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## AFSPA May Be Withdrawn from Most Northeast States by Next Year: Amit Shah

NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday expressed confidence that the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) could be withdrawn from almost the entire Northeast by next year, citing significant improvements in the region's security situation and progress in peace-building efforts.

Shah made the remarks after the signing of a tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) among the Centre, Assam and Nagaland aimed at facilitating oil and mineral exploration in the disputed border areas between the two states.

Describing the agreement as a milestone for the Northeast, the Union Home Minister said the gradual reduction of areas under AFSPA reflects the changing security landscape of the region and the success of ongoing peace initiatives.

"I am confident that barring one or two states, we will withdraw AFSPA from the entire Northeast next year," Shah said.

The MoU is expected to revive hydrocarbon and mineral exploration activities in the Disputed Area Belt along the



Assam-Nagaland border, where resource development had remained stalled for more than three decades due to territorial disputes and security concerns.

Calling the agreement a "historic moment", Shah said it has removed a long-standing obstacle to development and aligns with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of transforming the North-

east into a major growth hub.

According to Shah, the region possesses vast reserves of crude oil, natural gas and other valuable minerals that have remained largely untapped because of law-and-order challenges and unresolved administrative issues.

"This will open new avenues for mineral exploration in the Northeast. The

area not only has oil and gas but huge mineral deposits, which could not be explored due to law and order issues," he said.

Highlighting the economic significance of the agreement, Shah said oil production from the region could increase substantially from the current levels of around 1,000 to 1,500 barrels per day. He also claimed that a single oil field in the area could contain recoverable resources valued at more than ₹15,000 crore.

The Union minister noted that unlocking the hydrocarbon potential of the Assam-Nagaland border region could contribute to India's efforts to reduce dependence on imported energy resources and strengthen domestic energy security.

"If we extract the oil deposits spread across Nagaland, we would be able to reduce dependence on foreign countries for our oil needs," he said.

Linking the development to the broader peace process in the Northeast, Shah said the Centre has signed 12 peace accords with various insurgent groups and stakeholders since 2019. These agreements, he noted, have helped reduce violence in the region by nearly 80 per cent.

He credited the Narendra Modi-led government for maintaining a sustained focus on the Northeast and accelerating development initiatives through improved connectivity, infrastructure and investment.

"The development of both Assam and Nagaland remained hampered for a long time because a consensus could not be reached for an MoU. The avenue that opened today will open doors for development for both states. It is the best example of cooperative federalism," Shah said.

The tripartite agreement is expected to pave the way for joint exploration and development of natural resources in the border region while fostering greater cooperation between Assam and Nagaland on long-pending economic and administrative issues.

The announcement on AFSPA and the signing of the hydrocarbon exploration pact are being viewed as significant indicators of the Centre's efforts to balance security, economic development and regional cooperation in the Northeast, a region that has witnessed substantial political and socio-economic changes in recent years.

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### PERSPECTIVE

According to a study, wishing someone luck makes them do better.

### 'Ghost Ponds' and Fake Projects: Alleged Rs 300-Crore Fisheries Scam Triggers Political Storm in Arunachal Pradesh

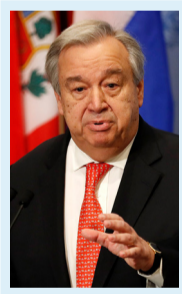
ITANAGAR

Allegations of a massive fisheries scam involving more than Rs 300 crore have triggered a political and administrative storm in Arunachal Pradesh, with activists, former officials and public watchdog groups claiming that public funds were siphoned off through fictitious fisheries projects, fabricated records and so-called "ghost ponds" across multiple districts. The alleged irregularities, currently under investigation by the Special Investigation Cell (SIC-Vigilance), have raised serious questions about financial oversight within the state's Fisheries Department between 2018 and 2024. According to members of the Joint Action Committee (JAC) formed to pursue the matter, preliminary findings indicate suspected financial irregularities of around Rs 183 crore in Kra Daadi district and more than Rs 100 crore in Lower Subansiri district. Together, the alleged diversion of funds could exceed Rs 300 crore, making it one of the largest financial controversies to emerge in the state in recent years.

The allegations centre on claims that funds earmarked for fisheries development were released against projects that either never existed or were grossly misrepresented in official records. Activists allege that several ponds and fisheries units shown as completed under government schemes were, in reality, non-existent. The case has drawn widespread attention because of the scale of the alleged transactions and the apparent ease with which large sums were reportedly withdrawn from government accounts.

Former Fisheries Minister Tage Taki, who held the portfolio between 2019 and 2024 and now serves as Chairman of Science and Technology, described the allegations as deeply troubling and called for a comprehensive investigation.

#### WHO SAID WHAT



Hate speech is a growing threat to peace & security. It divides communities, dehumanises entire groups, and sets the stage for bloodshed. We must break this outrageous cycle through education, support for those targeted by abuse & stronger interventions by governments & technology companies.

~ Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General, United Nations

### COBRA Battalions to Bolster Security Operations in Manipur, Says Home Minister

IMPHAL

Manipur Home Minister Govindas Konthoujam has expressed confidence that the recent deployment of two Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (COBRA) units of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) will significantly strengthen security operations and improve the law and order situation in the violence-hit state.

Speaking to reporters at the Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences (JNIMS) in Imphal, Konthoujam said the specialised anti-insurgency units would provide much-needed reinforcement to security forces operating in the state. The minister made the remarks after meeting family members of six Naga civilians whose bodies were kept at the institute's mortuary following recovery and identification procedures.

"We have very limited security forces. But now, with the recent deployment of two COBRA battalions, I think the situation will improve," Konthoujam said. The COBRA units are among the CRPF's most specialised formations and are trained extensively in guerrilla warfare, jungle combat and counter-insurgency operations. Their deployment comes amid continuing concerns over security and sporadic violence in several hill districts of Manipur. Officials believe the induction of the elite battalions will enhance the state's operational capability, particularly in difficult terrain where armed groups have remained active.

However, the Home Minister stressed that security measures alone would not be sufficient to restore lasting peace and stability. He appealed to people from all communities to cooperate with the administration and security agencies in preventing further violence.

"We, including the Chief Minister, have always appealed to people in both the hills and the valley to cooperate with the state administration to stop any violence. Even if more security forces are deployed, they cannot do much without public cooperation," he said.

The minister's comments came against the backdrop of widespread outrage over the killing of six Naga civilians, whose bodies were recently recovered after they had gone missing for nearly a month. Describing the incident as an "unprecedented and heinous crime", Konthoujam assured that the government was committed to bringing those responsible to justice. "We are committed to arresting the perpetrators and taking action against those who have no humanity," he said.

