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Nagaland Cracks Down on Gutkha, Pan Masala

DIMPUR
The Nagaland Health and Family Welfare Department has prohibited the manufacture, storage, distribution and sale of food products containing tobacco or nicotine, including gutkha and pan masala mixed with tobacco or nicotine, across the state. The ban was notified on Thursday under Regulation 2.3.4 of the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restrictions on Sale of Certain Products) Regulations, 2011, as amended from time to time.

According to the notification, tobacco and nicotine cannot be used as ingredients in any food product or article of food as defined under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006. The department stated that the regulation aims to curb the sale and consumption of products that combine food substances with tobacco and nicotine. The notification clarified that an "ingredient" includes any substance, including food additives, used in the manufacture or preparation of food and present in the final product, even in a modified form. The department also cited a September 23, 2016 order of the Supreme Court in the case involving the Central Areca Nut Marketing Corporation and others. The apex court had observed that manufacturers were attempting to bypass gutkha bans by selling pan masala without tobacco alongside flavoured chewing tobacco in separate sachets, often through the same vendors and premises. The court further noted that companies had shifted from selling ready-to-mix chewing tobacco to marketing gutkha in twin packs intended to be mixed and consumed together. Officials said the prohibition covers all food products, whether chewable or otherwise, that contain tobacco, nicotine or are mixed with toxic additives. The move is aimed at strengthening public health safeguards and ensuring compliance with national food safety regulations.

WHO SAID WHAT



The past eleven years have been the hottest on record. Every fraction of a degree brings greater harm - especially to the most vulnerable. This #WorldEnvironmentDay, warning signals are everywhere. This is the moment to act for our environment & for our future. - Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of United Nations

3 Civilians Killed, Homes Torched in Fresh Violence Manipur

IMPHAL

Fresh violence rocked Manipur's Kangpokpi district in the early hours of Friday, leaving three civilians dead and seven houses destroyed after armed militants allegedly attacked Loibol Khullen village under the Bungte Chiru Sub-Division. According to statements issued by the Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM) and the Kuki Students' Organisation (KSO), South West Sadar Hills Block, the attack took place around 4 am. The two organisations alleged that heavily armed cadres belonging to NSCN-IM, ZUF (K) and ZUF-Kamson were involved in the assault. The victims were identified as Letkhongam Haokip (34), his wife Timmary Haokip (30), and Jangminlal Haokip (34). Besides the loss of lives, seven houses were reportedly set ablaze, causing extensive damage to civilian property.

Strongly condemning the incident, KIM described the attack as a "barbaric act of violence" against unarmed civilians and termed the killing of villagers and destruction of homes a serious violation of human rights and human dignity.

Expressing condolences to the bereaved families, the organisation said



the killings had plunged the Kuki-Zo community into mourning and called upon the Government of India and security agencies to immediately investigate the incident, identify and apprehend those responsible, and strengthen protection for vulnerable villages.

"Kuki Inpi Manipur strongly demands that the perpetrators be brought to justice and that decisive measures be taken to uphold the rule of law and ensure the safety of innocent civilians," the organisation stated.

KIM further warned that it would not be responsible for any consequences arising from what it termed a heinous crime against its people.

The KSO South West Sadar Hills Block also condemned the attack, describing Loibol Khullen as a historic Kuki ancestral village. The student body alleged that the incident was part

of a broader pattern of attacks targeting Kuki communities in the region. "The attack on Loibol Khullen is further proof of how Kukis are being targeted in their own ancestral land under the aggression of Naga insurgent groups," the organisation claimed. The KSO additionally criticised the Rongmei Naga Council Manipur, alleging that a condemnation statement issued soon after the incident suggested prior knowledge of the attack. It also claimed that Charoipantongba Part-I was being used as a hideout by cadres of ZUF-K and NSCN (IM).

However, these allegations could not be independently verified.

Demanding immediate intervention from both the state and central governments, the student organisation urged authorities to take swift legal action against those responsible and ensure the safety and security of Kuki-Zo communities living in vulnerable areas.

The latest incident has further heightened tensions in the hill district, with Kuki organisations pressing for justice for the victims and stronger security measures to prevent further violence.

Assam Cabinet Expanded: 12 Ministers Sworn In, Four Fresh Faces Inducted into Govt

GUWAHATI

The Assam government on Friday expanded its Council of Ministers with the induction of 12 legislators, including four first-time ministers, as Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma reshaped his team following the NDA's sweeping victory in the recently concluded Assembly elections. Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya administered the oath of office and secrecy to the ministers at a ceremony held at the Jyoti-Bishnu Antarjatik Kala Mandir in Guwahati. With the latest expansion, the strength of the Council of Ministers has increased to 17, including the Chief Minister. Under constitutional provisions, Assam's 126-member Assembly can have a maximum of 19 ministers. The four new entrants to the ministry are BJP legislators Ashwini Ray Sarkar, Nilima Devi, Sushanta Borgohain and former Assembly Speaker Biswajit Daimary. Senior AGP leader Keshab Mahanta was also inducted into the ministry.

The remaining ministers sworn in were Ashok Singhal, Ranaj Pegu, Bimal Borah, Jayanta Malla Baruah, Kaushik Rai, Krishnendu Paul and Pijush Hazarika, all of whom had served in the previous Sarma-led government.

They join ministers already sworn into office, including AGP president Atul Bora, BPF leader Charan Boro and BJP leaders Ajanta Neog and Rameshwar Teli. Following the expansion, the ministry comprises 13 BJP ministers, two from the Asom Gana Parishad and one from the Bodoland People's Front, apart from the Chief Minister. The new cabinet reflects a broad regional and ethnic balance. Kaushik Rai and Krishnendu Paul represent the Barak Valley, while Charan Boro and Biswajit Daimary strengthen representation from the Bodo community. Ranaj Pegu represents the Mising community, Ashwini Ray Sarkar the Koch-Rajbongshi community, and Sushanta Borgohain the Ahom community. The expanded ministry also ensures representation from Upper Assam, Lower Assam, Central Assam, North Assam and the Barak Valley, underscoring the ruling alliance's effort to maintain geographical and social inclusivity in governance.

The NDA returned to power with a decisive mandate in the Assembly elections, securing 102 of the 126 seats. The BJP emerged as the dominant partner with 82 seats, while its allies AGP and BPF won 10 seats each.

Manipur CM Urges Faster Indo-Myanmar Border Fencing, Flags Influx Challenges at NEC Meet

SHILLONG

Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh urged the Centre to expedite the construction of fencing along the Indo-Myanmar border, describing the frontier situation as one of the most significant security and humanitarian challenges facing the state and the Northeast.

Addressing the 73rd Plenary Session of the North Eastern Council (NEC) in Shillong, Singh said the continuing civil conflict in Myanmar has triggered a large influx of people into Manipur's border districts, placing severe pressure on local resources and administrative systems. "The ongoing civil conflict in Myanmar has caused a large influx of persons into our border districts, placing enormous pressure on local resources, altering the demographic balance, and creating serious administrative and law enforcement challenges," the Chief Minister said. He also expressed concern over the misuse of the porous international border by transnational criminal networks. According to Singh, the frontier has been exploited by drug traffickers, arms smugglers supplying weapons to non-state actors, and groups involved in human trafficking and other illegal activities.

Welcoming the Union Ministry of Home Affairs' decision to fence the Indo-Myanmar border, Singh termed the initiative a long-awaited and critical step toward strengthening national security.

"This is an essential, long-overdue measure, and I urge that the fencing be completed on priority, covering the entire Manipur-Myanmar border," he said.

The Chief Minister further advocated a comprehensive approach to border

management, including regulated border crossings, deployment of modern surveillance systems, establishment of additional border outposts, improved road connectivity and focused border area development programmes.

"Such a regularised border regime is essential to ensure security and stability along our frontier," he added.

