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PERSPECTIVE
Loneliness is both physically and mentally damaging.

COCOMI Questions Centre's Handling of Hostage Crisis in Manipur

IMPHAL
The Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI) has alleged that the delay in rescuing civilians reportedly held hostage by armed groups in Manipur indicates a possible "hidden agenda" behind the Centre's handling of the ongoing crisis.

Addressing a public meeting at Thokchom Community Hall in Thoubal district on Sunday, COCOMI convenor Y.K. Dhiren questioned why authorities had failed to secure the release of the hostages despite India's strong military and security capabilities. The meeting was jointly organised by Thokchom Apunba Lamjing Meira Lup, Thokchom Youth Dynamic Association and Thokchom Youths and Students Development Organisation.

Dhiren described the prolonged captivity of civilians without decisive intervention as "shocking" and said it raised serious concerns regarding the intentions of the Government of India.

He further alleged that the continuing unrest in Manipur reflected a broader "proxy war" aimed at creating divisions among communities, including the Meitei, Naga and Kuki populations.

According to him, forces attempting to destabilise the state were seeking to deepen mistrust and conflict among different ethnic groups.

The COCOMI leader urged residents to remain united and vigilant against attempts to divide communities and weaken the social fabric of Manipur.

He also appealed to the public not to fall into communal divisions and stressed the importance of safeguarding the territorial integrity and unity of the state through collective efforts.

WHO SAID WHAT

The National Institute of Design (NID) will expand its reach into high-tech design sectors, including semiconductor chip design.
~ Amit Shah, Union Home Minister

Twin Blockades by Naga, Kuki Groups Disrupt Highways, Deepen Fuel Shortage in Manipur

IMPHAL
Manipur is witnessing a growing fuel supply crisis as ongoing shutdowns and economic blockades imposed by Naga and Kuki civil organisations continue to cripple movement along the state's key highways. The blockades, enforced in different parts of the state by the Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM) and the United Naga Council (UNC), have brought vehicular traffic to a near standstill, severely affecting the transportation of essential commodities, including petroleum products and cooking gas.

Officials said nearly 600 trucks remain stranded along National Highway 102, the lifeline connecting Imphal with Guwahati through Kohima. The stranded vehicles include several tankers carrying petrol, diesel and other petroleum supplies destined for the valley districts.

On the Imphal-Silchar route, more than 100 tankers transporting fuel and LPG cylinders have also been halted at Noney district, further ag-



gravating fears of an artificial scarcity across the state. The coordinated shutdowns were triggered after the May 13 ambush in Kangpokpi and Noney districts in which three Thadou church leaders and a Naga man were killed, while five others sustained injuries. The violence also led to the abduction of several Naga and Kuki individuals. Although some hostages have since been exchanged, civil society organisations claimed that 14 Kuki persons and six Naga individuals are still missing, prompting intensified protests and renewed calls for their immediate release. With supply chains disrupted, several fuel outlets in Imphal and nearby areas have

reportedly begun running dry, raising concerns of a worsening crisis if the blockades continue.

Sources said the Malom oil depot near Imphal airport currently has adequate fuel reserves. However, the shortage of available tankers for transportation has emerged as a major bottleneck in distribution.

Under normal circumstances, fuel tankers arriving from outside the state are unloaded at the depot before being dispatched to retail outlets. But with many vehicles stranded on the highways, authorities are now depending on locally available transporters to load and distribute fuel directly from the Malom depot. Transporters, however, have reportedly refused to operate under the existing payment structure, arguing that the loading charges offered are too low.

Officials warned that unless normal movement resumes soon, the state could face a sharper shortage of fuel and other essential commodities in the coming days.

Three Northeast Films Selected for Screening at Marche du Film 2026 in Cannes

IMPHAL
Three films from Northeast India, including Manipuri filmmaker Haobam Paban Kumar's feature film Joseph's Son, are set to be screened at the Marché du Film 2026 during the ongoing Cannes Film Festival in France.

The films selected from the region are Joseph's Son, Galo-language film Karken directed by Nending Loder, and Bodo-language film My Three Sisters by Kenny Basumatary.

Joseph's Son was scheduled for screening on Monday, while the other two films are expected to be screened on May 18 and 19.

The film follows the story of Joseph, a highlander searching for his missing son amid escalating ethnic violence. The feature had earlier earned international recognition after being screened in the Golden Goblet Competition section of the 25th Shanghai International Film Festival.

The film also received the Special Jury Award at the 29th Kolkata International Film Festival and later won the Best Director Award at the 1st North East India Film Festival 2024.

Officials said the selected films would be showcased for worldwide distribution opportunities, including theatrical release rights, OTT and Video-on-Demand licensing, as well as satellite distribution deals.

The screenings are part of India's regional cinema showcase organised by the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) at the Marché du Film, being held alongside the Cannes Film Festival from May 12 to 23.

The Marché du Film, regarded as the business arm of the Cannes Film Festival, is one of the world's largest film markets, attracting thousands of filmmakers, distributors, investors and production houses from nearly 90 countries each year.

Silchar Student Earns Global Research Opportunity Through Assam Fellowship

SILCHAR
A month-long research programme in Portugal has given a young student from Assam's Cachar district international exposure to advanced scientific research, highlighting the growing impact of the state government's sustainability-focused academic initiatives.

Bishali Choudhury, a 20-year-old undergraduate student of Cachar College, was selected under the Chief Minister's Green Fellowship for 2025-26 and was among seven students from Assam sent to NOVA University Lisbon for research exposure in sustainability and green science. She was the only participant selected from Cachar district.

Speaking after her return from Portugal, Bishali said the programme offered her a first-hand understanding of the difference between classroom-based learning and practical scientific research conducted in advanced laboratories. "I never imagined stepping into another country for research at this age. The exposure showed me the huge difference between classroom learning and actually working inside advanced laboratories," she said.

Before travelling abroad, Bishali had conducted field studies in Sonabarighat and nearby agricultural areas in Cachar district, interacting with farmers facing crop disease issues affecting vegetables such as cabbage, cauliflower and lady's finger.

During her stay in Portugal, however, her work focused on environmental sustainability and green chemistry. She participated in research related to extracting bioactive compounds from olive pomace - an agricultural byprod-

uct being studied for possible pharmaceutical and healthcare applications.

"At first, I expected research linked to my own domain. But after reaching Portugal, I realised the exposure was much broader and the learning was on how science can convert waste into something useful for society," she said.

Although the research work differed from her earlier field observations in the Barak Valley, Bishali noted that both experiences centred on sustainable and practical applications of science. The Chief Minister's Green Fellowship, conceptualised by the Pollution Control Board Assam, aims to provide selected students with exposure to environmental and sustainability-oriented research programmes. Chairman of the Pollution Control Board Assam, Arup Kumar Misra, described the fellowship as a transformative initiative designed to encourage scientific temperament and research orientation among students in the state. "Today, Assam has an opportunity to redefine itself through knowledge, technology, research and innovation," Misra said. He added that students from remote districts, many of whom had never imagined entering world-class laboratories, were now receiving opportunities for global academic exposure through the fellowship programme. Principal of Cachar College, Apratim Nag, said research exposure often helps students develop confidence and stronger academic interest.

"Students often possess tremendous potential, but because of lack of exposure, that potential remains untapped. This fellowship has opened an entirely new window," he said.

Drugs Worth Over Rs 18 Crore Seized in Mizoram, Tripura; Agencies Probe Cross-Border Smuggling Links

AIZAWL/AGARTALA
Security agencies have intensified anti-narcotics operations across the Northeast following major drug seizures in Mizoram and Tripura worth more than Rs 18 crore, exposing suspected cross-border trafficking networks operating through the region.

The operations, carried out separately in Mizoram and Tripura, led to the seizure of heroin, methamphetamine and Yaba tablets, while one suspected trafficker was arrested.

Investigators believe the seizures point to the growing use of the Northeast as a transit corridor for narcotics smuggled through international borders, particularly along routes linked to Myanmar.

