian Mast, the Republican chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

For Congress, the growing momentum to pass a war powers resolution could eventually lead to a legal showdown over who has the final authority over military conflicts.

The legislation before the House Thursday is a concurrent resolution that lawmakers say would take effect without Trump's signature if it passes both chambers of Congress.

But Trump has also argued that the 1973 law — passed by Congress during the Vietnam War era in an attempt to take back its power over foreign conflicts — is unconstitutional.

Tense Trump-Netanyahu call signals split over next move on Iran: reports



WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reportedly had a tense phone conversation over the future of the conflict with Iran, amid indications that Washington favours a negotiated settlement over renewed military action.

According to US media reports, including Axios, the two leaders spoke on Tuesday against the backdrop of ongoing diplomatic efforts led by regional mediators to prevent a resumption of hostilities.

Netanyahu is said to have pressed for renewed strikes aimed at further weakening Iran's military capabilities and damaging key infrastructure.

President Trump, however, has continued to express optimism about the prospects of a deal with Tehran. He had earlier said planned strikes on Iran, reportedly scheduled for Tuesday, were post-

poned following appeals from regional countries, including Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

Axios reported that mediators, including Qatar and Pakistan, had revised a peace proposal in an effort to bridge differences between Washington and Tehran. Iran has acknowledged reviewing an updated proposal, though there has been little indication of a shift in its negotiating position. Speaking at the US Coast Guard Academy on Wednesday, Trump said a resolution remained uncertain. "The only question is, do we go and finish it up, or are they going to be signing a document. Let's see what happens," he said.

Later, speaking to reporters in Washington, Trump said the US and Iran were "right on the borderline" between reaching an agreement and returning to conflict.

He warned that military action could resume swiftly if

negotiations failed to produce what he described as "100 per cent good answers".

Reports also suggested growing frustration within sections of the Israeli establishment over what officials view as Iran's delaying tactics and Washington's continued emphasis on diplomacy. CNN, citing an Israeli source, said there remained strong support within the Israeli government for renewed military action. According to Axios, Trump informed Netanyahu that mediators were working on a "letter of intent" that could formally end the conflict and initiate a 30-day negotiation period focused on Iran's nuclear programme and maritime security, including the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran's Foreign Ministry said negotiations were continuing on the basis of Tehran's "14-point proposal", while Pakistan's Interior Minister was in Tehran as part of mediation efforts.

India's Energy Future: Import Substitution and Renewable Energy



India's energy future remains challenging as fuel prices continue to stay high and concerns over availability persist. If crude oil prices remain around \$95-\$100 per barrel - significantly above last year's average of \$70 per barrel - the impact on the Indian economy could exceed \$40 billion, or more than 1.5% of GDP. At the current pace, the government's \$1 trillion economic stabilisation fund may not last beyond three months.

Against this backdrop, it is encouraging that India's crude oil storage capacity is likely to expand substantially. Reserves may increase by nearly 70%, from around 3.3 million tonnes to nearly 30 million barrels, after the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company agreed to enhance crude oil storage in India. Expanding reserves to 30 million barrels would increase India's total strategic crude reserves by more than four million tonnes. The agreement between the Abu Dhabi-based energy giant and Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited comes at a time when geopolitical tensions in West Asia continue to threaten India's energy supplies.

India also enjoys a refining advantage. At a time when refining margins have surged due to disruptions in global crude supply and refining capacity, Indian refiners remain capable of purchasing crude and supplying refined products domestically. In the fertiliser sector, however, the worst-hit are likely to be farmers in countries where governments do not provide subsidies similar to those in India.

In this context, Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari recently warned that vehicles running solely on petrol and diesel have no future. He cited growing concerns over air pollution and India's increasing dependence on imported fossil fuels.

Amid the wider debate over whether alternative fuels can become major contributors to the automobile supply chain, Gadkari urged original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) to seriously consider shifting from fossil fuels to cleaner alternatives.

"If you continue moving only in that direction, then as a friend I can say your future is not bright," Gadkari said at the Busworld India 2026 summit. He appealed to manufacturers and fleet operators to rapidly adopt cleaner fuels such as hydrogen, ethanol, CNG, LNG and electricity-powered vehicles.

"We import fossil fuels worth ₹22 lakh crore. This is not only an economic challenge but also a major pollution problem. Our policy is import substitution - affordable, pollution-free and indigenous," Gadkari said.

He also described hydrogen as the "fuel of the future" and noted that pilot projects involving hydrogen-powered trucks and buses have already been launched in collaboration with companies such as Tata Motors, Volvo, Indian Oil, BPCL and NTPC on 10 routes across India.