Highlighting the situation within Manipur, Singh said his government inherited a difficult environment and has since been working to restore peace, rebuild trust among communities and promote reconciliation.

He cited Jiribam district as a positive example, noting that members of the Meitei, Kuki, Paite and Hmar communities had come together on a common peace platform. "Jiribam has given us hope. It is the first district in Manipur where Meitei, Kuki, Paite and Hmar communities have come together on a common peace platform. This is the model we seek to replicate across the state," he said. Singh also informed the plenary session that the state government, with support from the Centre, has been implementing humanitarian measures for internally displaced persons (IDPs). Direct Benefit Transfers (DBTs) have been provided to affected families since November 2025, while phased resettlement has begun under the Rs 2,523-crore Resettlement and Rehabilitation Package. The package includes top-up assistance of Rs 21.70 lakh per house for around 7,000 beneficiaries under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G).

Apart from border security and rehabilitation efforts, the Chief Minister highlighted Manipur's ongoing anti-drug campaign and measures being undertaken to address climate change-related challenges in the state.

48-HOUR SHUTDOWN DISRUPTS NORMAL LIFE IN TINSUKIA, DIBRUGARH

TINSUKIA

Normal life was disrupted across Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts on Friday as a 48-hour shutdown called by Moran and Motok community organisations affected transportation, commercial activities and public movement in several areas of Upper Assam. The shutdown, jointly called by the All Moran Students' Union (AMSU), the All Assam Motok Youth Students' Association (AAMYSYA) and allied organisations, began at 5 am on Friday. Protesters staged demonstrations at Rupai Siding-Kakopathar Tini Aali in Tinsukia district, where tyres were set ablaze and vehicular movement was temporarily blocked, causing traffic disruptions.

The agitation was launched in protest against the absence of Moran and Motok representatives in the newly expanded Assam Cabinet and the alleged delay in granting Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to the two indigenous communities.

The impact of the shutdown was visible across both districts, with markets and business establishments remaining largely closed, public transport services disrupted and roads witnessing thin traffic throughout the day. Security personnel were deployed at sensitive locations to maintain law and order and prevent any untoward incidents during the bandh.

Although emergency and essential services were kept outside the purview of the shutdown, routine activities across the region were affected.

Leaders of the protesting organisations warned that the agitation could be intensified if the government fails to address their demands regarding political representation and ST status for the Moran and Motok communities.

Amit Shah Warns Against Demographic Changes in Border States, Unveils Smart Border Plan



AGARTALA

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday asserted that the Centre would not tolerate demographic changes in border states such as West Bengal, Tripura and Bihar, while reaffirming the government's commitment to strengthening border security through technology-driven surveillance and infrastructure.

Addressing personnel of the Border Security Force at the Lankamura Border Outpost in Tripura, Shah said the Centre was taking comprehensive measures to address vulnerabilities along international borders and curb illegal infiltration.

"Demographic changes in West Bengal, Tripura and Bihar will not be tolerated. The Centre is making all efforts to bridge the gaps in guarding international borders," the Home Minister said.

Shah also announced that the government's ambitious smart border project has reached its final stage and will soon be launched on a pilot basis at selected locations across the country.

According to him, the initiative will integrate advanced surveillance technologies, local administrative support and border security personnel to create a more efficient and responsive border management system.

"The concept of smart border will be implemented in seven to eight places of the country as a pilot project," he said. The Home Minister's remarks come amid ongoing concerns over illegal infiltration, cross-border crimes and security challenges in states sharing international boundaries. During his visit, Shah reviewed security arrangements along the India-Bangladesh border and interacted with BSF personnel deployed in the region. He also lauded the force for its role in protecting the country's frontiers.

The Centre has intensified efforts to modernise border management through the deployment of smart fencing, advanced monitoring systems and enhanced coordination among security agencies to strengthen national security and prevent illegal cross-border movement.

Barak Valley Gains Stronger Voice in Assam Cabinet as Kaushik Rai, Krishnendu Paul Return to Ministry

SILCHAR

The induction of Lakhipur MLA Kaushik Rai and Patharkandi MLA Krishnendu Paul into the Assam Cabinet has raised hopes of accelerated development in Barak Valley, with the region now securing two berths in Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's 12-member Council of Ministers.

strengthening Barak Valley's representation in the state government and generating expectations of greater focus on the region's long-pending developmental concerns.

Their inclusion is being viewed not only as a political recognition of Barak Valley's growing electoral significance but also as a signal that southern Assam will continue to occupy a prominent place in the state's development agenda.

Residents and stakeholders across the Valley are hopeful that issues such as road and highway connectivity, flood management, rural infrastructure, welfare delivery, institutional expansion and administrative decentralisation will receive renewed policy attention with two ministers representing the region in the Cabinet.

Kaushik Rai, who previously handled the Food, Public Distribution and



Consumer Affairs, Mines and Minerals, and Barak Valley Development departments, said he had no preference regarding portfolio allocation and would faithfully discharge any responsibility entrusted to him.

"Whatever responsibility is assigned to me, I will carry it out sincerely and efficiently. My priority is to ensure transparent and dedicated governance," Rai said.

He also highlighted the BJP's strong electoral performance in Barak Valley, where the party currently holds nine of the ten Assembly constituencies. Political observers believe his re-induction

reflects the BJP's intent to consolidate its support base in the region while rewarding its electoral success.

During his earlier tenure, Rai oversaw the establishment and operationalisation of the Assam Secretariat, Barak Valley, besides facilitating several infrastructure, education and governance-related initiatives in Lakhipur constituency. Krishnendu Paul, who earlier served as minister for Public Works Department (PMGSY), Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary, echoed similar sentiments, stating that portfolio allocation rests solely with the Chief Minister.

"Whatever responsibility the Chief Minister gives me, I will perform it with sincerity. Serving the people has always been my priority, and I will continue to do so round the clock," Paul said.

Reflecting on his previous ministerial tenure, Paul pointed to the development of nearly 10,000 kilometres of rural roads under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), initiatives aimed at increasing fish production, reducing dependence on imports from other states, and strengthening dairy infrastructure through projects such as the Purabi dairy initiative in Barak Valley.

He said the focus had been on improving connectivity to remote villages and

enhancing self-reliance in key economic sectors. Paul also expressed gratitude to the people of Patharkandi for electing him to the Assembly on three occasions, saying their continued support remained a source of motivation.

His return to the Cabinet is being closely watched in Sribhumi district, particularly following his recent advocacy on the poor condition of National Highways in the border region. During his previous tenure, the area witnessed several major projects, including the foundation stone-laying ceremony for the Agriculture College at Patharkandi by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Political analysts say the inclusion of Rai and Paul serves multiple objectives for the ruling BJP - strengthening Barak Valley's representation in the state's decision-making process, rewarding loyal and experienced legislators, and reinforcing the party's organisational and governance priorities in southern Assam.

For many across Barak Valley, the development has renewed optimism that long-pending demands related to infrastructure, highways, flood control, welfare schemes and institutional growth may now receive greater attention at the highest levels of government.

TEZPUR LITCHI FESTIVAL 2026

6th & 7th June, 2026
District Library Auditorium, Tezpur

- Inaugural Ceremony
- Litchi Garden Tour
- Exhibition-cum-sale
- Cultural Show
- Tezpur Litchi Cuisine
- Music & Food

Institutional Partner: Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority

Organised by: Sonitpur District Administration, Agriculture Dept.

In collaboration with: Assam, NERAMAC, NABARD, Krishi Jay, North East Region



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INDIA'S MISSILE ASCENDANCY

From Astra to BrahMos, India's indigenously built arsenal is reshaping modern warfare – and opening new frontiers in global defence exports. The age of the footsoldier is over. Modern warfare is waged in the skies, across vast maritime expanses, and in the cold calculus of missile trajectories calculated in milliseconds. The conflicts of the 21st century are decided not by the weight of boots on the ground, but by the precision of a warhead launched from hundreds of kilometres away. India, long content to be a buyer in this lethal marketplace, has served notice to the world: it is now a formidable seller.