In Mizoram, police recovered narcotics valued at over Rs 10.60 crore in separate operations conducted in Kolasib and Champhai districts. In the first case, a police team conducting highway patrols at N Chhimluang village in Kolasib district intercepted a truck bearing an Assam registration number along the Assam-Mizoram route. Officials said the driver and handyman fled from the spot while police were checking vehicles. Despite a chase, both managed to escape. A subsequent search of the abandoned truck led to the recovery of 900.29 grams of heroin concealed inside specially fabricated compartments. Authorities estimated the value of the seized heroin at around Rs 1.80 crore in the illegal market. Police also seized the truck along with two mobile phones left behind by the suspects. In another operation, police in Champhai district intercepted a Sumo vehicle at the Champhai Police Check Gate while it was travelling from Zokhawthar near the Myanmar border towards Aizawl. The vehicle was reportedly driven by Zardawngkima (36), a resident of Tuidil village in Myanmar.

DoNER Explores Blending North East's Eri Silk With Rajasthan's Kota Doria



GUWAHATI
The Ministry for Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) is exploring a collaboration between the North East's Eri silk and Rajasthan's traditional Kota Doria fabric to create a premium handloom textile aimed at domestic and international markets.

Officials said the proposed initiative could generate new livelihood opportunities for weavers and artisans in both regions while promoting Indian handloom products on a larger global platform.

As part of the exercise, DoNER Secretary Sanjay Jaju visited the Common Facility Centre at

Kaithoon in Rajasthan's Kota district on May 17 along with Kota District Collector Piyush Samaria and Managing Director of the North Eastern Handicrafts and Handlooms Development Corporation (NEHDC), Mara Kocho.

During the visit, the delegation interacted with local weavers, artisans and fashion designers and observed the traditional weaving process of Kota Doria, a fabric known for its lightweight texture, transparent weave and signature check patterns.

Officials said discussions centred on the feasibility of integrating Eri silk - often referred to as "peace silk" because of its eco-friendly and non-violent production process - with Kota Doria to develop a high-value fabric combining durability, comfort and traditional craftsmanship.

The delegation also met Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla in Kota, who reportedly said the collaboration could unite two distinct textile traditions and open up fresh economic opportunities for weaving communities.

According to officials, preparations are underway for signing a memorandum of understanding between the North Eastern Handicrafts and Handlooms Development Corporation and Rajasthan's District Industries Centre.

The proposed agreement is expected to focus on product development, skill enhancement, branding initiatives and strengthening market linkages for handloom products from both regions.

RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat's Hojai Visit Fuels Speculation Over Assam Cabinet Expansion



HOJAI
The recent three-day visit of Mohan Bhagwat to Assam's Hojai district has triggered intense political speculation ahead of the upcoming Assam Assembly session, with discussions centring around a possible Cabinet expansion in the state.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief, who visited Hojai between May 14 and 16, reportedly held meetings with senior Sangh Parivar leaders and is believed to have interacted with several political figures during his stay.

Political observers said the visit has generated widespread curiosity in political circles, particularly amid growing expectations over a reshuffle or expansion of the Assam Cabinet.

Speculation has also intensified over the possible inclusion of local MLA Shiladitya Dev in the state Cabinet, with supporters and observers closely watching developments following Bhagwat's visit.

Bhagwat arrived at the Sanskar Prakalp Mandir located within the Geetashram premises in Hojai on Wednesday night after travelling from Guwahati under tight Z-Plus security cover.

Ahead of his arrival, the district administration converted the Geetashram

area into a high-security zone, with heavy deployment of police personnel and strict surveillance measures across the locality.

Although the RSS chief did not address the media, his arrival drew a large gathering of RSS workers and members of Sangh-affiliated organisations, who welcomed him with flower showers and slogans.

According to sources, Bhagwat held extensive interactions with participants attending the 'Karyakarta Vikas Varg-1 (Second Year)' training camp being organised in Hojai from May 11 to June 1.

During the sessions, he is believed to have spoken on RSS ideology, organisational structure and national thought processes while also participating in several internal meetings with senior functionaries.

An RSS functionary from north Assam confirmed that Bhagwat attended the training camp on May 14, 15 and 16 before leaving for Nagpur via Guwahati on Sunday morning.

Officials associated with the camp said a total of 103 swayamsevaks from across the Northeast are participating in the 20-day programme, including representatives from north Assam, south Assam, Tripura, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh.

Four Killed, Six Injured After Stone-Laden Truck Overtakes Near Tripura Border



GUWAHATI
At least four labourers were killed and six others injured after a stone-laden truck overturned near the Indo-Bangladesh border in Tripura's Dhalai district on Sunday, police said.

The accident occurred in the Longtarai Valley subdivision while the vehicle was travelling from Chawmanu towards the Biju Border Outpost carrying stone chips for infrastructure work in the border area.

According to Longtarai Valley Sub-Divisional Police Officer Sonacharan Jamatia, the truck

lost balance on a steep and poorly maintained stretch of road. The driver reportedly attempted to reverse the vehicle after failing to climb the uphill section, causing it to overturn.

Several labourers seated on top of the stone load were thrown off as the truck toppled, while the shifting stones buried many beneath the debris. Occupants inside the cabin escaped with comparatively minor injuries.

Personnel from nearby Border Security Force camps rushed to the spot and launched rescue operations soon after the incident. The injured were taken to a nearby hospital, where doctors declared four labourers dead on arrival.

Police identified the deceased as Balidhanjoy Tripura (47), Majida Tripura (50), Bathojoy Tripura (39), and Narjoy Tripura (36).

Officials said one of the injured remains in critical condition, while others are undergoing treatment.

Authorities have launched an investigation to ascertain the exact cause of the accident.



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TEHRAN, MOSCOW MUST WALK THE TALK

In the grand theatre of international relations, admiration is the cheapest currency diplomacy trades in. It costs nothing to laud a nation's credentials, invoke its ancient wisdom, salute its statesmanship and then proceed to sideline it entirely. The BRICS foreign ministers' meeting in New Delhi last week offered a masterclass in this cynical art. Convened under India's chairmanship, the gathering was designed to forge collective resolve around the Iran-US conflict that has convulsed global energy markets since late February. It ended not with a communiqué, but with a contradiction that had India's name written all over.

What the summit produced, beyond the predictable procedural failure, was a brazen and meticulously documented display of duplicitous diplomacy by two nations that routinely present themselves as India's most dependable strategic partners: Iran and Russia. While their foreign ministers publicly extolled New Delhi's virtues as peacemaker, bridge-builder and indispensable mediator, their prior actions had already told a different story. It was one of calculated exclusion dressed up in the language of admiration.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi arrived in Delhi to press the BRICS members to unite against what he termed "violations of international law" and "Western hegemony". The summit's collapse, driven largely by Iran's insistence on explicit condemnation of US-Israeli "aggression", predictably left the conclave fractured and fruitless. Yet even amid this discord, Araghchi found time to lavish India with praise. In post-meeting remarks, he declared that New Delhi could play a "greater role" in promoting peace in West Asia, welcomed any "constructive role by India", and rhapsodised about the Chabahar port as a "golden gate" to Central Asia, promising safe passage for friendly vessels through the Strait of Hormuz and readiness to resume oil supplies. The words flowed warmly, graciously, almost effusively. They were also entirely hollow.

Russia's Sergey Lavrov performed the same act with greater precision. He drew a pointed distinction between Pakistan's current role as facilitator of short-term US-Iran dialogues and India's vastly superior credentials for long-term, structural mediation. "If they seek a long-term mediator between Iran and its Arab friends," he observed, "this role could be played by India, considering its vast diplomatic experience and international standing." He also suggested that India as BRICS chair could host preliminary conversations between Iran and the UAE to forestall future hostilities, leveraging relationships built across decades of careful, patient diplomacy. These were not throwaway pleasantries. They were careful, calibrated affirmations precise in their praise, precise in their pointlessness.