The six victims had reportedly been abducted from Leilon Vaiphei village in Kangpokpi district on May 13. Their bodies were recovered shortly after the release of 14 Kuki individuals who had allegedly been held captive by armed groups in Senapati district for nearly a month. The recovery of the bodies has heightened tensions and renewed concerns about the fragile security situation in parts of the state, particularly in the hill districts where inter-community mistrust and armed activity continue to pose challenges.

Konthoujam also welcomed the release of the 14 Kuki individuals, describing it as a humanitarian gesture and a positive development in an otherwise troubling situation.

He further commended the efforts of the state police leadership for tracing the missing Naga civilians and coordinating investigations into the incident.

The state government has vowed strong action against those involved in the killings.

### Guwahati Traffic Violations Spike in May; E-Challan Collection Crosses Rs 3 Crore

GUWAHATI

Traffic rule violations in Guwahati registered a sharp increase in May, prompting intensified enforcement by the city traffic police and resulting in a substantial rise in e-challan collections, which crossed Rs 3 crore during the month.

According to official data released by the Guwahati Traffic Police, cases of drunken driving, helmetless riding, wrong-side driving and other traffic offences surged significantly compared to April, reflecting both increased violations and stricter enforcement measures across the city.

One of the most striking increases was recorded in cases of drunken driving. Traffic authorities detected 396 cases in May, compared to just 41 cases in April, representing an almost tenfold rise. Officials described the trend as a matter of serious concern, noting that driving under the influence of alcohol remains one of the leading causes of fatal road accidents and serious injuries. The number of two-wheeler riders caught without helmets also rose sharply during the period. While 7,309 violations were recorded in April, the figure climbed to 11,859 in May. Traffic officials said the increase highlights continuing non-compliance with basic road safety regulations despite repeated awareness campaigns.

A significant portion of these violations—8,230 cases—was detected through the Integrated Traffic Management System (ITMS), underscoring the growing role of technology-based surveillance in monitoring road users and enforcing traffic laws.

Wrong-side driving, another major contributor to road accidents, also witnessed a notable rise. Cases increased from 526 in April to 963 in May. Authorities have repeatedly warned that driving against the designated traffic flow endangers not only the violators but also other motorists, cyclists and pedestrians.

### Assam Budget Session to Commence on July 6; Guv Summons Assembly

GUWAHATI

Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya has summoned the Budget Session of the Sixteenth Assam Legislative Assembly, which is scheduled to begin on July 6 at the Assembly Chamber in Dispur.

An official notification issued by the Assam Legislative Assembly Secretariat stated that the session will convene at 9:30 am on Monday, July 6, marking the start of the state's key legislative proceedings for the financial year.

The order summoning the Assembly was issued by the Governor on June 10 under the provisions of Article 174(1) of the Constitution of India, which empowers the Governor to summon the state legislature from time to time.

According to the notification, the Budget Session will be held at the Assam Legislative Assembly complex in Dispur, where legislators are expected to deliberate on a range of financial, administrative and policy matters concerning the state.

The official order stated that the Governor, exercising powers vested under Clause (1) of Article 174 of the Constitution, has directed the Sixteenth Assam Legislative Assembly to meet on July 6.

The notification was issued by the Assam Legislative Assembly Secretariat and signed by Rajib Bhattacharyya, Secretary-in-Charge of the Assembly.

The upcoming session is expected to be one of the most significant sittings of the year as the government presents its financial agenda and outlines spending priorities for the coming months. Legislators are

also likely to debate key developmental issues, review government programmes and discuss matters of public importance affecting different sectors of the state.

Apart from budgetary proposals, the session is expected to witness discussions on governance, infrastructure development, welfare initiatives, education, health-care, agriculture and other policy issues. Several bills and legislative measures could also be introduced during the proceedings.

The Budget Session provides an important platform for both the ruling party and the opposition to scrutinise government expenditure, debate policy decisions and raise issues concerning their respective constituencies.

Political observers expect the session to feature extensive discussions on Assam's economic outlook, revenue generation, public welfare programmes and ongoing developmental projects being undertaken by the state government.

The Assembly's deliberations are also likely to focus on challenges related to employment generation, infrastructure expansion, flood management, rural development and implementation of various flagship schemes.

With preparations now underway for the session, government departments are expected to finalise budgetary documents and legislative business that will be placed before the House.

The July 6 sitting will formally mark the commencement of the Budget Session, setting the stage for detailed discussions on Assam's financial roadmap and legislative priorities for the year ahead.

## Manipur CM Highlights Peace Efforts, Seeks Centre's Support for IDP Resettlement and Connectivity Projects

NEW DELHI/IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Thursday outlined the state government's progress in restoring peace, rehabilitating internally displaced persons (IDPs), strengthening border security and advancing development initiatives during the 11th Governing Council Meeting of NITI Aayog in New Delhi. The meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was held under the theme "Inclusive Human Development for Viksit Bharat@2047" and brought together Union ministers, state chief ministers, lieutenant governors and senior policymakers to discuss development priorities across the country.

Addressing the gathering, Khemchand Singh expressed gratitude to the Prime Minister for his continued support for Manipur and said coordinated efforts by the Centre and the state government, along with interventions led by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, have contributed to an improvement in the law-and-order situation in the state.

Focusing on the rehabilitation of people displaced by the ethnic violence that has affected Manipur, the Chief Minister said substantial humanitarian assistance has been provided with Central government support. He informed the council that nearly 11,000 displaced families have already been resettled under the ongoing Resettlement and Rehabilitation Package.

Khemchand Singh said the state government is working to ensure the return and rehabilitation of



the remaining displaced families at the earliest. He also acknowledged the Centre's approval of 5,000 additional houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin for 2026-27 and sought further assistance to strengthen rehabilitation efforts.

The Chief Minister noted that since assuming office on February 4, 2026, his administration has prioritised not only the restoration of peace but also rebuilding trust among communities affected by the conflict. He said reconciliation and confidence-building measures remain central to the government's approach.

Detailing his outreach initiatives, Khemchand Singh said he visited relief camps in Jiribam and Imphal and travelled through Kangpokpi district to Senapati to assess ground realities. He also held interactions with representatives of Naga and Kuki communities during a visit to Ukhrul district and conducted virtual meetings with displaced persons from

Kangpokpi and Churachandpur districts. Highlighting developments in Jiribam, the Chief Minister said the district has emerged as a positive example of community cooperation. He noted that members of Meitei, Kuki, Paite and Hmar communities have worked together peacefully, enabling displaced families to begin returning to their original homes.