The recent successful test firing of the indigenously developed beyond-visual-range air-to-air missile Astra – launched from a Su-30 MK-I off the coast of Odisha – is the latest chapter in a quiet revolution. Striking unmanned aerial targets at ranges exceeding 100 kilometres, Astra demonstrated what India's scientific community has long insisted: that world-class precision weaponry can be conceived, designed, and built on Indian soil. Critically, the missile's indigenous radio-frequency seeker was developed entirely by DRDO, validating a depth of technological maturity that few had credited India with. Contemporary military doctrine is predicated on neutralising threats before they materialise. Nations that can dominate the aerial battlespace hold an overwhelming strategic advantage. Astra gives the Indian Air Force the ability to engage hostile aircraft long before they pose a threat to Indian territory. India has simultaneously assembled one of the most comprehensive indigenous missile portfolios in the world: the Agni series for surface-to-surface deterrence, Akash for surface-to-air defence, a range of air-to-surface capabilities, and the crowning jewel – the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile, now extended to an 800-kilometre range.

Operation Sindoor was more than a military operation – it was a live demonstration of indigenously developed systems under real combat conditions. BrahMos's near-Mach-3 speed, terrain-hugging flight paths, and sophisticated electronic countermeasures rendered it virtually undetectable and near-unstoppable within conventional defensive parameters. Anti-missile and drone interception systems performed with equal distinction, protecting Indian installations with homegrown technology. The credibility that comes from battle-tested performance is, in the global defence market, worth more than any number of brochures.

India's emergence as a missile exporter is not merely a matter of military prestige – it is a significant economic opportunity. The Philippines signed a contract worth nearly 375 million US dollars in 2022, becoming BrahMos's first foreign customer. Vietnam has since concluded a deal, and Indonesia is in the final stages. India's Defence Secretary, speaking at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, was unequivocal: New Delhi is prepared to share advanced technologies with trusted ASEAN partners. Several buyers face contested maritime claims with China in the South China Sea, and India's exports carry powerful geopolitical resonance – they are instruments of foreign policy as much as generators of foreign exchange. Argentina and others are watching closely.

India's missile achievements are the result of deliberate and sustained industrialisation. Over fifty public and private enterprises contributed to Astra alone, including Hindustan Aeronautics Limited. Make in India and dedicated defence industrial corridors have created an enabling environment. The private sector's agility, combined with the institutional depth of DRDO, is producing results that neither could have achieved alone. Crucially, Indian systems are competitively priced – a consequence of lower development costs without sacrificing performance. In a global market where buyers must balance capability against budget, India's proposition is increasingly compelling.

India now stands in the elite club of missile-exporting nations – alongside the United States, Russia, France, and Israel. Streamlining export approvals, deepening after-sales support infrastructure, and expanding co-production arrangements will be essential to sustaining this momentum. A focused export strategy, backed by the assurance of systems that have already performed under fire, could transform India's defence sector into a premier foreign exchange earner. Astra and BrahMos are missiles. But together, alongside every system emerging from India's research centres and production lines, they are something more – evidence that a nation once dismissed as a perennial arms importer has, through scientific resolve and strategic patience, become a power that others turn to when they need the means to defend themselves.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Self-esteem is the reputation we acquire with ourselves. - Nathaniel Branden

REVIVING INDIA-CANADA TIES IN FRACTURED WORLD



ASHOK BHAN

The rebooting of relations between India and Canada marks an important diplomatic shift in an increasingly fragmented and polarized world order. After years of tension, mistrust and political acrimony, New Delhi and Ottawa now appear willing to restore communication channels and rebuild a relationship that serves important strategic, economic and human interests on both sides. The thaw may still be cautious and measured, but it reflects political maturity and recognition that major bilateral relationships cannot remain hostage indefinitely to episodic confrontations and domestic political calculations.

India and Canada are not merely two Commonwealth democracies linked by historical association. They are important partners in trade, education, technology, agriculture, energy and innovation. More importantly, they are connected through one of the world's most successful and influential Indian-origin diasporas. Millions of families, students, professionals and entrepreneurs form a living bridge between the two countries. It is this human dimension that made the deterioration in relations particularly damaging and emotionally unsettling for ordinary citizens across both nations.

The diplomatic crisis that followed allegations made by former Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau regarding the killing of a Khalistani separatist on Canadian soil pushed bilateral ties to an unprecedented low. India rejected the allegations strongly and accused Canada of permitting extremist and separatist elements to function freely under the cover of democratic freedoms. Diplomatic expulsions, suspension of negotiations, disruption in visa services and sharp public rhetoric deepened mistrust and affected multiple sectors.

Yet diplomacy rarely functions in absolutes. Nations ultimately return to dialogue because strategic realities compel engagement. Geography may separate India and Canada, but economics, security concerns, educational linkages and geopolitical developments create a strong basis for cooperation. The recent signs of re-engagement suggest that both countries increasingly recognize the costs of prolonged estrangement.

For India, Canada remains an important strategic partner in the Western hemisphere. Canada possesses enormous reserves of critical minerals, vast energy resources, advanced agricultural expertise and globally respected educational institutions. India, on the other hand, is one of the fastest-growing major economies, a technological hub and a key geopolitical actor in the Indo-Pacific region. In a world increasingly shaped by supply-chain disruptions, energy insecurity and strategic competition, pragmatic cooperation between the two countries carries significant value.

Economic considerations alone make reconciliation essential. Bilateral

trade has continued to expand despite political tensions. Canadian pension funds and institutional investors hold substantial stakes in India's infrastructure, renewable energy and real estate sectors. At the same time, Indian professionals contribute significantly to Canada's healthcare, technology, transportation and academic sectors. Indian students constitute one of the largest international student communities in Canadian universities and colleges, contributing enormously to the Canadian economy and multicultural social fabric.

The disruption in normal relations adversely affected these constituencies. Visa delays, uncertainty in educational mobility and concerns among investors created avoidable anxiety. Businesses and institutions on both sides require stability, predictability and policy continuity. Restoration of confidence therefore becomes essential not merely diplomatically, but economically and socially as well.

The timing of this revival is also significant. The global geopolitical landscape is undergoing rapid transformation.

Strategic rivalries are intensifying, economic uncertainty is growing and multilateral institutions are increasingly under strain. In such a climate, middle powers like India and Canada must cooperate on issues such as climate change, clean energy transition, technological regulation, food security and maritime stability. Despite political disagreements, both countries broadly share democratic values, commitment to pluralism and support for a rules-based international order.

Beyond political tensions

At the same time, normalization will not be easy. The issue that strained ties most deeply – the political space available to separatist extremism in Canada – remains sensitive and unresolved. India has consistently maintained that freedom of expression cannot become a shield for advocacy of violence, glorification of terrorism or threats to another country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Canada, shaped by its constitutional traditions and domestic political dynamics, has often approached such questions through the prism of civil liberties and multicultural politics.

Bridging this gap requires seriousness, discretion and sustained institutional dialogue. Public posturing and televised accusations only inflame public sentiment and complicate diplomacy. Mature democracies resolve difficult questions through legal cooperation, intelligence-sharing and evidence-based engagement rather than emotional rhetoric.

A particularly important factor in rebuilding ties is the role of the Indian diaspora in Canada. Indo-Canadians have emerged as one of the country's most successful and respected communities, contributing immensely to public life, politics, business, science and culture. Their achievements symbolize the

strength of India-Canada relations. It is important that the larger diaspora is not viewed through the narrow lens of fringe radical groups whose politics do not represent the overwhelming majority of peaceful and law-abiding citizens of Indian origin.