For both nations had already made their choices. And India was conspicuously absent from them. Since the US-Israeli strikes in February that killed Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and triggered a catastrophic spiral of missile barrages, a fragile ceasefire and a de facto blockade of Hormuz, India had signalled its readiness to intervene at every available turn. Prime Minister Narendra Modi advocated de-escalation from the very first day, drawing on historical relations with Iran rooted in three decades of energy cooperation and a deep cultural affinity. It offered back-channel facilitation. It offered mediation plainly, repeatedly, without condition as the one power capable of speaking credibly to all sides without the taint of ideological alignment. The offer was neither accepted nor acknowledged. Instead, Tehran turned to Islamabad.

Pakistani mediation produced the April 2026 ceasefire framework. America-Iran talks were hosted in Islamabad on April 11-12. Iranian ministers made multiple visits to Pakistan, shuttling proposals across a fragile diplomatic corridor and personally sustaining the truce through repeated high-level engagement. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif seized the moment with characteristic fanfare, declaring it "a matter of pride for the nation" that Pakistan had brought the US and Iran to the table after 47 years of estrangement. Congratulatory calls flooded in from European capitals, Gulf monarchies and Asian diplomatic missions.

In India, the reaction was sharp and unsparing. Strategic analysts and opposition voices alike demanded answers: why had India, with its deeper historical leverage with Tehran, superior infrastructure, broader global credibility and genuine desire for regional stability, been kept away from the high table? The choice of Islamabad as venue deepened the affront. The message was unmistakable: tactical convenience had been allowed to trump strategic partnership, and India had been made to watch from the gallery. Moreover, Iran's decision to impose broader restrictions on movements through the Straits of Hormuz compounded this duplicity and disrupted supplies, and aggravated India's energy calculations in ways other nations largely avoided a disparity that carried the unmistakable scent of deliberate pressure.

Russia, Iran's most steadfast political and military backer, bears its own share of culpability. Moscow possesses leverage over Tehran that no other power can replicate. Had Lavrov genuinely believed India to be the ideal long-term broker, it could have used every instrument to mount pressure on Iran. It did not. Modi's personal rapport with President Trump, India's singular ability to engage Washington, Tehran, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi simultaneously without ideological baggage are precisely the assets Lavrov publicly celebrated. That Moscow neither championed nor protected India's inclusion was not an oversight. It was a deliberate choice dressed in the language of praise. India, the world's fastest-growing major economy and one of its largest energy importers, has not merely a stake in resolution but a civilisational responsibility to pursue it.

The reckoning, however, is coming and it is coming for Islamabad first. Pakistan's mediation drive has collapsed under the weight of its own limitations. Its leverage was always transactional, never structural. Confidence in Islamabad's ability to deliver durable outcomes has drained away. Iran now stands at a crossroads. Internally pressured, economically isolated and diplomatically exhausted, Tehran must confront a simple, inconvenient truth. India, the partner it flattered and sidelined, possesses everything it now desperately needs. India's diplomatic capital is not borrowed. It has been earned across decades of principled, patient engagement with every stakeholder in this conflict. The BRICS summit inadvertently became a morality play about the cost of shortsightedness. For India, it delivered an unambiguous lesson: in diplomacy, as in life, being praised is not the same as being respected, and being celebrated is not the same as being included. A genuine pivot towards New Delhi would not merely vindicate the public endorsements offered so freely by Iran in Delhi. The stage now demands a statesman. Tehran, along with Moscow, must decide to walk the talk.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

This is your world, shape it or someone else will. - Gary Lew

HER "KARMA" DETHRONES MAMATA BANERJEE IN BENGAL...



CHANAKYA CHARAN DASS

Bengal elections have been very keenly contested state elections ever in India. The closest, to the best I can think of were the ones held in 1977 in J&K when Sheikh Abdullah won 47/76 seats to the state legislature, 7 of them (unbelievably) from the Jammu region out of a total of 32. The Sheikh did not participate in electioneering, pretending sickness, while recordings of his speech were played to the highly emotional and surcharged audience. The audience was told that he was on his death bed and his last appeal to the Kashmiris was to vote National Conference to power.

Elections in Bengal, however, were fought on issues not only critical for its people but also for 1.4 billion citizens of the country. The shrill, autocratic and dictatorial misrule of TMC party of Mamata had created a situation in the state that was ripe for a change of the government. Mamata's silence on the atrocities on the Hindus of Bangladesh next door, over last few years, couldn't have gone unnoticed by the people of Bengal. The brutal rape of women, murder of the innocent citizens, burning of the properties, temples and commercial establishments of Hindus, especially after the ouster of Sheikh Hasina from Bangladesh must have run a chill through the spine of the Hindus of Bengal especially as the events consequent to "Direct Action Day" called by Jinnah in 1946 couldn't have been lost from the collective memory of the Bengalis. Today it was Pope, tomorrow it would be potatoes in Bangladesh, but it was the hapless Hindus who faced the brunt of the marauders.

But, did the events in Bangladesh alone unnerve the Sanatanis of Bengal? The answer is no!

Surprisingly, the situation in Bengal was no better!

The goons of the TMC were free to inflict terror on Hindus in whatever way they wanted in Bengal and Mamata ensured full and unashamed protection to them.

Some of the women who have won elections to the state assembly on the ticket of BJP are a living testimony to the atrocities of the TMC government in Bengal.

Ratna Debnath, a poor woman whose husband worked as a small-time tailor, literally became the face of resistance to the Mamata government. Her only daughter, a 31-year-old doctor, was brutally raped and murdered in what was considered to be the "protected environs" of RG Kar Medical College and Hospital in August 2024. Her daughter was a post-graduate trainee at the hospital.

Fully protected by the government the hospital authorities initially tried to pass her death off as a suicide, but when the pressure from the poor parents, local and non-local doctors and the public grew the Mamata government got the autopsy conducted in haste and the body of the victim was cremated hastily without handing it over to her distraught parents. Brutal rape and death of the doctor shook Bengalis to the core.

Every attempt was made by the hospital administration to clean the crime scene of any telltale forensic signs of rape and brutality inflicted on the doctor. Repair work was started almost the next day at the scene of the crime and later a mob was sent in to damage, ransack and vandalize the crime scene where a peaceful candle march was underway by the people in the area to pro-

test the killing of the doctor.

Instead of acting against the principal of the college the TMC government transferred him to another medical college. Ratna Debnath, the victim's mother, resolved that she would not comb her hair till justice was delivered to her innocent daughter. Considering her marginalized background and educational limitations, her election campaign was more of a personal appeal against the tyrannical regime that refused to deliver justice to her dead daughter. She met the electorate of her constituency teary eyed, often sobbing and at other times embracing the visibly shaken women folk.

Her face became the message that was not limited to her constituency but became a message for the whole of Bengal – the message was clear; oust the pathetic Mamata government.

All this while, Mamata Banerjee and her government stood with the criminals.

There were hundreds of such incidents in Mamata ruled Bengal where poor were harassed, their lands grabbed, women molested and raped while the corrupt ruled the roost. Instances were reported when tribal women were made to crawl – "dandavat parikrama" – to the TMC functionaries offices to humiliate them as they had associated themselves with the BJP. The concept was to terrorize the locals so that they could not stand up to the TMC establishment.

Terror perpetrated by the leaders of TMC in Sandeshkhali threw up a marginalized woman, Rekha Patra, as a face of resistance to the brutalities of the TMC goons. (Her total assets; Rs.25,000!!) While the Enforcement Directorate team landed in Sandeshkhali in January 2024 to investigate the role of Sheikh Shahjahan in the ration scam under a TMC minister Jyotipriya Mallick were attacked and several of them were injured. In fact, Mamata government lodged FIR against the ED team to frustrate its efforts to get at the bottom of the scam. Finally, after the intervention of courts when the investigation finally started it came to fore that Shahjahan and his associates were not only involved in the ration scam but also in land grab, rape and torture of women-folk of families and individuals who refused to tow their line. Shahjahan was finally arrested.