According to him, the government aims to replicate the Jiribam model of peace-building and rehabilitation in other parts of the state to facilitate the return of displaced persons and restore normalcy.

Turning to security concerns, Khemchand Singh stressed the importance of strengthening surveillance and border management along the Indo-Myanmar frontier. He called for coordinated action to tackle cross-border challenges, including drug trafficking, arms smuggling and human trafficking.

He informed the meeting that the Ministry of

Home Affairs has completed fencing work along 50 kilometres of the international border, while construction on an additional 80 kilometres is currently underway.

On healthcare, the Chief Minister said more than 1.4 lakh treatments worth over ₹181 crore have been provided free of cost under the Ayushman Bharat programme and the Chief Minister's Health Shiksha Yojana scheme. He also stated that Manipur currently records the lowest Infant Mortality Rate in the country.

In the education sector, Khemchand Singh highlighted that Manipur's Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education stands at 35.5 per cent, significantly above the national average of 28.4 per cent. He said recruitment of teaching faculty is being carried out on a mission mode basis and educational institutions are implementing reforms under the National Education Policy 2020 and the National Credit Framework.

Seeking additional support from the Centre, the Chief Minister proposed the inclusion of Manipur in the national Research and Innovation Parks and Mega Educational Hubs initiative. He suggested establishing a regional innovation node linking universities, the National Institute of Technology, the Indian Institute of Information Technology and local enterprise clusters.

The Chief Minister also highlighted efforts to improve employment opportunities for youth through skill development programmes. He said Manipuri youths trained in the Japanese language through collaborations involving the Skill Development De-

partment and the National Skill Development Corporation have secured jobs in healthcare and hospitality sectors in Japan.

In addition, he noted that young people from the state have found employment opportunities in countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Portugal and the United States through the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana.

To further strengthen workforce development, Khemchand Singh requested modernisation of Industrial Training Institutes and polytechnic institutions through a hub-and-spoke model supported by industry partnerships.

The Chief Minister also called for the expansion of the Aspirational Districts and Aspirational Blocks programmes to cover more regions of Manipur. He urged the Centre to accelerate infrastructure projects linked to the Act East Policy, including national highways, railway expansion and trade facilities at Moreh.

He said enhanced connectivity would reinforce Manipur's strategic position as India's gateway to Southeast and East Asia while boosting trade and economic development.

Concluding his address, Khemchand Singh reaffirmed his government's commitment to steering Manipur towards lasting peace, stability and inclusive growth. He expressed confidence that continued support from the Central government and collaboration with NITI Aayog would help the state play a significant role in achieving the vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047.



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## BRICS AND THE NEW GEOGRAPHY OF AGRICULTURAL TRADE

**A**s India assumes the chairmanship of BRICS in 2026, it does so at a pivotal moment for global agriculture. The traditional architecture of agricultural trade, once defined largely by tariffs, quotas and market access negotiations, is undergoing a profound transformation. Climate change, supply-chain disruptions, food security concerns, sustainability requirements, digital compliance systems and geopolitical tensions are increasingly shaping how nations produce, trade and consume food. In this changing landscape, agriculture has emerged as one of the most strategic dimensions of India's BRICS presidency.

The significance of the BRICS grouping has expanded considerably following its recent enlargement. Today, the bloc accounts for nearly half of the world's population, around 40 per cent of global GDP and roughly a quarter of international trade. According to recent assessments, intra-BRICS merchandise trade has witnessed remarkable growth over the past two decades, reflecting the growing economic weight of emerging economies. While agriculture represents only a segment of this larger commercial relationship, it remains one of its most sensitive and consequential components.

Food occupies a unique place in national policymaking. Unlike many other traded commodities, disruptions in food systems have immediate social, economic and political consequences. Rising food prices can trigger inflationary pressures, threaten livelihoods and deepen vulnerabilities among the poorest sections of society. Fertiliser shortages, energy shocks or disruptions in shipping routes can quickly affect farm productivity and food availability. It is therefore no exaggeration to state that agriculture has become central to questions of national security and economic stability.

The BRICS countries possess a remarkable diversity of agricultural strengths. Brazil stands among the world's leading exporters of soybeans, sugar and meat. Russia plays a critical role in grain production and fertiliser exports. India contributes significantly through rice, spices, marine products and a wide range of commodities produced by millions of smallholders. China remains one of the largest food importers and processors globally, while South Africa provides a gateway to important African agri-food markets. The inclusion of new members such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Ethiopia and Indonesia further broadens the bloc's agricultural profile, bringing together expertise in logistics, food-security investments, tropical agriculture, fisheries and emerging African food systems.

Yet complementarities alone do not guarantee resilience. The experience of recent years has demonstrated that even countries with abundant production capacities remain vulnerable to disruptions caused by conflict, pandemics, climate-induced disasters and volatile commodity markets. The challenge before BRICS, therefore, is not merely to increase trade volumes but to create systems that make agricultural trade more predictable, transparent and reliable.

India's chairmanship offers an opportunity to move the conversation from declarations to practical cooperation. One of the most important priorities should be the creation of trusted trade infrastructure. Modern agricultural commerce increasingly depends on the ability of countries to verify product quality, trace supply chains and meet stringent sanitary and phytosanitary standards. Digital certification systems, interoperable documentation, streamlined customs procedures and greater regulatory cooperation can reduce transaction costs while improving trust among trading partners.

The foundation for such cooperation already exists. Previous BRICS discussions have recognised the importance of trade facilitation in agriculture and the need to harmonise standards wherever possible. The next step is implementation. India, with its experience in digital public infrastructure and large-scale technology platforms, is well positioned to champion systems that make agricultural trade more efficient and less vulnerable to bureaucratic delays.

Another area demanding urgent attention is the resilience of agricultural input supply chains. Food production does not begin at the farm gate; it starts with access to fertilisers, energy, seeds, finance and logistics. Recent geopolitical developments have exposed the fragility of these interconnected systems. Fertiliser shortages and energy price spikes have demonstrated how quickly disruptions in one part of the world can affect agricultural productivity elsewhere.

For India, this issue carries particular importance. A substantial portion of its fertiliser and energy requirements is linked to BRICS economies. Ensuring stable supplies is therefore not merely an economic concern but a strategic necessity. Cooperation among BRICS nations on early-warning systems, transparent market information and contingency planning could help mitigate future disruptions. Establishing mechanisms for timely information-sharing on stocks, prices and supply conditions would enhance preparedness and reduce uncertainty.