Indeed, the diaspora can become the strongest constituency for reconciliation. Families, students, entrepreneurs and professionals seek smoother mobility, stronger connectivity and deeper cooperation between the two countries. Their aspirations can serve as a stabilizing force against attempts to promote division and polarization.

The future trajectory of India-Canada relations will also depend substantially on political leadership. Statesmanship lies not in denying differences but in preventing them from overwhelming larger strategic interests. India has increasingly pursued a foreign policy rooted in realism, strategic autonomy and multi-alignment. Canada too appears to recognize that engagement with India is not optional but strategically necessary in the context of Indo-Pacific geopolitics and economic diversification.

Recent high-level engagements indicate movement in that direction. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister Mark Carney have reportedly agreed to fast-track negotiations toward a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, with an ambitious target of expanding bilateral trade substantially by 2030. Canadian company Cameco has also signed a long-term uranium supply agreement with India, while discussions on critical minerals, clean energy and artificial intelligence cooperation have gained momentum.

Education has similarly emerged as a key area of renewed engagement. Both governments have expressed interest in expanding academic partnerships, facilitating exchanges for students and researchers and strengthening mutual recognition of qualifications. Defence dialogue and maritime cooperation are also expected to resume, reflecting wider strategic convergence beyond economic considerations alone. An important development in this context was the recent acknowledgment by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service that Khalistani extremism constitutes a national security concern.

Such recognition may contribute toward a more realistic and balanced understanding of India's long-standing concerns regarding extremist networks operating abroad.

There are several sectors where immediate cooperation can generate positive momentum: clean energy, digital infrastructure, artificial intelligence, food processing, healthcare, pharmaceuticals and higher education. Canada's expertise in sustainable technologies and India's scale, innovation capacity and market potential can complement each other effectively.

ly. People-to-people engagement should also remain central to rebuilding trust. Academic collaborations, parliamentary exchanges, cultural initiatives and youth

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

India's digital infrastructure journey is gathering remarkable momentum.

AirTrunk has announced plans to invest around Rs. 3 lakh crore (\$30 billion) in India, and develop 5 GW of data centre capacity. This is among the largest proposed investments in the country's digital infrastructure ecosystem.

Such investments will strengthen India's position as a global hub for cloud computing and AI, while generating employment opportunities, supporting local supply chains and accelerating innovation-led growth.

It is clear that the future of the world's digital economy is increasingly being shaped in India! ~ Narendra Modi, PM India



dialogue can strengthen social connectivity even during periods of political disagreement. Diplomacy succeeds best when societies remain connected despite governmental tensions. History demonstrates that strong nations do not fear dialogue.

They negotiate differences while expanding areas of cooperation. India and Canada possess the democratic resilience, institutional strength and societal linkages necessary to restore trust.

What is required now is patience, political wisdom and mutual respect. As the world confronts instability and uncertainty, partnerships between democracies become increasingly important. India and Canada have both the opportunity and responsibility to shape a relationship rooted not in suspicion and confrontation, but in pragmatism, cooperation and shared global responsibility.

Handled with maturity and foresight, the revival of ties can open the door to a more stable, constructive and mutually beneficial future for both countries. (The author is a noted legal eagle and a geo-political analyst)

Northeast States Back Vision 2047 Roadmap at 73rd NEC Plenary in Shillong

SHILLONG

Leaders from all eight Northeastern states on Thursday reaffirmed their commitment to building a stronger, more connected and prosperous region as they deliberated on the North East Vision Plan 2047 during the 73rd Plenary Session of the North Eastern Council (NEC) in Shillong.

The high-level meeting was chaired by Union Home Minister Amit Shah and attended by Union DoNER Minister Jyotiraditya M. Scindia, governors, chief ministers, deputy chief ministers and senior officials from across the region.

According to the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER), the plenary session focused on the North East Vision



Plan 2047 and reviewed key regional development priorities aimed at accelerating growth and improving connectivity across the Northeast.

The meeting also assessed the progress made by Chief Minister-led High-Level Task Forces constituted for critical sectors of regional development. Discussions covered major initiatives undertaken by the DoNER Ministry, including updates on flagship schemes and programmes, outcomes of the North East Investment Summit, and recommendations emerging from the Bankers' Conclave.

Participants reviewed a wide range of sectoral initiatives, including tourism promotion, agriculture and horticulture, investment facilitation, self-sufficiency in milk, egg,

fish and meat production, sports development, economic corridor projects, infrastructure and connectivity expansion, as well as the promotion of handloom and handicrafts. Scindia said leaders across the region were united in their resolve to create a "stronger and more prosperous" Northeast through coordinated efforts and long-term planning.

Officials said the deliberations are expected to strengthen cooperation among Northeastern states and facilitate coordinated action toward shared development goals.

The North East Vision Plan 2047 seeks to transform the region into a hub of economic growth, innovation, sustainability, connectivity and cultural prosperity by the cen-

tenary year of India's independence.

Earlier, Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma welcomed Amit Shah to Shillong ahead of the plenary session. A pre-plenary meeting involving chief secretaries, planning secretaries, NEC officials and senior DoNER Ministry representatives was held on Wednesday to finalise key agenda items.

The North Eastern Council, established under the North Eastern Council Act, 1971, serves as the apex regional planning body for the Northeast and plays a central role in promoting coordinated development and cooperative federalism across Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura.

"This Is Not 1962, This Is New India": Arunachal CM Dismisses Border Concerns at NEC Meet

SHILLONG

Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Thursday asserted that the state remains secure and well-prepared along the international frontier, stressing that India's border infrastructure has undergone a dramatic transformation since the 1962 India-China war.

Speaking on the sidelines of the 73rd Plenary Session of the North Eastern Council (NEC) in Shillong, Khandu also reiterated Arunachal Pradesh's position on China's territorial claims over the state.

"We don't share a border with China, but with Tibet-China. Originally, we shared a border only with Tibet," he said, underscoring the historical context of the frontier.

Addressing concerns over border preparedness, the Chief Minister said comparisons with the situation during the 1962 conflict were no longer relevant. "Infrastructure-wise, this is not 1962; this is 2026. This is the New India," Khandu remarked.

He highlighted the significant improvements in roads, connectivity and strategic infrastructure across Arunachal Pradesh's border regions over the past decade, saying the developments have strengthened both civilian access and military readiness.

"If anyone compares Arunachal Pradesh's current infrastructure with that of 1962, it would be completely inaccurate. The infrastructure in our border areas today is vastly improved," he said.

Khandu credited the Union government for prioritising the development of border areas across the northern frontier, from Jammu and Kashmir to Arunachal Pradesh.

"Over the last 12 years, there has been a significant push to strengthen infrastructure in border areas. These regions are now far more accessible, and the infrastructure available to our armed forces has been enhanced considerably," he added.

Manipur High Court Seeks Action Taken Report on Abduction of Six Naga Civilians

IMPHAL

The High Court of Manipur has directed the state government to submit an Action Taken Report (ATR) by Monday on the alleged abduction of six Naga civilians, who have been missing for over 20 days after reportedly being kidnapped by armed Kuki groups.

The directive was issued on Thursday during the hearing of a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) seeking urgent intervention in the case involving six residents of Leilon Vaiphei village who were allegedly abducted on May 13. Their whereabouts remain unknown, prompting concerns over their safety.

According to counsel for the petitioners, Advocate D. Jilius Riamei, the PIL was filed by Advocate Mark Khapai, president of the Naga Lawyers' Association, Manipur, in view of the continued uncertainty surrounding the fate of the missing civilians.

The petition seeks directions to

the state and central governments, along with security agencies, to intensify efforts to trace the abducted individuals, determine their whereabouts, and ensure their safe release at the earliest.