Rekha Patra is now a BJP MLA in the recently elected state legislature. The brazenness of TMC members is such that after losing elections they are sending white sarees to the ladies of BJP cadre declaring, symbolically, not-so-far widowhood for them. This was the level of vile and hatred spread by TMC.

It would be an interesting research work to understand the number of assembly seats TMC must have lost after Sayooni Ghosh, the TMC – MP, sang the "Aankhun main Kaaba; Dil main Madina" song in her public meetings. Candidly speaking, music is the core of Sanatan and none would have noticed the eulogy by her to the two revered religious places of Islam. However, what rattled Sanatanis was that the same Sayooni Ghosh, with a big red bindi on her forehead, had posted a caricature ridiculing Shri Mahadev on X-platform. She mocked Him by depicting 3/4th of a Shivalingam covered by a condom and revealing the "tripund tilak" on the 1/4th at the lower end. The backlash by the Sanatanis in Bengal and across the country to this shamelessness was

severe. Bengalis gave vent to their feelings by voting the TMC out – the "ballot paper way" in the truest traditions of democracy!!

The most vicious and divisive policy (with national security implications for the country) being followed by Mamata Banerjee in Bengal was protection, bordering on encouragement, to the illegal immigrants from Bangla Desh and Rohingya of Myanmar. She went to the extent of not allocating land for installation of fence in the areas bordering Bangladesh.

This was a complete U-turn for Mamata Banerjee, who as an MP, in August 2005 (UPA government), had described the presence of illegal immigrants in the electoral rolls of Bengal as a disaster. When she was not allowed to raise this issue in the Lok Sabha by the Deputy Speaker she went to the well of the house and threw papers on the chair and later resigned in protest saying that it was no use to be in Lok Sabha if the issues pertaining to the people were not being allowed to be raised. Her resignation was not accepted.

So, what changed Mamata Banerjee?!

This question certainly needs an answer. Was she overtaken excessively by the trappings of power and thought that her and Abhishek Banerjee's (her nephew) insurance to infinite continuum in power was the vote bank of illegal immigrants in Bengal? Was she playing into the hands of the "Greater Bangladesh" forces, wittingly or unwittingly? Didn't she hear Muhammad Yunus, Bangladesh's interim leader (2024-26), calling the seven northeastern "Seven Sisters" states of India landlocked and declaring Bangladesh the "only guardian of the ocean" for the region, even inviting China to use Bangladesh as its maritime gateway? These were no off the cuff remarks. They were mischievous and an extension of the deep rooted and long-standing, but unfulfillable desire of the internal as well as external forces inimical to the interests of the country. The idea was to swamp Bengal with illegal immigrants for electoral gains as far as Mamata was concerned but the "Greater Bangladesh" project of the enemies of the nation envisaged turning the indigenous population of Bengal into a minority thereby making the state vulnerable to the machinations of the anti-national forces.

Wasn't Sharjeel Imam, the former JNU student, pushing the same agenda during CAA protests?

Didn't Mamata hear Asif Munir, the Field Marshal of Pakistan, declaring in a meeting with the Pakistani diaspora in the US that Pakistan now had the capabilities to disturb the eastern part of India as it is building assets/infrastructure there? This was after Op Sindhoor and subsequent to Donald Trump befriending him. Why then was Mamata's policy on illegal infiltration from Bangladesh and that of Rohingya in sync with the enemies of India?

She tried to stall SIR (Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls), a genuine legal process, to identify ineligible voters. She didn't leave any stone unturned to achieve her nefarious objective – from the courts to the street power – but nothing was to her avail. In fact, it only exposed her love for the illegal immigrants. Mamata and her ilk had no regrets about the exodus of over one lakh Hindus who had to take shelter in Assam in the face of violence against them by TMC cadre after 2021 state elections.

Finally, Mamata lost the elections,

and BJP government was sworn on the 9th of May 2026. Suwendu Adhikari became the new Chief Minister.

For the people in J&K the firm embrace of the 98 years old Makhan Lal Sarkar by Narendra Modi must not have been lost. Makhan Lal Sarkar was accompanying Shyama Prasad Mukherjee to J&K on that fateful trip when he died in Srinagar under suspicious circumstances on June 23, 1953, while the Sheikh was the PM of J&K. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee had entered J&K without a permit and was protest-

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Manufacturing is the key to achieving #ViksitBharat, & Assam will play an important role in it.

We are developing 15 sites under BHAVYA, a Govt of India industrial vision to create plug & play infra parks to boost domestic manufacturing, push growth & create job opportunities. ~ Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM, Assam



ing against grant of special status to J&K under article 370 of the Indian constitution.

History has turned a full circle in 2026 with installation of a BJP government in Bengal, a reincarnation of Jan Sangh, the party founded by Shyama Prasad Mukherjee. The party will face insurmountable challenges. On one hand it will have to meet the expectations of the people of the state and on the other overhaul the law enforcement machinery. It will have to generate employment for the youth, bring in investment while keeping a tab on illegal immigration. The task is cut out for the new CM. While bigger challenges shall be faced and issues settled, hopefully, given the profile of the CM, he will also have to address such smaller things as ensuring that the traffic police of Bengal challans the skull cap wearing traffic violators as much as those who don't wear them. Hitherto, in Bengal, the skull cap wearing violators would not face a challan while all others did. That is the "depth" of discrimination bequeathed to Sudendu Adhikari by the Mamata regime. Brazen cow smuggling in full daylight to Bangladesh is the other level of the challenge which is fuelling an illegal parallel economy.

Valley-Based Civil Society Groups Hold Sit-In Protests in Manipur, Demand Scrapping of SoO Pact

IMPHAL

Sit-in protests were organised at multiple locations across Imphal East and Imphal West districts on Sunday as civil society organisations intensified demonstrations over the continuing unrest in Manipur and demanded stronger action against militant groups.

The protests were jointly organised by the All Manipur United Clubs Organisation (AMUCO) and several allied organisations, including the All Manipur Women's Voluntary Association (AMAWOVA), Committee on Human Rights (CoHR), Manipuri Students' Federation (MSF) and Poirei Leimarol.

According to organisers, the protests are part of an ongoing series of demonstrations being held across the state following the Tronglaobi bomb attack and continuing violence in conflict-hit areas. On Saturday, similar sit-in pro-



tests were staged at Sangaiprou in Imphal West district and at Sagolmang, Leitampokpi, Pukhao, Keibi and several other localities in Imphal East district. Protesters condemned the recent killing of civilians and demanded justice for victims affected by the violence. They also called for intensified military operations against militant groups, immediate withdrawal of the Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement and stronger measures to tackle terrorism and armed violence in the state. Speaking during one of the demonstrations, a protest participant identified as Ibotombi said that despite the conflict entering its fourth year, there had been little visible progress toward restoring lasting peace and stability in Manipur. She alleged that the law and order situation continued to deteriorate, with recurring incidents of violence and deadly attacks creating fear

and insecurity among residents. "Even after deadly attacks, the government has failed to deliver justice. Issuing condemnation statements and announcing ex-gratia assistance cannot compensate for the pain and suffering of victims' families and the people of the state," she said. The protester urged authorities to make effective use of constitutional powers to protect the lives and properties of citizens and restore public confidence. She also expressed concern over the impact of the prolonged conflict on the education sector, stating that repeated disruptions and closures were severely affecting students and academic activities across the state.

The demonstrators appealed to the government to address the Manipur crisis with urgency and take concrete steps toward restoring peace, security and normalcy in the violence-hit state.

Assam Police Reports Sharp Decline in Crime Rate and Pending Cases

GUWAHATI

Assam Police has reported a significant decline in crime rates, pending investigations and monthly criminal case registrations across the state, according to official data reviewed during a virtual crime review meeting chaired by Director General of Police Harmeet Singh.

The review meeting, held on May 16, was attended online by Officers-in-Charge, Superintendents of Police and Range Officers from different districts to assess crime trends for March and April. During the meeting, Assam Police presented comparative data indicating notable improvements in key law enforcement indicators, which officials attributed to intensified policing measures and administrative reforms undertaken under the leadership of Himanta Biswa Sarma.