Equally important is the need for stronger agricultural market intelligence. Information has become as valuable as commodities themselves in an era marked by volatility. Reliable data on crop prospects, food stocks, weather patterns and trade flows can help governments anticipate shortages and respond proactively. The proposed BRICS Grain Exchange reflects recognition of this reality, but its broader value lies in creating greater transparency across agricultural markets. India should advocate for a robust market intelligence framework within existing BRICS agricultural institutions. Such a mechanism could monitor commodity trends, track sanitary and phytosanitary alerts, assess production forecasts and provide early signals of emerging risks. Better information would not eliminate crises, but it would significantly improve the capacity of governments and businesses to manage them before they escalate. However, the success of any agricultural trade agenda must ultimately be measured not only by export figures or trade balances but by its impact on people. Agricultural trade often benefits large corporations and commodity exporters, while millions of small farmers remain disconnected from the opportunities generated by global markets.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

First say to yourself what you would be; and then do what you have to do. - Epictetus

# THE FIBRE ECONOMY: INDIA'S NEXT BIG GLOBAL OPPORTUNITY



SHRI GIRIRAJ SINGH

India's relationship with fibre is civilisational, 5,000 years deep, woven into our villages, our traditions, and our collective identity. From the legendary muslins of Mohenjo-daro, celebrated as "woven air", to the craftsmanship that travelled across continents, fibre has always been the lifeblood of our rural economy. Today, at the cusp of a global sustainability revolution, that ancient knowledge is our greatest competitive advantage.

For decades, the banana pseudostem was discarded as waste. Today, that same biomass is premium fibre, feeding export markets, sustaining rural livelihoods, and turning agricultural residue into national revenue. From waste to wealth, from local abundance to global opportunity: this is the essence of India's New Age Fibre movement, paving the way for India's path to global leadership in green materials and future-ready textiles.

New Age Fibres are sustainable, plant-based materials that blend India's traditional knowledge with modern innovation. Fibres like Bamboo, Hemp, Banana, PALF, Flax, Ramie, Sisal, Milkweed, and Kapok have existed for centuries, but are now being rediscovered for high-value uses in textiles, defence, biodegradable composites, and premium products. They are expanding India's natural fibre basket for a greener future.

Rising incomes, global sustainability mandates, and traceable sourcing requirements are fundamentally re-wiring global supply chains and driving a new fibre economy. Consumers are seeking comfort, breathability, and sustainability in everything they wear. This structural shift is why India's fibre consumption is set to surge from 15 MMT today to 23 MMT by 2030. The

world is increasingly seeking exactly what India can offer: ethical, sustainable, and high-performance natural fibres backed by centuries of expertise.

This vision is supported by a clear institutional and policy framework. Under the Mission for Cotton Productivity, with a total outlay of ₹5,664 crore for 2026-2031, a dedicated ₹300 crore New Age Fibres component has been kept. Complementing this effort, the National Fibre Mission announced in the Union Budget 2026-27 provides the broader strategic framework, resting on four pillars: KRISHI-SUTRA for cultivation and raw material development, INFINITY for research and innovation, GRAM-SETU for infrastructure and enterprise creation, and GMPS for branding and market development.

The strength of this policy framework lies in decades of scientific research already delivering results. Milkweed (Aak/Madar), traditionally offered to Lord Shiva, has emerged as a breakthrough after 18 years of research at the Northern India Textile Research Association (NITRA), evolving into defence applications such as sleeping bags for soldiers operating at -20°C. These are 10% lighter than polyester alternatives, warmer than wool, and CLO/Cell certified. Grown on 55 million hectares of wasteland without fertiliser, it can generate ₹1.5-2 lakh per acre annually for farmers.

Bamboo fibre offers an estimated 1.8 million tonnes annual production potential and additional farmer income from agricultural residue, while Bamboo can yield up to 60 tonnes of biomass per hectare, creating major opportunities for the Northeast. Hemp is also emerging as a promising global market, with cultivation already permitted in Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh. Along with Flax, Sisal, Ra-

mie, PALF, Nettle, and Kapok, these fibres are steadily expanding India's sustainable fibre base.

Building on this scientific momentum, the National Seminar on New Age Fibres became a platform where science, policy, and enterprise could converge. It brought together researchers, scientists, entrepreneurs, farmer organisations, industry leaders, and policymakers under one roof. Three Task Force reports covering all ten priority fibres were released, translating field science directly into scheme design and investment priorities.

The seminar also openly identified gaps in standards, processing infrastructure, and institutional financing, reflecting a mission focused on real execution. Key priorities emerged: scaling production from 10,000 MT to 10 lakh MT in five years, developing quality standards, promoting machinery indigenisation, reducing dependence on imported processing technology, and building cluster-based fibre ecosystems from cultivation to value addition. Together, these steps position New Age Fibres as a whole-of-government mission for rural prosperity and sustainable growth.

Perhaps the most transformative frontier is fibre blending. India's real strength lies not in a single fibre, but in combining them intelligently, such as milkweed for thermal lightness, wool for warmth, bamboo for breathability, and cotton for softness. A blended fabric is not a compromise; it is a performance upgrade creating fabrics that are stronger, smarter, and more sustainable, with better comfort, moisture management, durability, and versatility across fashion, lifestyle, and technical textiles.

The benefits cascade across the entire value chain. Consumers get better comfort and functionality, manufacturers gain premium and differentiated products, and farmers benefit from diversified demand and more resilient incomes. For India, blending is more than a technical innovation; it is the bridge from raw fibre supply to globally competitive, value-added brands rooted in Indian identity.

At its core, the New Age Fibre movement is about transforming lives, creating opportunities for farmers, strengthening rural livelihoods, empowering women, and enabling entrepreneurs to build global enterprises from local resources. Anchored in Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji's 5F Vision: Farm to Fibre to Fabric to Fashion to Foreign, India's Green Fibre Revolution is not a distant promise. The strategy is set. The institutions are engaged. The science is proven. The entrepreneurs are ready. What India is now doing, fibre by fibre, blend by blend, region by region, farm by farm, is writing the next great chapter of its textile story.

(The author is the Union Minister of Textiles. The views expressed are personal)

### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

**The boundary issue between Assam and Nagaland is a long standing issue due to which the natural resources lying in the area could not be utilised for the nation.**

**Today with signing of the MoU in presence of Adarniya @AmitShah ji, this bottleneck is now removed.**

~ Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM, Assam



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# NSCN (IM) Seeks Terror Designation for Kuki Militant Groups After Killing of Six Naga Captives

DIMA PUR

The National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) has called on the Government of India to outlaw Kuki militant groups and their affiliated village volunteers, demanding that they be formally designated as terrorist organisations following the alleged killing of six Naga captives.