During the hearing, Riamei informed the court that the Manipur government had reportedly stated that the case had been handed over to the National Investigation Agency (NIA). However, the Deputy Solicitor General of India told the court that the agency had not received any official communication from the state government regarding the matter as of Thursday.

Taking note of the submissions, the High Court directed the state government to furnish a detailed report outlining the steps taken to locate the abducted civilians and the progress made in the investigation.

The matter is scheduled to be heard again on Monday, when the state government is expected to place its Action Taken Report before the court.

Kuki Inpi Opposes Electoral Revision in Manipur, Raises Concerns Over Exclusion of IDPs

IMPHAL

The Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM) has strongly opposed the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Manipur, arguing that the exercise cannot be considered fair or inclusive while thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) remain unable to participate.

In a statement issued recently, the apex Kuki civil body expressed concern over the situation of nearly 59,000 internally displaced members of the Kuki-Zo community, many of whom continue to live away from their homes following the ethnic violence that erupted in the state.

KIM said conducting a crucial electoral and administrative exercise without ensuring the participation of a large section of displaced citizens undermines the principles of democratic representation.

"Proceeding with such a critical electoral and administrative exercise without ensuring the



participation of a large and vulnerable section of the population undermines the very principles

of democratic representation," the organisation stated.

The body maintained that the

exclusion of displaced citizens, whether direct or indirect, renders the Special Intensive Revision process incomplete and raises questions about its legitimacy.

Calling for immediate intervention, KIM urged the state government and district administrations to establish accessible and inclusive mechanisms that would enable all affected IDPs to be enrolled and included in the revision exercise. The organisation stressed that appropriate arrangements must be put in place to ensure displaced persons are not denied their electoral rights due to circumstances beyond their control. Warning against proceeding without adequate safeguards, KIM said the credibility of the entire revision process could be called into question if displaced communities are left out.

The apex body concluded by urging the authorities to take swift corrective measures to ensure that no internally displaced person is excluded from the electoral process.

Arunachal Unions Threaten Power, Water Shutdown Over Delayed Wages

ITANAGAR

The Arunachal Pradesh Trade Union Federation (APTUF) and the All Arunachal Pradesh Workers' Union (AAPWU) have warned of a 24-hour shutdown of electricity and water supply services in Itanagar if the state government fails to clear pending wages of casual and contingency workers by June 20.

Addressing a joint press conference, leaders of the two unions expressed concern over the prolonged delay in salary payments to workers employed across various government departments, saying the situation has caused severe financial hardship for thousands of families.

APTUF Secretary General Kenkar Yomcha said many workers have not received salaries for the last two to three months, while



some have reportedly been waiting for wages for as long as eight to nine months.

Despite the delays, the workers have continued to discharge their duties and ensure the uninterrupted functioning of essential public services, he said.

The unions noted that irregular wage payments have affected workers' ability to meet daily household expenses, education costs and other basic needs, placing many families under considerable financial strain.

According to Yomcha, memorandums seeking immediate release of pending salaries were submitted to the state government on March 12 and May 11. However, the unions alleged that no concrete action has been taken to resolve the issue.

Expressing dissatisfaction over the government's response, APTUF and AAPWU warned that casual and contingency workers would cease work and launch a statewide protest if their demands are not met by the June 20 deadline.

As part of the proposed agitation, the unions announced plans

to enforce a 24-hour shutdown of electricity and water supply services in the state capital as a mark of protest against the continued delay in wage disbursement.

The organisations said their demand is aimed at protecting the rights and livelihoods of workers who play a key role in maintaining essential government services across Arunachal Pradesh.

They urged the state government and concerned departments to treat the matter as a priority, clear all pending dues without further delay, and establish mechanisms to ensure timely salary payments in the future.

The unions expressed hope that the government would take corrective measures before the deadline, preventing disruption of essential services and further hardship for affected workers.

KSU Urges Amit Shah to Fast-Track Meghalaya-Assam Border Talks, Push for ILP and Khasi Language Recognition



SHILLONG

The Khasi Students' Union (KSU) has urged Union Home Minister Amit Shah to accelerate efforts to resolve the remaining Meghalaya-Assam border disputes, implement the Inner Line Permit (ILP) in Meghalaya, and facilitate the inclusion of the Khasi language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

In a memorandum submitted to Shah during his visit to Shillong for the 73rd Plenary Session of the North Eastern Council (NEC), the KSU welcomed the Centre's role in helping Meghalaya and Assam resolve the first six areas of difference along their interstate boundary.

The student body, however, called for greater intervention from the Union Ministry of Home Affairs to expedite Phase-II negotiations covering the remaining six disputed sectors.

According to the memorandum, these unresolved areas remain highly sensitive, with periodic tensions affecting local communities. The KSU alleged that recurring provocations from the Assam side often lead to law-and-order concerns and hamper livelihood and development activities in border villages.

"The Union requests through your office that the state of Assam must not act as an aggressor and must maintain peace until these issues are resolved," the organisation stated.

The appeal comes a day after

the governments of Meghalaya and Assam agreed to allow residents from both sides to cultivate land in designated areas of the disputed Lapangap region, while the issue of final boundary demarcation was referred to a higher-level committee.

The KSU also renewed its longstanding demand for the implementation of the Inner Line Permit system in Meghalaya, arguing that unchecked illegal migration has altered the state's demographic profile and poses a challenge to the protection of indigenous tribal communities.

The organisation further claimed that recent eviction drives in Assam and West Bengal have resulted in increased movement of migrants into Meghalaya, which it said lacks adequate safeguards to regulate entry and settlement.

In addition, the KSU appealed to the Union Home Minister to support the inclusion of the Khasi language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, a demand that has been repeatedly raised by community organisations and language activists in the state.

The memorandum reflects three key concerns for the organisation—border resolution, stronger mechanisms to regulate migration, and constitutional recognition of the Khasi language—as Meghalaya continues discussions with the Centre on issues affecting the state's political, cultural and territorial interests.

ED Raids Nine Locations in Mizoram in Probe Into Multi-Crore Myanmar Areca Nut Smuggling Network

AIZAWL

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday conducted searches at nine locations in Mizoram's Champhai district as part of a money laundering investigation linked to an alleged multi-crore cross-border areca nut smuggling racket operating along the India-Myanmar border.

The searches were carried out under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA) at premises associated with individuals suspected of facilitating the illegal import and distribution of Myanmar-origin areca nuts, commonly known as Burmese supari.

According to the ED, preliminary findings point to a well-organised transnational network involved in the large-scale smuggling of areca nuts through porous stretches of the India-Myanmar border in eastern Mizoram. Investigators believe the syndicate operated across multiple states and generated illicit proceeds worth hundreds of crores of rupees.

The raids focused on properties linked to key facilitators in and around Champhai, a major border trade hub adjoining Myanmar. Officials said the



operation aims to trace the financial trail of funds generated through the alleged illegal trade and identify individuals involved in laundering the proceeds.

Investigators allege that consignments were brought into India through the Tiau River and other vulnerable crossing points near Zokhawthar and Champhai without mandatory customs clearance. The areca nuts were then allegedly stored in local warehouses before being transported to markets outside Mizoram.

The ED further claimed that members of the network used forged documents, fabricated e-way bills and fake

billing arrangements to disguise smuggled consignments as locally sourced agricultural produce. This, investigators say, enabled large quantities of areca nuts to be moved across the country while evading customs duties and regulatory scrutiny.

According to the agency, the consignments were transported through a network extending towards Vairengte near the Assam-Mizoram border and onward to other states, with dedicated escorts allegedly deployed to facilitate movement. The money laundering case originates from an FIR registered by the Anti-Corruption Branch of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in Imphal on August 7, 2024. The FIR followed directions issued by the Gauhati High Court while hearing a Public Interest Litigation concerning alleged large-scale smuggling of Myanmar-origin areca nuts through Champhai. Investigators have alleged that fraudulent e-way bills worth approximately ₹251.19 crore were issued through the State GST Department in Mizoram between 2021 and 2024. In addition, e-way bills valued at around ₹86.25 crore were reportedly generated through the Central GST Department during the same period.