According to official statistics, the state's crime rate per lakh population declined to 100.2, compared to 121.5 in 2025 and 349.5 in 2021.

Police records also showed a substantial reduction in pending criminal cases, which dropped to 10,902 from 11,140 in 2025 and 1,33,982 in 2021.

The average number of criminal cases registered every month also fell significantly to 3,065, compared to 3,682.9 in 2025 and 11,103.3 in 2021.

At the same time, the charge sheet filing rate improved to 86.04 per cent, up from 81.46 per cent in 2025 and 59.40 per cent in 2021.

Officials said the improvements reflected stronger supervision, increased use of technology-based investigation methods and sustained efforts to improve policing efficiency across the state.

Assam Police reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening public safety through continued anti-crime operations and more effective investigative mechanisms across Assam.

Assam CM Reviews Guwahati Urban Projects, Pushes Flood Control and Sanitation Measures

GUWAHATI

Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday reviewed the progress and future roadmap of major urban development initiatives in Assam, with a strong focus on flood mitigation, sanitation and drinking water infrastructure in Guwahati.

The review meeting examined projects being implemented by the Guwahati Municipal Corporation, Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority, Guwahati Jal Board and the AMRUT mission under the state's Housing and Urban Affairs Department.

During the meeting, the Chief Minister stressed the need for citizen-centric urban growth and directed concerned agencies to prioritise access to safe drinking water, management of flash floods, strengthening sanitation infrastructure and creation of open public spaces.

Sarma instructed officials to accelerate the implementation of major civic projects aimed at improving urban infrastructure and transforming Guwahati into one of India's leading metropolitan cities.

The discussions also focused on long-term measures to tackle urban flooding, expansion of satellite townships in and around Guwahati and improvement of sanitation facilities in other towns and cities across Assam.

Highlighting the importance of coordinated execution, the Chief Minister called for closer collaboration among departments and agencies. He also emphasised the need to involve skilled professionals and private-sector expertise to improve the quality and efficiency of project implementation.

Sarma further directed officials to adopt an outcome-oriented approach with emphasis on

Demographic Changes in Karbi Anglong Spark Concerns Over Land, Identity and Political Balance

DIPHU

The demographic composition of Assam's hill districts of Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong has undergone major transformation since the first post-Independence elections in 1952, raising growing concerns over land rights, indigenous identity and changing political dynamics in the region.

Researchers and local organisations say migration, administrative restructuring, urbanisation and economic expansion have significantly altered the ethnic profile of the autonomous districts, which were historically dominated by indigenous tribal communities including Karbis, Bodos, Dimasas, Kukis, Hmars and Rengma Nagas.

Over the decades, the region has evolved into a far more heterogeneous society, with demographic changes increasingly influencing electoral politics, land ownership patterns, linguistic dynamics and inter-community relations.

Historical census records indicate a sharp rise in population after the 1950s. According to census compilations, the population of the undivided Karbi Anglong district increased from nearly 1.26 lakh in 1951 to more than 9.56 lakh by 2011.

Researchers attribute the demographic shift largely to migration from the plains of Assam as well as from Bihar, Bengal and neighbouring regions, particularly after expansion of roads, railways, forest-related economic activity and agricultural settlements.

Urban growth around centres such as Diphu, Bokajan, Howraghat and Dokmoka, along with industrial development in the Bokajan cement belt, also attracted increasing numbers of non-tribal settlers over the years.

Scholars studying census trends note that population growth accelerated significantly between the 1960s and 1990s, with the hill districts recording growth rates higher than the

state average during several decades.

The establishment of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution was aimed at safeguarding tribal identity, customary rights and land ownership. However, indigenous organisations have repeatedly raised concerns over alleged encroachment on tribal belts, grazing reserves and protected lands by migrant communities. Demographic concerns have increasingly entered mainstream political discourse in recent years. In 2025, protests linked to land rights and settlement patterns in parts of West Karbi Anglong escalated into ethnic tensions and internet shutdowns in certain areas.

Political observers say the changing population profile is also reshaping electoral equations in the hill districts. The 2023 delimitation exercise increased Scheduled Tribe representation in the autonomous region and redraw constituency boundaries

in parts of West Karbi Anglong.

Despite these demographic shifts, Scheduled Tribes continue to constitute a substantial share of the population. According to the 2011 Census, tribal communities accounted for more than 50 per cent of the district's residents.

However, many indigenous groups fear that continued migration and increasing land pressure could gradually reduce their demographic dominance in certain pockets of the region.

Experts say the central challenge before the autonomous administration is balancing constitutional safeguards for indigenous communities with economic development, migration pressures and the realities of an increasingly diverse society.

As Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong continue to evolve socially and politically, demographic change remains a critical factor shaping the region's identity, governance and future trajectory.

Tripura Congress MLA Sudip Roy Barman Attacks Centre Over Economy, Foreign Policy and NEET Leak

AGARTALA

Senior Congress leader and MLA Sudip Roy Barman on Sunday launched a sharp attack on the Narendra Modi-led central government, accusing it of economic mismanagement, foreign policy failure and undermining merit through alleged irregularities in recruitment and examination systems.

Addressing an executive meeting of newly elected representatives of the Tripura Pradesh Youth Congress at the Agartala Students Health Home, Barman claimed that the country was facing a worsening economic situation and criticised the Centre's handling of international relations.

"The country's condition is not good. The economy is in turmoil and the foreign policy of the central government is a complete failure," he alleged.



The Congress MLA further claimed that people were beginning to realise what he described as the consequences of electing Narendra Modi as Prime Minister.

"One truth after another is now coming to the fore. People are realising what a mistake they made by making Narendra Modi the Prime Minister. Narendra Modi is listening

to whatever the US President says," Barman said.

He alleged that the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party government was failing to represent the interests of citizens and stressed the need to politically mobilise young people against the BJP.

"People need to be made aware of this BJP government. Before

that, the youth need to be united to strengthen the organisation," he said.

Referring to the recent controversy surrounding the alleged NEET question paper leak, Barman accused the government of allowing merit and talent to be compromised.

"In this government's tenure, talent is being sold. They know nothing except money. Therefore, the youth must come forward to save this country," he alleged.

The meeting witnessed the participation of Youth Congress workers and supporters and was attended by several party leaders, including Manish Sharma, Ashish Kumar Saha and Zeesan Ahmed.

Party leaders discussed organisational strengthening and the role of youth workers in countering the BJP's political narrative ahead of upcoming electoral contests in the state.

Meghalaya CM Conrad Sangma Calls for Revival of Border Trade and Haats With Bangladesh

SHILLONG

Conrad K Sangma has called for renewed economic and cultural engagement between India and Bangladesh, stressing the need to revive border haats, trade links and regional connectivity projects to strengthen the economy of the Northeast.

Speaking to journalists on the sidelines of the North East India Infrastructure Summit and Exhibition curtain raiser event in Shillong on Friday, the Meghalaya Chief Minister said India and Bangladesh had already initiated dialogue at the local level despite recent strains in bilateral relations.

"It is already happening. The process has started. Dialogues are taking place at the local level, people are talking and discussing," Sangma said while responding to questions on India-Bangladesh engagement.

He described the current tensions between the two countries as temporary and emphasised the long-term importance of cooperation between New Delhi and Dhaka.

"I firmly believe the current phase with Bangladesh is temporary, but in the long run, we will have to work with Ban-



gladesh. This is good for us and Bangladesh as well, and I believe there is huge potential and opportunities," he said.

Relations between India and Bangladesh witnessed a slowdown following the removal of former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the subsequent political transition in Bangladesh, resulting in limited high-level engagement for several months.

However, efforts to restore communication have gathered momentum in recent weeks. Sangma noted that diplomatic interactions and local-level discussions were gradually helping rebuild ties between the two neighbours.