In a strongly worded statement issued on Thursday, the NSCN/GPRN condemned what it described as the "barbaric killing" and "grotesque mutilation" of the six victims, alleging that the incident constituted a serious violation of human dignity and amounted to crimes against humanity.

The organisation said it would continue pursuing efforts to ensure



that those responsible for the killings are identified and brought to justice.

Expressing outrage over the incident, the NSCN (IM) said that even during periods of conflict, universally accepted moral principles require respect for the dead.

The statement alleged that the

desecration of bodies serves only to spread fear and inflict psychological trauma on families and communities already affected by violence.

"Even in times of conflict, universal moral norms demand absolute respect for the deceased. The deliberate desecration of human bodies serves no purpose other than to spread terror, weaponise fear, and inflict deep psychological trauma on grieving families and communities," the statement said.

The organisation further argued that the deliberate targeting of civilians, extreme acts of violence and alleged mutilation of victims should be treated as acts of terrorism.

The NSCN (IM) urged the Centre to take immediate and decisive action against the groups it holds re-

sponsible for the killings.

According to the organisation, any group accused of committing such acts should be stripped of political legitimacy and subjected to the full force of the law.

It warned that failure to act could undermine efforts to achieve justice and lasting peace in the region.

The demand comes amid rising tensions following the recovery of six bodies believed to be those of Naga men who were reportedly abducted from Leilon Vaiphei village in Manipur's Kangpokpi district on May 13.

The NSCN (IM) also criticised Indian security forces, alleging unequal treatment in their handling of protests and security-related incidents.

The organisation claimed that se-

curity personnel had acted against Naga women demonstrators, student activists and village guards while allegedly failing to prevent the killing of Naga civilians.

Questioning what it described as disparities in the enforcement of law and order, the group said such actions raised concerns about the principles of justice, equality and protection guaranteed under the Constitution.

The organisation expressed its condolences to the families of the deceased and reiterated its support for efforts to secure justice for the victims.

The statement comes at a time of heightened tensions in Manipur and neighbouring Naga-inhabited areas, where the recovery of the six bodies

has triggered widespread outrage and protests.

Several Naga organisations, including the United Naga Council, have also condemned the killings and demanded action against those responsible.

The incident has further complicated the already fragile security situation in Manipur, where ethnic tensions and sporadic violence continue to pose significant challenges to peace and reconciliation efforts.

Authorities have not yet announced the findings of ongoing investigations into the abduction and deaths of the six individuals. Security agencies continue to monitor the situation amid growing demands from various organisations for accountability and justice.

## Over 1.07 Lakh Girls Receive HPV Vaccine in Assam, Says Himanta Biswa Sarma

GUWAHATI

Assam has crossed a significant milestone in its fight against cervical cancer, with more than 1.07 lakh girls vaccinated under the state's Human Papillomavirus (HPV) immunisation programme, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced on Friday.

The vaccination campaign, one of the largest public health initiatives focused on women's preventive healthcare in the state, aims to protect young girls from cervical cancer, one of the most common cancers affecting women worldwide.

Sharing an update on social media platform X, the Chief Minister said the programme reflects the government's commitment to ensuring that girls in Assam can pursue their aspirations without being hindered by preventable diseases.

"Assam's daughters deserve to chase their dreams without barriers," Sarma said, emphasising that the HPV vaccination drive is a major step towards securing a healthier future for young girls across the state.

According to the Chief Minister, the government has set a target of vaccinating 3.27 lakh girl children under the programme. Of this, more than 1.07 lakh beneficiaries have already received the life-saving vaccine, marking substantial progress since the initiative was launched.

Health officials said the campaign is being implemented across educational institutions and healthcare facilities, with special emphasis on reaching eligible adolescent girls in both urban and rural areas.

The Human Papillomavirus is one of the leading causes of cervical cancer, a disease that claims thousands of lives every year in India. Medical experts have consistently highlighted vaccination as one of the most effective preventive measures against HPV-related cancers and associated health complications.

By expanding access to the vaccine, the Assam government aims to significantly reduce the future burden of cervical cancer and improve long-term health outcomes for women in the state.

## Three Northeast Rajya Sabha Seats Decided Unopposed; Mizoram Set for Lone Electoral Contest

GUWAHATI

Three of the four Rajya Sabha elections scheduled in the Northeast have been decided unopposed, with candidates from Manipur, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh securing victories after the completion of scrutiny and withdrawal of nominations on Thursday. Mizoram remains the only state in the region headed for a contest, with polling scheduled for June 18.

The developments mark a significant phase in the biennial elections to the Upper House of Parliament, as the region prepares to send a new set of representatives to New Delhi.

In Manipur, BJP state president and veteran party leader A. Sharada Devi was formally declared elected to the Rajya Sabha after no rival candidate remained in the fray. Returning Officer Rohit Saram handed over the certificate of election to her at the Manipur Legislative Assembly complex in Imphal on Thursday afternoon.

One of the Bharatiya Janata Party's most prominent women leaders in the state, Sharada Devi has played a key role in strengthening the party's organisational network over the years.

Following her election, she pledged to raise issues concerning the welfare and development of Manipur at the national level.

Speaking to reporters after receiving her certificate, she said that her election to Parliament would provide an opportunity to directly engage with the country's top leadership and advocate for the interests of the people of the state.

Her unopposed election also reflects the BJP-led alliance's numerical strength in the Manipur Assembly and comes at a time when the state continues to face political and social challenges requiring sustained attention from the Centre.

In Meghalaya, the lone Rajya Sabha seat was won uncontested by National People's Party (NPP) leader James Sangma, a senior politician and former state minister. He was declared elected after the deadline for withdrawal of nominations passed without any other candidate entering the race.

Returning Officer and Meghalaya Legislative Assembly Secretary Malthus Sangma formally announced his election on Thursday.

## Former Manipur CM N Biren Singh Condemns Killing of Six Persons, Hopes for Improved Law and Order



IMPHAL

Former Manipur Chief Minister Nongthombam Biren Singh on Thursday expressed hope that the law and order situation in the state would improve following recent security measures initiated by the Central government and administrative changes aimed at restoring stability.

Speaking to reporters after visiting the Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences (JNIMS) in Imphal, Biren Singh condemned the killing of six persons believed to be Naga hostages and extended his

condolences to their families.