Authorities suspect these documents were used to legitimise the movement of smuggled areca nuts outside Mizoram under the guise of lawful local trade, despite local growers not being registered under the GST framework.

The ED has also alleged that traders

and financiers, primarily based in Assam, particularly in Silchar, financed procurement and transportation operations. Local facilitators in Mizoram allegedly received commissions ranging from ₹2 to ₹15 per kilogram of areca nuts handled.

Another aspect of the investigation concerns allegations that local individuals were used as proxy claimants whenever consignments were seized by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) or Customs authorities. These individuals allegedly submitted fabricated import-related documents and claimed ownership of the goods in attempts to secure their release.

Based on allegations involving cheating, forgery and criminal conspiracy—offences scheduled under the PMLA—the ED registered an Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) and launched a detailed financial probe into the movement of funds linked to the suspected smuggling network. Officials said documents, electronic devices and other materials recovered during Thursday's searches will be examined as part of the ongoing investigation. The agency has not disclosed details of any seizures or arrests so far.

The operation highlights increasing scrutiny of illegal cross-border trade activities along the India-Myanmar frontier and their potential links to organised financial crime, with further searches and enforcement actions likely as the investigation progresses.

Quest!

Spiders can walk on water, and breathe under it, too.

Tatkal booking goes haywire despite Railways app reforms



KOLLAM

Nearly a year after the Indian Railways announced key modifications to the Tatkal booking service, passengers continue to face various issues and are unable to get confirmed tickets.

From July 2025, Tatkal tickets booked through the IRCTC website and mobile app were made available only to users authenticated with the Aadhaar number.

Tatkal tickets booked at computerised passenger reservation system (PRS) counters and through authorised agents also require OTP authentication sent to the mobile number provided by the user at the time of booking.

To prevent bulk bookings during the crucial opening period, authorised ticketing agents are not permitted to book Tatkal tickets during the first 30 minutes of the booking window. According to the Indian Railways, around 14 lakh passengers book train tickets through online platform daily, and for Tatkal, around four lakh users log in between 10 am and 11 am.

"There is an issue between demand and supply, which is the reason why the ticket issue persists," a senior Railways official said.

When we tried booking a Tatkal ticket from Kollam Junction to MGR Chennai Central on train no 12624 through the RailOne app, the facility was not functional during the 11 am time slot. On the other hand, a private app showed TQWL 17 for third AC berths within three minutes of the booking period, at 11.03 am, even as the new rules suggest that private apps can only begin bookings after 11.30 am.

Several users on the social media platform X have raised allegations regarding issues with booking Tatkal tickets.

"I have been trying to book a single Tatkal ticket for the past four days. First, the mobile app kept crashing, then the website too. The system conveniently collapses during the first few crucial minutes when genuine users try to book tickets. Then, magically, after five minutes, the app and start working perfectly normally, but by then all tickets would be sold out," lamented a user on X.

"One issue we have experienced in recent days

is that if you search directly for Premium Tatkal tickets, most of the time there won't be any error, and there is a higher chance of getting a confirmed ticket. But with normal Tatkal, things are different. Many are asking whether this is being done intentionally to push passengers towards higher-cost tickets. Many also allege that normal Tatkal tickets are mainly booked by agents," alleged Ansuman Satapathy, a rail enthusiast. Premium Tatkal at times costs three times the rate of normal tickets.

Several rail users have also alleged that some railway staff at ticket counters help travel agents with bookings. A source, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed that such allegations are often raised. "In several cases, server glitches occur on the RailOne app while booking Tatkal tickets. The app keeps loading for nearly five minutes even after payment is completed. By then, tickets would have been sold out. Most Tatkal bookings are made during emergencies, and refunds also take time," said Vishakh Kochiyil, a travel agent from Malappuram.

India, Venezuela agree on long-term energy partnership as PM Modi holds talks with Delcy Rodriguez

NEW DELHI

India and Venezuela agreed to forge a long-term energy partnership, along with measures to ramp up economic ties—including in critical minerals, pharmaceuticals, agriculture and automobiles—after extensive talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Venezuelan Vice President Delcy Rodriguez.

Rodriguez is on a five-day visit to India to bolster the overall bilateral cooperation against the backdrop of New Delhi seeking to diversify its crude oil procurement amid supply disruptions due to the West Asia conflict.

India's procurement of Venezuelan crude oil has picked up momentum since April and the South American nation has already emerged as the third largest oil supplier to the country.

In the meeting, the Venezuelan leader indicated that her country looks at India as a "preferred energy partner" given the size of the Indian economy and the fact that it will be a stable buyer in the energy market for many years to come, Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs Rudrendra Tandon said.

The response by the prime minister was that India looks forward to building this energy relationship and it will cover both upstream and downstream activities, he said at a media briefing.

"The discussions focused on forging an energy partnership. They (Venezuela) see India as a stable demand for many years to come. Therefore, there exists a perfect complementarity for India and Venezuela to work in the energy sector, in both upstream and downstream," Tandon said.

In the talks, the Indian side also raised the issue of Venezuela owing over USD 500 million in dividends to ONGC Videsh.

"It is our money. They (Venezuela)



are very sensitive to the issue," Tandon said responding to a question. The Modi-Rodriguez discussions also went into broadening the overall bilateral economic partnership to other areas.

"Venezuela is a resource-rich country. It's not just about critical minerals; it also has gold, diamonds, and other materials. So, mining is very much there. In fact, there was a discussion on how to assess the potential reserves that they have, or whether we could cooperate in that area," he said.

Tandon declined to directly answer a question on whether the political transition in Venezuela following the detention of then President Nicolas Maduro by US forces in January came up for discussion.

"We all know that there was a transition in Venezuela. We are working with a government that is friendly, that wants a partnership with India. We want to reciprocate that. And do not forget that Venezuela has traditionally

been a very close friend of ours, both bilaterally as well as internationally," he said.

The senior diplomat said BRICS also came up for discussion, and added that it was more to compliment India and PM Modi for New Delhi's chairmanship of the grouping.

MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the two leaders reviewed the full spectrum of bilateral relations and explored new avenues of cooperation in energy, trade, investment, healthcare, automobiles, among others.

"The leaders also exchanged views on global and regional issues of mutual interest.

Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to deepening the bilateral partnership and advancing the interests of the Global South," he said.

Rodriguez took charge as Venezuela's acting president following the detention of then President Nicolas Maduro by US forces in January.

India was once a major processor of Venezuelan heavy crude, importing more than 4,00,000 barrels per day at peak levels, until sweeping US sanctions and rising compliance risks forcibly shut down purchases in 2020.

New Delhi started purchasing crude oil from Venezuela after the sanctions were lifted following Maduro's capture.

Indian oil marketing companies significantly ramped up crude oil sourcing from Venezuela in the last few weeks largely due to the West Asia crisis. The Venezuelan acting president is accompanied by several ministers, including the ministers of foreign affairs, economy and finance, science and technology, communication and information, and transportation.

The Venezuelan delegation will visit several sites connected with energy, pharmaceuticals and auto sectors to gain insights into India's technological and industrial capabilities and to explore opportunities for collaboration.

It is learnt that Rodriguez is expected to visit the Reliance Industries Limited's refinery in Jamnagar in Gujarat.

"The Venezuelan leader will be exposed to the sophistication that India has achieved in the energy sector," Tandon said.

India and Venezuela share a history of warm relations.

A major thrust to the bilateral relationship was imparted by former president Hugo Chavez's state visit to India in March 2005.

The two countries have robust cooperation in the energy sector.

ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL) has a joint venture with Corporacion Venezolana del Petroleo (CVP).