The Meghalaya Chief Minister also strongly advocated reopening border

haats that were shut following the political unrest in Bangladesh in 2024. He said the revival of traditional trade routes and economic exchanges could significantly benefit the northeastern region.

"I think the normal economic activities that used to take place, whether it is just the basic border haats, or the movement of basic trade that used to take place earlier, should be reactivated," he said.

Sangma highlighted the strategic importance of regional connectivity projects, particularly a proposed trade corridor linking Hili in West Bengal to Mahendraganj in Meghalaya through Bangladesh. According to him, enhanced access to the Port of Chittagong could substantially reduce transportation costs

and improve logistics connectivity for the Northeast.

At the same time, he stressed that concerns related to infiltration and illegal immigration must be addressed through robust safeguards and effective monitoring mechanisms.

Commenting on the ongoing push for border fencing in West Bengal, Sangma said issues concerning national security and people-to-people relations should be treated separately.

"Border is for our protection, for our safety and national interests," he said, adding that cultural and social interactions between communities could continue despite physical barriers.

Sangma also spoke about the ongoing ethnic unrest in Manipur, describing the situation as increasingly "more complicated" amid recent tensions involving Kuki and Naga groups. Nevertheless, he expressed hope that "better overall sense will prevail".

Rejecting criticism that the Centre had not engaged sufficiently on the Manipur crisis, the Meghalaya Chief Minister said the Union government had remained in regular contact with stakeholders and political parties, including the National People's Party.

"We only see it from the point of visits, but visits are not the only way to show concern," he said, adding that he and his party had been extensively consulted on developments in the state, including discussions related to President's Rule in Manipur.

Violence Erupts During Itanagar Bandh Against e-ILP Rules; Pema Khandu Backs Digital Permit System

ITANAGAR

A 36-hour bandh called by the Arunachal ST Bachao Andolan Committee against the newly introduced electronic Inner Line Permit (e-ILP) guidelines turned violent on Friday, with incidents of road blockades, stone-pelting, attacks on vehicles and protests outside the Itanagar Police Station reported from several parts of the capital region.

The shutdown, organised in protest against the "Arunachal Pradesh Inner Line Permit (ILP) Guidelines, 2026", disrupted normal life across the Itanagar Capital Region, affecting transportation, businesses and government services.

The protesting organisation alleged that certain provisions of the new guidelines violated the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873 and could adversely impact the rights and interests of indigenous communities in Arunachal Pradesh.

The committee has been demanding revision and review of the gazette notification issued by the state Political Department regarding the new ILP framework.

Government and private offices, banks, post offices, schools, colleges, commercial establishments and petrol pumps largely remained shut during the bandh period.

Protesters also blocked stretches of National Highway 415 at mul-

multiple locations, severely disrupting vehicular movement across the twin capital region of Itanagar and Naharlagun.

While traffic movement was partially visible in some areas during the morning hours, protests intensified later in the day as demonstrators demanded the release of leaders and members of the agitation detained by police on Thursday.

According to sources, around eight individuals, including executive members of the organisation such as Millo Ambo, Sol Dodum and Tana Tamar, were detained in connection with the bandh that came into effect from 5 am on May 14.

Thousands of people later marched toward the Itanagar Police Station demanding the release of all detained protesters.

Amid growing tension, Mama Natung ordered the release of the detainees and appealed to protesters to withdraw the bandh.

However, despite the assurance, tension escalated outside the police station where protesters allegedly resorted to stone-pelting. Police personnel later used tear gas shells to disperse the crowd and restore order.

Subsequently, all detained members of the Arunachal ST Bachao Andolan Committee were released after the Itanagar district administration revoked preventive detention orders issued against them.

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India holds Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance, rejects 'illegally constituted' Court of Arbitration ruling



NEW DELHI

India rejected the award issued by the "illegally constituted Court of Arbitration (CoA)" on May 15 and said its decision to hold the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance remains in force. "The illegally constituted so-called Court of Arbitration (CoA) has, on 15 May 2026, issued what it termed an award concerning maximum pondage supplemental to the award on issues of general interpretation of the Indus Waters Treaty. India categorically rejects the present so-called award, just as it has firmly rejected all prior pronouncements of the illegally constituted CoA," MEA Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in response to media queries on matters per-

taining to the so-called Court of Arbitration. India has never recognised the establishment of CoA and said any proceeding, award, or decision issued by it is null and void. "India's decision to hold the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance remains in force," the Spokesperson added.

External Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal. In a statement in June last year, India had said that it never recognised the existence in law of this so-called Court of Arbitration, and India's position has all along been that the constitution of this so-called arbitral body is in itself a serious breach of the Indus Waters Treaty.

It said that any proceedings before this forum and any award or decision taken by it

are also for that reason illegal and per se void.

Following the Pahalgalam terrorist attack, India had in exercise of its rights as a sovereign nation under international law, placed the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance, until Pakistan credibly and irrevocably abjures its support for cross-border terrorism.

"Until such time that the Treaty is in abeyance, India is no longer bound to perform any of its obligations under the Treaty. No Court of Arbitration, much less this illegally constituted arbitral body which has no existence in the eye of law, has the jurisdiction to examine the legality of India's actions in exercise of its rights as a sovereign," MEA had said in a release.

NEW DELHI

India and Netherlands on Saturday inked 17 agreements to boost cooperation in defence, critical minerals and other key sectors, elevating their ties to a strategic partnership.

The agreements were signed after a meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi - who is on a two-day visit to the nation - and his Dutch counterpart Rob Jetten.

Following the Modi-Jetten talks, India and the Netherlands unveiled a "strategic partnership roadmap" to boost ties in trade and investment, defence and security, critical and emerging technologies including semiconductors, space, AI and quantum computing.

The two leaders also launched an ambitious "India-Netherlands roadmap on the development of green hydrogen".

Modi and Jetten also agreed to explore possibilities of establishing a defence industrial roadmap to ensure joint manufacturing of defence equipment, systems, components and other key capabilities through transfer of technology and setting up of joint ventures.

The Netherlands is one of India's largest trading destinations in Europe, with bilateral trade touching USD 27.8 billion in 2024-25.

The European nation is India's fourth largest investor with cumulative foreign direct investment of USD 55.6 billion.

The Netherlands, with its world class logistics network also serves as a strategic gateway to Europe for Indian exporters, mainly through the Port of Rotterdam.

In the talks, the two sides also agreed to enhance cooperation in science and innovation, sustainability, health, agriculture, water

management, climate change and energy transition, maritime development and people-to-people ties.

The agreements inked between the two sides will provide for boosting cooperation in areas of semiconductors, critical minerals, health, water, renewable energy, agriculture and culture among others, according to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

A key pact signed following the Modi-Jetten meeting was one on migration and mobility, which is expected to facilitate greater movement of Indians to the European nation for jobs and education.

While deliberating on geopolitical developments, the two leaders called for a free, open and peaceful Indo-Pacific, based on respect for international law, sovereignty and territorial integrity, freedom of navigation, and "absence of coercion and conflicts", according to the joint statement.

The remarks came against the backdrop of growing global concerns over China's increasingly assertive behaviour in the region.

Recognising the strategic importance of critical minerals for continued innovation, the two prime ministers expressed their mutual interest in strengthening cooperation across the critical minerals value chain, including exploration and integration of value chains.

Both leaders also welcomed an initiative to connect the Dutch Semicon Competence Centre to the Indian Semiconductor Mission, which aims to support and strengthen the semiconductor sector, according to the joint statement.

On enhancing overall two-way trade, Modi and Jetten emphasised

the immense potential for further growth particularly in light of opportunities arising from the India-EU Free Trade Agreement, which was signed earlier this year.

In the meeting, PM Modi thanked Jetten for the continued Dutch support to India's permanent membership of a reformed and expanded UN Security Council.

According to the joint statement, Jetten strongly condemned the "heinous and abhorrent" Pahalgalam terrorist attack in April 2025 - in which 26 tourists were killed - and extended his country's unwavering support to India in its fight against terrorism, including cross-border terrorism.