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At the same time, the minister highlighted ethanol as another important alternative fuel. India is now producing

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ethanol from broken rice, maize, bamboo, rice husk, sugarcane and molasses.

These remarks come as the Centre intensifies efforts to reduce dependence on imported petroleum. Meanwhile, ratings agency ICRA has projected electricity demand growth of 5%-5.5% in the current financial year, compared to just 1% growth in 2025-26 despite steady industrial and commercial activity.

According to ICRA, electricity demand growth this year is likely to be supported by agriculture and domestic consumption due to expectations of below-normal rainfall linked to possible El Niño conditions. Demand is also expected to rise from emerging sectors such as electric vehicles and data centres.

It is therefore encouraging that India's renewable energy capacity has expanded rapidly over the past five years, with several states accelerating installation of clean energy projects to meet rising targets. In the current geopolitical environment, where imported oil and gas continue to strain economies worldwide, this growth is particularly significant.

Data from FY22 to FY26 show western states leading the expansion in renewable energy capacity, while growth in some southern states has slowed after an early lead. Energy experts increasingly advocate a complete shift towards renewable sources, with greater focus on solar, wind and nuclear energy.

Rajasthan and Gujarat have emerged as dominant players in India's renewable energy landscape, excluding large hydropower projects. These two states alone have added the highest renewable energy capacity in the last five years.

Rajasthan now leads the country with an installed renewable energy capacity of 46.6 GW in FY26, up from 17 GW in FY22 - an increase of nearly 30 GW, driven mainly by solar energy. Its solar capacity has surged from 12.6 GW to over 41 GW, further strengthening its position as India's solar hub.

Gujarat is close behind, with total renewable energy capacity rising from 16.6 GW to 45.2 GW. Its solar capacity has more than tripled from 7.2 GW to 29.3 GW, supported by large solar parks and favourable government policies.

There is little doubt that India has made remarkable progress in renewable energy. In 2014, the country's installed solar capacity stood at just 3 GW; today, it has crossed 135 GW. This expansion has been driven by political commitment and sustained investment.

Reducing dependence on fossil fuels, cutting carbon dioxide and greenhouse

gas emissions, and strengthening energy security remain key objectives behind the expansion of renewable energy.

At the same time, while renewable energy deserves continued support, coal gasification - a thermo-chemical process that converts coal into synthetic gas - may offer a practical alternative for India because of the country's vast coal reserves.

For a nation that imports more than 88% of its crude oil requirements and ranks among the world's largest energy importers, such alternatives are strategically vital.

The Centre launched the Coal Gasification Mission in 2020 with a target of gasifying 100 million tonnes of coal by 2030. However, six years later, commercial production remains slow.

Interestingly, financial constraints do not appear to be the primary obstacle. The government allocated ₹300 crore for the mission in the 2025-26 Budget Estimates, but unofficial figures suggest a substantial portion of the funds remains unutilised due to slow progress. In the current financial year, the Centre has increased the mission's allocation from ₹1,075 crore to ₹3,525 crore.

NITI Aayog has also pointed out that existing gasification technologies are not ideally suited to India's high-ash coal. Given current realities, the government may need to prioritise development of more suitable technologies.

Beyond technology and policy, climate finance remains a major concern for India and other developing countries. Although the United Nations process at the Baku climate summit set an annual climate finance target of \$1.3 trillion, developed nations agreed to contribute only about one-third of that amount.

While climate finance support for adaptation projects increased in 2024, it remained far below actual requirements, and future flows continue to appear uncertain due to rising financial pressures globally.

To strengthen adaptation efforts, both public and private finance will need to increase, while ensuring that vulnerable countries are not pushed deeper into debt burdens.

At COP29 in Baku last year, India and several developing countries strongly objected to the proposed financing figures, arguing that annual climate finance should rise to \$1.3 trillion by 2025. Even the amount eventually agreed upon has yet to fully reach developing nations.

India's energy requirements will continue to rise due to rapid industrialisation and urbanisation. Energy security therefore remains a critical priority, as Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman recently reiterated while emphasising the need to ensure stable supplies of crude oil, fertilisers and other essential inputs for domestic needs.

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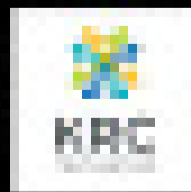


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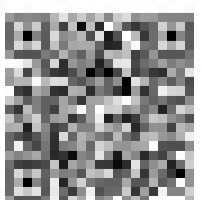


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