The joint venture is known as 'Petrolera venezolana SA' for the production and exploration of oil in the San Cristobal field, in which the OVL has a 40-per cent stake.

INTERNATIONAL

Iran's Supreme Leader says dealt US, Israel with 'decisive blow'



TEHRAN

Iran's Supreme Leader said Thursday that the United States and Israel had been dealt a "decisive blow" in the West Asia conflict, after the government reported "no tangible progress" in negotiations on ending the conflict.

Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei's message, read out by a prayer leader at a ceremony marking the anniversary of the death of the Islamic Republic's founder, came after the US House of Representatives passed a resolution seeking to halt American military action in Iran.

Weeks of talks marked by threats and flare-ups of violence have failed to secure a deal to end the war and reopen the Strait of Hormuz, a key conduit for global energy flows.

The US and Iran have sent divergent messages, with Tehran insisting on steep conditions for progress, even as President Donald Trump again voiced optimism, telling reporters a deal "could happen... over the weekend".

In his message, Khamenei said his country's enemies, after "facing a decisive blow", were now "experiencing a deeply meaningful and profound humiliation."

He went on to accuse them of seeking to "plant the seeds of doubt, despair, fear, mistrust and division" among the public, calling for unity to "neutralise their sinister plot".

Khamenei has not been seen in public since being wounded in strikes that killed his father and predecessor Ali Khamenei in the opening salvo of the US-Israeli bombing campaign on February 28.

Every June 4 since 1989, the elder Khamenei had delivered a speech at the commemoration of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's death.

This year, however, an empty chair bearing his portrait stood at the mausoleum, according to footage broadcast from the site.

Trump is under pressure to find a way out of the war, which has delivered a shock to markets and proven unpopular at home as midterm elections loom.

But in spite of a ceasefire that has largely held since April, progress towards a final deal has been punctured by sporadic episodes of violence—including on Wednesday, when the US struck targets in Iran, which responded with an attack on Kuwait.

Four lawmakers from Trump's Republican party joined Democrats on Wednesday to vote 215-208 in favour of a resolution ordering the withdrawal of American troops from the Iran war.

"This is a loud and unambiguous message to Donald Trump on behalf of the American people: it's time to end his deeply unpopular and illegal war of choice in Iran," Democrats posted on X.

The resolution was largely symbolic, however, as the US president can veto it if it gains Senate approval.

At a congressional hearing, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Iran's highly enriched uranium stockpiles were at the centre of discussions with Tehran.

Washington insists Tehran must turn over its near-weapons-grade enriched uranium, agree to curb its

nuclear activities and reopen Hormuz.

Iran, however, has long claimed a right to enrichment, and has also preconditioned a deal on halting the parallel conflict in Lebanon, where Israel is fighting the Tehran-backed armed group Hezbollah.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi had said Wednesday that any Israeli attack on the Lebanese capital Beirut would trigger a "full-scale resumption" of the wider war.

In Washington, Israel and Lebanon agreed on Wednesday to implement a new ceasefire after two days of direct talks.

The agreement requires a "complete cessation" of fire by Hezbollah, and calls for "pilot zones" in which the Lebanese armed forces "will take exclusive control of the territory to the exclusion of all non-state actors".

Further talks were planned in the week of June 22, with a view toward reaching a "comprehensive agreement."

A previous truce was meant to have taken hold in Lebanon on April 17 but has never been observed, with the violence only escalating since.

Even after the announcement of the renewed ceasefire, Israel said there had been "a hostile aircraft infiltration" after air raid sirens sounded in the north, while Lebanese state media reported fresh Israeli drone strikes in the south.

Israel's defence minister, Israel Katz, characterised the agreement as granting his forces the "freedom of action, with American backing, to strike in Beirut in response to fire on Israeli communities".

Israel is staging its deepest ground offensive into Lebanon in two decades, and Katz said its troops would stay where they are "while continuing to dismantle terrorist infrastructure".

North Korea unveils a new plant to produce fuel for nuclear weapons



SEOUL

North Korea on Thursday unveiled a new facility to produce nuclear bomb fuels, with leader Kim Jong Un announcing plans to bolster the country's nuclear forces "at an exponential rate."

Some experts still question whether North Korea has functioning nuclear missiles that can reach the US mainland. But the nuclear plant's disclosure implies that Kim is eager to cement his country's status as a nuclear power and has no intentions of placing his bomb program on a negotiating table.

After visiting the site on Wednesday, Kim said he and other top officials "confirmed the order of priority for implementing the ambitious future plan designed to beef up our state's nuclear forces at an exponential rate," according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

KCNA said the facility used "more sophisticated technology" but didn't provide further details like its location. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff assessed the site as a uranium enrichment plant and said it was closely coordinating with the United States to monitor North Korean nuclear activities.

KCNA photos showed Kim walking through narrow aisles lined with dense rows of silver tubes and pipes, in what appeared to be a centrifuge hall.

Another image showed him speaking with senior officials in a meeting room, where a blurred graphic depicting a cone-shaped object was spread across a table. It wasn't immediately clear whether the graphic showed a warhead design.

It's the third time that North Korea has disclosed a uranium enrichment site. In 2024, North Korea released photos of another covert uranium-enrichment plant. In 2010, North Korea showed one at its main Yongbyon nuclear complex to visiting American scholars. Last September, South Korean Unification Minister Chung Dong-young said that North Korea was operating a total of four uranium enrichment facilities including the Yongbyon complex, and that they were running everyday.

During his plant visit, Kim said the urgency for bolstering up the country's nuclear war deterrent, both in quality and quantity, has grown because of confrontations with "the most ferocious enemies," an apparent reference to the U.S. and South Korea. Kim said exercising "the position of a nuclear weapons state" is his country's "invariable" stand. He said North Korea's nuclear materials production capacity has more than doubled compared with five years ago, a claim that cannot be verified independently.

Experts say Kim wants international recognition as a nuclear state so that he could demand the lifting of U.N. economic sanctions. They say Kim would ultimately push for arms reductions talks with the U.S. as a way to win concessions in return for a partial surrender of his nuclear capability.

President Donald Trump has repeatedly expressed his desire to resume diplomacy with Kim, but the North Korean leader responded that the Americans must first drop its demand for North Korea to denuclearize as a precondition for talks.

Since his first round of nuclear diplomacy collapsed in 2019, Kim has performed a provocative run of weapons tests and vowed repeatedly to "exponentially" expand the country's nuclear arsenal.

This led to many experts believing North Korea now likely has nuclear missiles capable of striking the U.S. mainland. But some still note North Korea hasn't proved it mastered last-remaining technological hurdles to obtain such missiles, including ensuring its warheads survive the conditions of atmospheric reentry. They say North Korea also needs to perfect technologies to place multiple nuclear warheads on a single missile to defeat U.S. missile shields.

A senior South Korean official told lawmakers in 2018 that North Korea was estimated to have manufactured between 20 and 60 nuclear weapons, but some experts now put the size of the North's arsenal at more than 100 warheads.

In 2023, North Korea unveiled a type of battlefield nuclear warheads. Some analysts speculated the warhead's unveiling might be a prelude to a nuclear test. But North Korea hasn't carried out a test, which would have been its seventh detonation overall and the first since September 2017.