The two prime ministers unequivocally condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and called for a "zero tolerance" approach to combat terrorism and rejected double standards in countering the menace, it said.

"There has been significant progress in India-Netherlands ties in the last one decade," Modi said in his televised opening remarks during the meeting with Jetten.

The prime minister said India considers the Netherlands among its most important partners as the historical and people to people relations between the two sides are "deep" rooted.

"Democratic values, market economy and responsible behavior are part of our common approach. Our cooperation in areas of Water, healthcare and education has been making the lives of our people better," he said.

Modi also highlighted India's economic growth.

The prime minister suggested that there should be convergence of the Netherlands' expertise and

India's "speed and skill" in every sector.

"We need to take our cooperation in areas of innovation, investment, sustainability and defence to new heights. Under this common vision, we are taking India-Netherlands relations to the level of strategic partnership," Modi said.

The two prime ministers also expressed deep concern over the situation in West Asia, especially its serious implications for the region and the wider world in view of disruptions caused to the global energy supplies and trade networks.

Modi and Jetten called for freedom of navigation and global flow of commerce through the Strait of Hormuz, while opposing any "restrictive" measures, and reaffirmed their support for ongoing initiatives in this regard, according to a joint statement.

Roughly one-fifth of global energy supplies pass through this narrow waterway, where shipping has been severely disrupted since February 28, after the US and Israel launched a joint attack on Iran, triggering retaliatory strikes.

The two leaders also discussed the situation in Ukraine - marked by the ongoing conflict with Russia and regional security developments.

They agreed to continue supporting efforts towards the achievement of a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in Ukraine through dialogue and diplomacy, based on the principles of the UN Charter and international law, it added.

Modi landed in The Hague on Friday on a two-day visit as part of a four-nation trip to Europe that is aimed at ramping up bilateral ties in a range of key areas.

INTERNATIONAL

WHO declares international emergency as Ebola outbreak kills more than 80 in DR Congo

KINSHASA

An Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo has killed more than 80 as authorities warned there was no vaccine for the strain in a crisis that the World Health Organization declared an international health emergency on Sunday.

A total of 88 deaths and 336 suspected cases of the highly contagious haemorrhagic fever have been reported, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC Africa) said in an update on Saturday.

The Geneva-based WHO said early on Sunday the outbreak caused by the Bundibugyo strain of Ebola constituted a "public health emergency of international concern" - the second-highest level of alert under international health regulations.

The global health body warned the true scale of the number of cases and spread was not clear but stopped short of declaring a pandemic emergency, the highest alert level introduced in 2024.

Medical aid group Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said it was preparing a "large-scale response", calling the rapid spread of the outbreak "extremely concerning", in warnings echoed by authorities.

"The Bundibugyo strain has no vaccine, no specific treatment," DR Congo's Health Minister Samuel-Roger Kamba said.

"This strain has a very high lethality rate, which can reach 50 percent."

The strain - which was first identified in 2007 - has also killed a Congolese national in neighbouring Uganda, officials said Saturday.



Vaccines are only available for the Zaire strain, which was identified in 1976 and has a higher fatality rate of 60-90 percent.

Health officials had confirmed the latest outbreak Friday in Ituri province in northeastern DRC, bordering Uganda and South Sudan, according to CDC Africa.

"We've been seeing people die for the past two weeks," said Isaac Nyakulinda, a local civil society representative contacted by AFP by phone.

"There is nowhere to isolate the sick. They are dying at home and their bodies are being handled by their family members."

According to Kamba, patient zero was a nurse who reported to a health facility in Ituri's provincial capital Bunia on April 24, with symptoms suggesting Ebola.

Symptoms of the disease include fever, haemorrhaging and vomiting. "The number of cases and deaths we are seeing in such a short time-frame, combined with the spread

across several health zones and now across the border, is extremely concerning," says Trish Newport, MSF Emergency Programme Manager, which is mobilising medical and support staff to the area.

Large-scale transport of medical equipment is a challenge in DR Congo, a country of more than 100 million people which is four times the size of France but has poor communications infrastructure.

High risk of spread. It is the 17th Ebola outbreak to hit the DRC, and officials warned of a high risk of spread.

"There are significant uncertainties to the true number of infected persons and geographic spread," the WHO said.

But it added the high positivity rate of initial samples, the confirmation of cases in two countries, and the increasing reports of suspected cases, "all point towards a potentially much larger outbreak than what is currently being detected and reported, with significant local and

regional risk of spread."

The previous outbreak of Ebola - which has killed around 15,000 people in Africa over the past 50 years, despite advances in vaccines and treatment - was last August in the central region.

That episode killed at least 34 people, before being declared eradicated in December.

Nearly 2,300 people died in the deadliest outbreak in the DRC between 2018 and 2020.

Ebola, believed to have originated in bats, can cause severe bleeding and organ failure.

Outbreaks over the past half century have seen a mortality rate among those affected of between 25 percent and 90 percent, according to WHO. The virus spreads from person to person through bodily fluids or exposure to the blood of an infected person, who become contagious only once they display symptoms. The incubation period can last up to 21 days.

Reports link Pak Interior Minister Naqvi's Tehran visit to efforts aimed at reviving stalled Iran-US talks



ISLAMABAD

Pakistani and Iranian media have linked Pakistani Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi's unannounced visit to Tehran to Islamabad's efforts to revive stalled Iran-US talks amid continuing tensions in West Asia.

Pakistan's Dawn newspaper, quoting unnamed diplomatic sources, reported on Sunday that Naqvi's two-day visit came after US President Donald Trump rejected Tehran's latest response to American proposals.

It also said that Pakistan was continuing shuttle diplomacy aimed at preventing the negotiations from collapsing entirely after momentum generated by earlier rounds of talks in Islamabad slowed sharply.

Iran's semi-official Tasnim News Agency also described Naqvi's trip as part of Pakistan's "ongoing efforts to facilitate dialogue and promote regional peace".

The visit, officially framed around bilateral and border security cooperation, came as the fragile ceasefire brokered earlier through Pakistani mediation continued to hold unevenly amid intermittent tensions around the Strait of Hormuz and prolonged disruption to global energy shipping. Naqvi, who arrived in

Tehran on Saturday, is expected to hold meetings with senior Iranian officials during the visit to cover both bilateral security matters and the wider regional situation.

He met his Iranian counterpart Eskandar Momeni soon after landing.

According to Tasnim News Agency, the two interior ministers discussed Iran-Pakistan relations, regional developments and "the prospects for the resumption of peace negotiations" between Iran and the US.

Iran's official news agency IRNA reported that the two sides also discussed border trade, transit, exchange of goods and bilateral cooperation, while describing the recent high-level contacts between Tehran and Islamabad as part of intensified consultations following the Pakistan-mediated ceasefire.

Pakistan Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi.

"Calm before storm": Trump posts cryptic message amid reports of possible US strikes on Iran

The visit came hot on the heels of Trump's trip to Beijing and his meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, which produced no visible breakthrough on the ongoing conflict despite speculation

beforehand that Beijing could quietly encourage Tehran toward compromise.

Analysts noted that Trump returned from Beijing still publicly emphasising coercive leverage, while simultaneously indicating limited flexibility on enrichment timelines.

Speaking to reporters aboard Air Force One, Trump said he could accept a 20-year suspension of Iran's nuclear activity if they provided what he described as a "real" guarantee, appearing to signal some flexibility from Washington's earlier demands for a permanent end of Iran's nuclear programme.

At the same time, the American leader dismissed Tehran's latest proposal in blunt terms and complained that Iranian officials were backtracking on earlier understandings regarding the handling of highly enriched uranium stockpiles.

The deadlock has reinforced concerns that the negotiations are increasingly moving into a prolonged phase of simultaneous diplomacy and pressure rather than toward any imminent comprehensive settlement.

According to Iranian media reports cited by the Dawn newspaper, at least 1,260 people were killed in Tehran and more than 2,800 were injured in the US and Israeli attacks.