The former chief minister met the bereaved relatives at the institute, where the bodies have been kept for identification and post-mortem examination. Biren Singh said recent developments indicate efforts to strengthen the security framework in the conflict-hit state. According to him, the deployment of specialised security personnel, including the CoBRA unit, and recent changes in departments responsible for law and order management could help improve the prevailing situation. He expressed optimism that these measures would contribute to restoring normalcy and enhancing public confidence in the administration's ability to maintain peace. Describing the deaths as deeply tragic, Biren Singh said the loss of lives had caused immense pain and sorrow. He condemned the killings in strong terms and conveyed his sympathies to the families of the victims.

"The loss of innocent lives is painful, and my heartfelt condolences go out to the bereaved families,"

he said while interacting with the media after the hospital visit.

The former chief minister's visit came amid growing concern over the recovery of the six bodies, which has intensified tensions in parts of the state. Appealing for restraint, Biren Singh stressed that violence cannot be a solution to any issue and urged all communities to pursue peaceful means of resolving differences. He said disputes and grievances should be addressed through dialogue, discussions and negotiations rather than confrontation.

"Violence has no place in society. Problems can be resolved through talks and mutual understanding," he said, calling upon all sections of society to contribute towards restoring harmony and stability.

The BJP leader also underscored the importance of public participation in peace-building efforts, stating that lasting peace can only be achieved through collective cooperation among communities.

The six bodies brought to JNIMS are believed to be those of six individuals who were reported-

ly abducted on May 13 from Leilon Vaiphei village in Kangpokpi district. Authorities recovered the bodies recently and transported them to the medical institute in Imphal for identification and other legal formalities. The incident has sparked widespread concern and renewed calls for justice, with several organisations demanding a thorough investigation and accountability for those responsible.

The latest development comes at a time when Manipur continues to grapple with ethnic tensions and security challenges that have affected several districts over the past months. Security agencies have intensified operations in vulnerable areas, while community leaders and political representatives have repeatedly appealed for peace and reconciliation.

Biren Singh reiterated that restoring law and order remains essential for the state's recovery and urged all stakeholders to work together to ensure that peace, stability and normalcy return to Manipur at the earliest.

## Illegal Infiltration Must Be Curbed to Safeguard India's Territorial Integrity: Meghalaya MP James Sangma

SHILLONG

Rajya Sabha MP from Meghalaya, James Sangma, has called for stringent action against illegal infiltration along India's international borders, asserting that protecting the country's territorial integrity must remain a paramount national priority. Addressing journalists on Thursday, Sangma expressed concern over reports of infiltration attempts along the India-Bangladesh border and stressed the need for constant vigilance by security agencies tasked with safeguarding the nation's frontiers. "Protection of India's territorial integrity should remain a top priority under all circumstances," the parliamentarian said, emphasizing that any form of illegal cross-border movement poses a serious challenge to national security. Sangma's remarks came in the wake of reports of tension between the Border Security Force (BSF)



and the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) in the Nandirchar area of South West Garo Hills district. The situation reportedly arose following an incident involving an alleged Bangladeshi national near the international border, prompting heightened attention from security agencies on both sides. While refraining from commenting on operational details, Sangma said the concerned authorities are closely monitoring developments and taking appropriate measures to address the situation. The Meghalaya MP reiterated

his support for the initiatives being undertaken by the Government of India to strengthen border management and ensure national security.

"As a Member of Parliament, I fully support the measures being taken by the Government of India in matters concerning national security," Sangma said. He further stated that he remains ready to contribute in any capacity required to safeguard the country's interests and support efforts aimed at securing the nation's borders. Highlighting the strategic importance of border security, Sangma said maintaining the sanctity of India's international boundaries is a responsibility that extends beyond security forces alone. He stressed that preserving the country's territorial integrity and preventing illegal infiltration should remain a collective national objective involving governments, security agencies and citizens alike.

The Rajya Sabha member noted

that effective border surveillance, coordinated action among agencies and sustained vigilance are essential to addressing challenges posed by illegal cross-border activities. Meghalaya shares a long and porous international border with Bangladesh, making border management a critical issue for the state. Authorities have frequently undertaken measures to curb illegal infiltration, smuggling and other trans-border activities in sensitive sectors along the frontier. Sangma's comments come amid renewed discussions on strengthening border infrastructure and enhancing security arrangements in northeastern states bordering Bangladesh and Myanmar. Reaffirming his position, the MP said that safeguarding India's borders and protecting national sovereignty must remain a key priority as the country continues to address emerging security challenges along its international frontiers.

## BJP's Tai Tagak Elected Unopposed to Rajya Sabha from Arunachal Pradesh



ITANAGAR

Senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Tai Tagak has been elected unopposed to the Rajya Sabha from Arunachal Pradesh, securing the state's lone seat in the Upper House of Parliament.

Tagak's uncontested victory ensures that the BJP retains its representation in the Rajya Sabha from the northeastern state. The veteran leader was the party's sole candidate for the seat and emerged victorious without facing any opposition.

His election marks another significant milestone in a long political career during which he has played an active role in the BJP's growth and organisational strengthening in Arunachal Pradesh.

Veteran Leader to Represent Arunachal in Parliament

With his election to the Rajya Sabha, Tagak will now represent the interests and aspirations of Arunachal Pradesh at the national level, bringing regional concerns and developmental priorities to Parliament.

Political observers believe his extensive experience in public life and understanding of issues affecting the border state will contribute meaningfully to debates and policymaking related to Arunachal Pradesh and the wider Northeast region.

As a member of the Upper House, Tagak is expected to advocate for key issues concerning infrastructure development, connectivity, border security, education, healthcare and economic growth in the state.

Chief Minister Congratulates Tagak

Congratulating the newly elected parliamentarian, Arunachal

Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu described the achievement as well deserved and expressed confidence in Tagak's ability to effectively represent the state in Parliament.

Khandu said Tagak's experience, dedication and commitment to public service would strengthen Arunachal Pradesh's voice in national policymaking forums.

The Chief Minister also expressed hope that the veteran BJP leader would continue working for the development of the state and the welfare of its people from his new position in the Rajya Sabha.

The unopposed election reflects the BJP's strong position in Arunachal Pradesh, where the party currently enjoys overwhelming political support.

By securing the lone Rajya Sabha seat without a contest, the BJP has maintained its hold over the state's representation in the Upper House.

The development is seen as a continuation of the party's dominance in Arunachal Pradesh politics, where it has strengthened its organisational base and electoral presence over the past decade.