Rajya Sabha Polls in Northeast: Four States, Four Contests and Crucial Political Messages

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ASSAM
TEA, BRAHMAPUTRA RIVER
3 SEATS
CONGRESS vs [Opposition]

MANIPUR
LOKTAK LAKE
1 SEAT
MEITEI MAYEK
[Party] vs [Party]

MEGHALAYA
1 SEAT
NDA vs TMC / CONG

NAGALAND
1 SEAT
NDPP vs OPPOSITION

POLITICAL MESSAGES

- ASSAM:** CONSOLIDATION OF BJP IN NER, CONGRESS'S UPSTREAM STRUGGLE, ROLE OF REGIONAL ALLIES (UPPL, AGP, AIUDF)
- MANIPUR:** TEST OF BJP'S HILL-VALLEY UNITY, IMPACT OF RECENT UNREST, REGIONAL IDENTITY VOICES
- MEGHALAYA:** NPP'S REGIONAL ASCENDANCY, TMC'S EXPANSION EFFORTS, COALITION POLITICS IN FOCUS
- NAGALAND:** STRENGTH OF NDPP-BJP ALLIANCE, NAVIGATING THE NAGA POLITICAL ISSUE, MESSAGES OF UNITY vs DIVISION

As the June 18 Rajya Sabha elections draw closer, political activity across the Northeast has intensified, with parties finalising strategies and weighing candidates for four Upper House seats that are set to fall vacant in Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh.

While only one Rajya Sabha seat is up for election in each of the four states, the contests carry significance beyond parliamentary representation. In a region where legislative arithmetic is often delicate and political equations frequently evolve, the selection of candidates is being viewed as a reflection of broader political calculations, leadership priorities and coalition dynamics.

Nationally, the Election Commission has announced elections for 24 Rajya Sabha seats across 10 states following the retirement of sitting members. Yet in the Northeast, where every Assembly vote carries considerable weight, the focus has shifted to what these elections may reveal about the future direction of state politics.

Manipur: Rajya Sabha Seat Overshadowed by Leadership Speculation

Among the four northeastern states, Manipur has emerged as the most closely watched battleground, not because of electoral uncertainty but because of the political implications surrounding the choice of candidate.

The seat currently held by Maharaja Leishemba Sanajaoba is nearing the end of its term, and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party is yet to announce its nominee. While the official position remains that the party will reveal its candidate before the nomination deadline, speculation has intensified around several prominent names.

State Home Minister Govindas Konthoujam recently indicated that the process was progressing smoothly following the Election Commission's notification and assured party workers that a decision would be announced at the appropriate time.

However, political attention has largely centred on former Chief Minister N. Biren Singh. Sources within the BJP suggest that Singh remains among the leading contenders, alongside Manipur BJP president A. Sharda Devi and senior party leader Premananda Sharma.

The significance of a potential Biren Singh candidature extends far beyond the Rajya Sabha election itself.

Political observers view the decision as a possible indicator of the BJP's strategy ahead of the next Assembly elections, expected early next year. A Rajya Sabha nomination for Singh could signal a shift in his political role towards national politics and policy engagement in New Delhi. On the other hand, if he remains outside the race, it may indicate his intention to continue playing a direct role in Manipur's electoral and organisational politics.

As a result, the BJP's final choice is being closely scrutinised as a potential clue to the party's future leadership



When feeling depressed, do some cleaning. Straightening out the physical aspects of your life can also bring clarity to the mental one

structure in the state. Unlike Manipur, Meghalaya presents a comparatively clear political picture.

The ruling Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) 2.0 has already thrown its weight behind National People's Party leader James PK Sangma for the June 18 election.

The decision emerged from a meeting of alliance partners chaired by Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma, where constituent parties reportedly reached a unanimous consensus to support the nominee of the National People's Party, the largest member of the coalition.

The choice reflects the alliance's continuing emphasis on stability and collective decision-making.

Although reports suggest that a few other leaders from the Garo and Jaintia Hills regions were considered during internal discussions, the coalition ultimately settled on James Sangma's candidature without any visible dissent.

The smooth selection process offers a contrast to the uncertainty visible in some other states and serves as a demonstration of the ruling alliance's cohesion ahead of future political challenges.

For the MDA government, securing the Rajya Sabha seat would reinforce the perception that the coalition remains firmly in control of the state's political landscape.

Mizoram: ZPM Seeks to Consolidate Dominance

In Mizoram, the ruling Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) has moved quickly to establish its position by naming party spokesperson K. Lalhuangkima as its candidate.

The announcement marks another important step in ZPM's efforts to consolidate its political dominance following its rise to power in the state.

With a comfortable majority in the 40-member Assembly, the ruling party enters the Rajya Sabha contest from a position of strength.

The opposition landscape remains fragmented.

The Congress, which has only a solitary member in the Assembly, is not expected to field a candidate. The Mizo National Front (MNF), however, is reportedly considering entering the race and may nominate a candidate despite the numerical disadvantage it faces.

Even if the election becomes a formal contest, ZPM's legislative strength makes it the clear favourite to secure the seat.

Yet the significance of the election lies not merely in the outcome but in the symbolism attached to it. Winning the Rajya Sabha seat would further strengthen ZPM's claim as Mizoram's dominant political force and provide the party with a stronger voice in national policymaking.

For the opposition, participation itself may serve as an opportunity to remain politically relevant and signal its continued presence in the state's political arena.

Arunachal Pradesh: Intense Competition Within BJP

If Manipur is defined by leadership questions and Meghalaya by coalition consensus, Arunachal Pradesh is witnessing a different kind of contest-one taking place largely within the ruling BJP itself.

The competition for the party ticket has reportedly attracted extraordinary interest, with around 15 aspirants expressing their willingness to contest for the state's lone Rajya Sabha seat.

State BJP president Kaling Moyong confirmed that numerous applications had been received and said the party was still in the process of evaluating potential candidates.

The unusually large number of contenders reflects both the BJP's dominant position in Arunachal Pradesh and the growing political importance attached to Rajya Sabha representation.

For many aspirants, a Rajya Sabha berth offers an opportunity to influence national policymaking while enhancing their own political stature within the party.

The selection process is therefore expected to involve careful balancing of organisational interests, regional representation, political experience and future leadership considerations.

With the nomination deadline approaching, party leaders are expected to announce a candidate well before June 8, bringing an end to one of the most competitive internal races in the region.

More Than Numbers
Although only four seats are at stake across the Northeast, the elections have become im-

portant indicators of political trends that extend beyond parliamentary arithmetic.

In Manipur, the choice of candidate could offer insight into the BJP's future leadership plans. In Meghalaya, the election serves as a test of coalition unity and stability. In Mizoram, it reflects the consolidation of a relatively new ruling force. In Arunachal Pradesh, it highlights the internal dynamics of a dominant political party.

Taken together, these contests provide a snapshot of the evolving political landscape of the Northeast at a time when the region is increasingly attracting national attention for its strategic, economic and electoral importance.

The Election Commission has scheduled scrutiny of nominations for June 9, while candidates may withdraw their papers until June 11. Voting will take place on June 18 between 8 am and 4 pm, with counting set to begin at 5 pm the same day.

By then, the results will not merely determine who occupies four seats in the Rajya Sabha. They may also offer valuable clues about the shifting political currents shaping the future of the Northeast.

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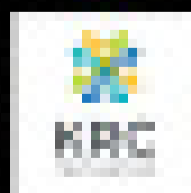


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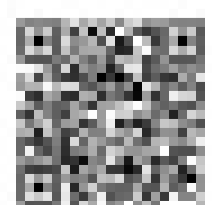


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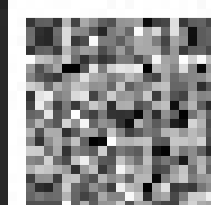


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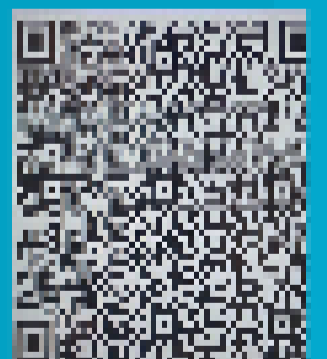
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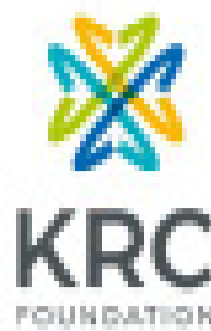
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