Tehran's municipal government also said that 51,000 residential housing units were damaged, along with 10,733 cars and 754 motorcycles.

Despite formidable hurdles that have so far stalled efforts for peace, Pakistan has continued to push for a negotiated settlement and Naqvi's visit is being viewed as significant, given his closeness to Field Marshal Asim Munir.

Naqvi was part of a delegation led by Munir that visited Tehran last month when Iran-US negotiations were a major focus of the trip.

Arunachal Fashion Council Holds First Auditions for Apatani's Next Top Model



The Fashion & Design Council of Arunachal Pradesh (F&DCAP) today successfully conducted the first phase of auditions and registrations for "Apatani's Next Top Model" at the Hija Youth Association Badminton Hall, Hija Village. The community-based indigenous model platform is being organized under Apatani Fashion Week and the larger vision of Arunachal Fashion Week — The Artisans' Movement.

The initiative is part of a long-term movement by F&DCAP to build a professional, sustainable, and globally connected indigenous fashion ecosystem in Arunachal Pradesh by creating opportunities not only for designers and artisans, but also for aspiring models, photographers, stylists, makeup artists, content creators, and creative youth from every tribe and community of the state.

According to the organizers, Arunachal Pradesh is rich in indigenous textiles, craftsmanship, weaving traditions, and cultural identity, with every community carrying its own unique artistic heritage. While artisans, weavers, and designers already exist across different tribes, F&DCAP stated that there has long been a lack of organized professional platforms for indigenous youth interested in modelling and the fashion industry.

To address this gap, the council has introduced community-based fashion and model platforms beginning with the Apatani community.

The upcoming Apatani Fashion Week will take place during the Dree Festival celebrations from 1st to 6th July at Hija Village, where local designers, weavers, artisans, and creative entrepreneurs will showcase indigenous fashion, textiles, handloom traditions, and handcrafted works.

As part of the event, Apatani's Next Top Model will be conducted on 1st and 2nd July alongside designer showcases and runway presentations. The exhibition, networking sessions, artisan interactions, cultural exchanges, and community fashion activities will continue from 3rd to 6th July.

The organizers stated that the platform is directly connected to the larger vision of "Arunachal's Next Top Model", an indigenous modelling platform created by F&DCAP under Arunachal Fashion Week to professionally groom, mentor, and promote talents from all communities of Arunachal Pradesh.

Under this structure, selected participants and title holders from different community-based model platforms, including Apatani's Next Top Model, will eventually come together to represent their communities at Arunachal's Next Top Model during Arunachal Fashion Week.

F&DCAP stated that Apatani Fashion Week and Apatani's Next Top Model mark the first phase of a larger statewide Community Fashion Week movement that will gradually expand to other tribes and communities of Arunachal Pradesh.

The initiative includes multiple categories to encourage wider participation and representation, including:

- Miss Apatani's Next Top Model
 - Mr. Apatani's Next Top Model
 - Inclusive Category
 - Adaptive Category
- The organizers stated that the platform aims to create

equal opportunities and proper representation for aspiring talents from different backgrounds and abilities while promoting inclusivity within the fashion and creative industry.

F&DCAP further clarified that the initiative is not limited only to selecting winners. Every registered participant automatically becomes part of the F&DCAP Creative & Models Network, through which aspiring youth will continue receiving opportunities related to fashion shows, castings, workshops, collaborations, mentorship, exhibitions, campaigns, portfolio development, and industry exposure.

Selected participants will also receive professional grooming, runway training, mentorship, and guidance from fashion professionals, designers, choreographers, and creative mentors from Arunachal Pradesh, Northeast India, and beyond.

According to the organizers, the movement is not only about fashion, but also about youth empowerment, creativity, identity, economic development, and community growth.

The council emphasized that fashion is often misunderstood as only glamour or beauty pageantry, whereas the fashion industry is deeply connected to business, textiles, tourism, branding, entrepreneurship, employment generation, and cultural preservation.

The organizers stated that the movement also aims to promote indigenous textiles, handloom traditions, cultural tourism, sustainable and ethical fashion, local entrepreneurship, and creative employment opportunities for youths across Arunachal Pradesh. The initiative also encourages greater participation of women and youths in creative entrepreneurship and cultural industries while promoting slow fashion practices rooted in local communities. Celebrating identity, creativity, and indigenous fashion through community-led platforms remains one of the core visions of the movement.

According to F&DCAP, the initiative is driven by a larger vision of creating a globally connected indigenous creative industry where local talents, traditions, and craftsmanship from Arunachal Pradesh can eventually reach national and international platforms.

The organizers further added that many young people today possess immense creativity and potential but often lack proper direction, opportunities, mentorship, and exposure. Through fashion, creativity, and community participation, the council hopes to create positive platforms that encourage confidence, discipline, self-expression, and purpose among youths.

The organizers also announced that the upcoming second phase of auditions will specifically focus on reaching out to youths from rehabilitation centres and vulnerable backgrounds, with the aim of using fashion, creativity, and mentorship as tools for confidence-building, healing, self-expression, and positive transformation.

Speaking on the initiative, Founder and Chairperson of Arunachal Fashion Week and Northeast India Fashion Week, Ms Yana Ngoba Chakpu, stated:

"If we truly want to build a proper fashion industry in Arunachal Pradesh, we must first create the ecosystem ourselves. Every community in Arunachal already has beautiful textiles, artisans, weavers, designers, and unique cultural identities. Now it is time to also create platforms for our youths who are passionate about modelling, fashion, creativity, and the creative industry.

This movement is not only about fashion shows. It is about creating opportunities, representation, confidence, exposure, and long-term growth for indigenous creative youths of Arunachal Pradesh.

Today, many young people believe that success is limited only to a few professions. But the creative industry also has immense potential

economically and professionally. Fashion, design, textiles, media, and creative entrepreneurship can create employment, businesses, and global opportunities for our youths if properly supported and organized."

She further added:

"We also want to reach youths who may be struggling in life, including those in rehabilitation centres. Many of them are creative and talented but lack direction and opportunities. Through this movement, we want to encourage them to believe in themselves and become part of something positive, creative, and meaningful."

Arunachal Fashion Week Chief Operating Officer, Ms. Meena Noshi, said:

"We want this platform to become a long-term movement where aspiring youth can professionally enter the fashion and creative industry. Even if participants are not selected as winners, they remain connected to the F&DCAP network and future opportunities. The vision is collective growth for the creative ecosystem of Arunachal Pradesh with a global outlook."

Today's audition panel included:

- Yana Ngoba Chakpu — Founder & Chairperson, Arunachal Fashion Week and Northeast India Fashion Week
- Taba Tapang — Arunachal's Next Top Model 2026 Title Holder & Mentor

- Tana Ashwin — Chief Operating Officer, Community Fashion Week & Creative Mentor
- Bullo Tajung — Community Youth Coordinator & Mentor
- Hibu Olo — Fashion Designer & Social Worker

- Taro Aku — Organising Committee, Women's Wing Cultural Secretary (Apatani Fashion Week)
- Pura Tabiyo — Organising Committee, Cultural Secretary (Apatani Fashion Week)
- Kago Tagang — Organising Committee, Assistant Cultural Secretary (Apatani Fashion Week)
- Gianga Ramching Mara — CEO, Tagin Fashion Week & Mentor
- Isha Sindik — COO, Tagin Fashion Week & Mentor

The organizers expressed hope that the initiative would inspire greater participation from indigenous youth while strengthening Arunachal Pradesh's indigenous creative economy through fashion, textiles, artisanship, entrepreneurship, and cultural innovation.

F&DCAP stated that the movement is envisioned as a long-term indigenous creative platform that will continue expanding across communities of Arunachal Pradesh with a global vision rooted in local identity.

Registrations for models, designers, artisans, and creative participants are currently ongoing.

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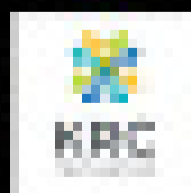


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