Tagak's entry into Parliament is expected to further bolster the representation of northeastern states in national discussions, particularly on matters related to regional development, connectivity, border management and socio-economic progress.

With his formal election completed, Tai Tagak is set to begin his tenure in the Rajya Sabha, carrying forward the responsibility of representing Arunachal Pradesh's interests at the national level while contributing to legislative debates and policy deliberations in Parliament.

## Meghalaya Launches Tax Amnesty Scheme for Commercial Vehicles, Eyes Revenue Recovery of Rs 200 Crore



SHILLONG

The Meghalaya government has rolled out a One-Time Settlement (OTS) Scheme offering substantial tax and penalty waivers to commercial vehicle owners, aiming to recover long-pending dues, improve compliance and generate up to

Rs 200 crore in revenue.

The scheme was formally launched in Shillong by Deputy Chief Minister and Transport Minister Sniawbhalang Dhar following approval from the state cabinet.

Designed as a limited-period amnesty programme, the initiative allows commercial vehicle operators to regularise outstanding liabilities by paying reduced amounts under a government-approved settlement formula.

Under the scheme, commercial vehicle owners will receive an 80 per cent waiver on pending Motor Vehicle Tax and Goods and Passenger Tax dues, including related penalties.

In addition, the government has announced a 90 per cent waiver on penalties associated with overdue Fitness Certificates, offering significant relief to transport operators burdened by accumulated liabilities.

According to Dhar, the scheme covers pending dues accumulated over several years, regardless of when they originated, enabling vehicle owners to settle their obligations under a single settlement framework.

The Transport Department estimates that total outstanding dues across Meghalaya have reached nearly Rs 1,100 crore.

Of this amount, approximately Rs 900 crore pertains to penalties linked to Fitness Certificates, making it the largest component of unpaid liabilities.

Officials believe the settlement programme could result in the recovery of between Rs 180 crore and Rs 200 crore, provided a substantial number of vehicle owners take advantage of the waiver scheme before its expiry.

Government data indicates that tax arrears are widespread across the state's transport sector.

According to official figures: "Around 65,000 vehicles have pending Motor Vehicle Tax liabilities."

"12,642 vehicles owe Goods and Passenger Tax payments."

"More than 57,000 vehicles have outstanding Fitness Certificate penalties."

Officials expect the scheme to encourage transport operators to clear dues that may otherwise remain unrecoverable while helping the government improve compliance levels.

The One-Time Settlement Scheme will remain in force until August 31, 2026, giving commercial vehicle owners nearly three months to avail themselves of the

concessions.

The government has urged truck owners, passenger transport operators and other commercial vehicle stakeholders to utilise the opportunity and regularise their records before the deadline.

Dhar cautioned that once the scheme concludes, vehicle owners will have to resume regular tax payments on a quarterly or monthly basis as prescribed under existing regulations.

He also emphasised that such large-scale waiver programmes cannot be introduced frequently and should be viewed as a special one-time opportunity.

Addressing questions on the proposed vehicle scrappage policy, the Transport Minister said the state government is currently working on the necessary systems and administrative mechanisms required for its implementation.

He noted that the policy would be rolled out only after the required groundwork, infrastructure and procedural framework are put in place.

The Meghalaya government believes the OTS Scheme will serve multiple objectives by reducing the burden of accumulated dues on vehicle owners, increasing tax compliance and strengthening state revenues.

Officials say the initiative is expected to bring thousands of defaulting vehicles back into the formal system while helping the government recover a portion of long-pending arrears that have accumulated over several years.

With outstanding dues touching nearly Rs 1,100 crore, the success of the settlement programme could provide a significant boost to Meghalaya's revenue collection efforts while offering much-needed relief to the commercial transport sector.

Quest!

99% of all the species that have ever lived on Earth are now extinct.

## Govt bars commercial users from buying bulk fuel at retail petrol pumps



NEW DELHI

The Centre has barred industrial, commercial and institutional consumers from purchasing petrol and diesel through retail fuel stations, directing them instead to source supplies from designated bulk sale points, according to an official order issued by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

The restrictions, which can remain in force for up to 90 days at a time, come amid an abnormal rise in diesel demand in certain regions, driven by bulk consumers shifting purchases to retail outlets due to a sharp pricing gap.

In Delhi, diesel is currently priced at Rs 95.20 per litre at petrol pumps, while bulk diesel costs Rs 134.50 per litre. The price differential emerged after state-owned oil companies moderated retail fuel rates to shield ordinary consumers from the surge in crude prices following the West Asia crisis in late February.

Bulk consumers, including telecom towers, industries using diesel for power generation, and firms relying on diesel as feedstock, continue to pay market-linked prices, unlike retail consumers.

On June 11, the ministry issued the Motor Spirit and

High Speed Diesel (Temporary Regulation of Supply through Retail Outlets) Order, 2026, empowering oil marketing companies and authorised fuel retailers to restrict bulk fuel purchases from retail outlets.

The government said the decision was prompted by the "current prevailing geopolitical situation affecting certain regions of the world" that has disrupted international petroleum supply chains, shipping logistics and product availability.

"It has been observed in current situation that abnormal increases in sales of Motor Spirit (petrol) and High Speed Diesel (diesel) through Retail Outlets in certain parts of the country are driven by shifting of industrial, commercial and institutional consumers to Retail Outlets owing to the price difference between retail and bulk sale prices," the notification said.

Under the order, industrial, institutional and commercial users may no longer procure fuel from petrol pumps and would instead have to rely on their own consumer pumps or bulk supply channels.

The restrictions, which will be in place for up to 90 days, follow abnormal demand growth, particularly that of diesel, in

some pockets after bulk users started buying fuel from petrol pumps due to the pricing difference.

The notification also caps diesel purchases at retail outlets at 200 litres per customer or vehicle per day and permits sales only through vehicle fuel tanks or Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO)-approved containers. Such diesel "cannot be resold", the order said.

According to the government, unchecked bulk buying at retail stations could divert supplies meant for regular consumers and "create the potential for localised shortages and disruption of essential services to the common man".

The order authorises public-sector oil marketing companies and other fuel retailers to enforce restrictions, while state governments and Union Territories have been tasked with curbing hoarding, black marketing, unauthorised procurement and fuel diversion.

Any restrictions imposed under the framework may remain in force for an initial period of up to 90 days and can be extended through a fresh government notification.

The Centre said the measures are aimed at ensuring the "equitable availability" of petrol and diesel, curbing hoarding and diversion, and maintaining uninterrupted fuel supply nationwide.

"The Government may by a special order exempt any consumer, class of consumers, area, transaction, or category of transactions from all or any of the provisions of this Order," the notification said.

It also directed state governments and Union territory administrations to take "all necessary measures to implement" the order, including "action against hoarding, black marketing, unauthorised procurement, diversion and other malpractices."

## India, Bangladesh discuss illegal border crossings and security issues during DG-level talks



NEW DELHI

India and Bangladesh discussed issues related to border deaths and illegal, inadvertent and forcible crossings during four-day director general-level talks that concluded in New Delhi on 11 June, according to an official statement issued on Friday.

A delegation led by Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) Director General Major General Mohammad Ashrafuzzaman Siddiqui visited Delhi for talks with the Border Security Force (BSF). The Indian

delegation was headed by BSF Director General Praveen Kumar.

The 57th edition of the biannual DG-level border coordination conference was held at the BSF headquarters between 8 and 11 June.

In a statement issued a day after the talks concluded, the BSF said both sides held detailed discussions on measures to effectively prevent cross-border crimes, including the smuggling of narcotics, arms, counterfeit currency, gold and other contraband, as well as illegal border crossings and human trafficking. The delegations also discussed

issues relating to border deaths, illegal, inadvertent and forcible crossings in border areas, construction of border infrastructure, implementation of the Coordinated Border Management Plan, confidence-building measures and the need for closer cooperation in addressing emerging security challenges along the border.

The meeting was significant as it was the first since the BNP government assumed office in Dhaka earlier this year and a new BJP government came to power in West Bengal.

More than half of the 4,096-km India-Bangladesh international border, stretching 2,216 km, lies in West Bengal.

The new state government led by Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari has announced strict action against illegal Bangladeshi infiltrators, stating that such individuals would face a "3D action" of detect, delete and deport.

The statement said both countries reaffirmed their commitment to maintaining peace, tranquillity and stability along the border. They also agreed to strengthen coordinated patrols, enhance surveillance, improve real-time information sharing and intensify joint efforts against cross-border criminal networks.

According to the BSF, the meeting was conducted in a "cordial, positive and forward-looking atmosphere", reflecting the enduring cooperation and mutual trust between the two border guarding forces. The two sides also stressed the need to sensitise border populations about the sanctity of the international boundary and promote greater public awareness to prevent illegal activities in border areas. "Both sides expressed satisfaction with the outcome of the conference and reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthen cooperation, mutual trust and professional engagement in the interest of secure and peaceful borders," the statement added.

The meeting concluded on a "highly positive note", with both delegations expressing confidence that the discussions would further strengthen friendly relations between the two countries.

It was reportedly the first time in the history of these talks that the customary joint press conference by the directors general of the two forces, held after signing the joint record of discussions on the final day, did not take place.

The next round of talks is expected to be held in November, when the Indian delegation will travel to Dhaka.

## INTERNATIONAL

# Ahead of G7, Carney softens tone toward Trump with trade talks at stake



OTTAWA

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney became a symbol of middle power resistance after a celebrated speech earlier this year, but he is expected to be more muted in his criticism of U.S. President Donald Trump at an upcoming summit in Europe.

Carney's speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, helped make him an international political star in January, when he declared the global rules-based order over and condemned coercion by great powers on smaller countries. The prime minister received widespread praise and attention for his remarks and upstaged Trump at the gathering.

But the Group of Seven summit of industrialized democracies that begins Monday in France comes ahead of the scheduled July 1 review of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, or USMCA, the latest iteration of the North American free-trade pact that

has intertwined the economies of the United States, Mexico and Canada since the early 1990s. It is a crucial moment in trade talks, and Trump said this week that he may not renew the deal.

More than 70% of Canada's exports go to the U.S., so preserving the accord is critical for Canada.

Canadian historian Robert Bothwell said Trump is more of a problem for Carney "than anybody else because we are more exposed to the United States than anybody else."

Trump leaves for the G7 right after he hosts UFC fights at the White House on Sunday for his 80th birthday. The summit will unfold as tensions are ramping up between Trump and Canada. One of the world's most durable and amicable alliances — born of geography, heritage and centuries of common interests — is broken, as seen in several recent examples of tension between leaders.

Ontario Premier Doug Ford, the

leader of Canada's most populous province, had a reception with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Washington canceled Monday at the last minute. Vic Fedeli, one of Ford's ministers, said if Trump forced the chamber to cancel, "Ford should be wearing that as a badge of honor."

Trump said again this week that the U.S. doesn't need anything that Canada has. Carney has set a goal for Canada to double its non-U.S. exports in the next decade, saying Trump's trade war is causing a chill in investment.

In other developments, the opening of a major Canadian bridge across the Detroit River that Trump previously threatened to block was delayed Thursday due to unresolved issues.

Trump's actions, including launching a trade war and suggesting Canada become the 51st U.S. state, have infuriated Canadians and created the political environment for Carney to win the job of prime minister after promising to confront Trump.

Trump administration officials keep noting that only two countries, China and Canada, retaliated against America in the trade war. U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer says Canada's retaliatory measures are a major issue in talks.

Daniel Béland, a political science professor at McGill University in Montreal, said Carney seems to have moderated his tone toward the Trump administration to avoid worsening relations.

"There is a clear tension between what Prime Minister Carney said in his Davos speech about middle powers standing up to hegemony and his attempt to nudge the U.S. administration 'in the right direction' with regard to the USMCA review and trade policy more generally," Béland said.

Carney has downplayed Trump's most recent comments about Canada becoming the 51st state.

Canada and Mexico want the USMCA to be renewed for another 16 years. Trump has mused about withdrawing from it. More likely it will be subject to annual reviews for the next 10 years.

Carney will meet with French President Emmanuel Macron on Friday in Paris ahead of the summit in Évian-les-Bains, France.

The prime minister will also travel to Ireland this weekend to meet with the Irish prime minister in a bid to diversify trade away from the U.S.

This is Carney's ninth trip to Europe in the 15 months since he became prime minister in March 2025.

The U.S. "will clearly remain Canada's largest trading partner for the predictable future," Béland said, calling it an inescapable reality that Carney "must keep front of mind even as he seeks to make Canada somewhat less dependent on trade with the U.S."

## South Korea's ex-president gets 30 years over North Korea drone incident



SEOUL

South Korea's ex-president Yoon Suk Yeol was sentenced to 30 years in prison on Friday for sending drones into North Korea, a move prosecutors argued was aimed at creating a pretext for his disastrous martial law declaration in 2024.

Special prosecutors said back in April that Yoon's effort to "fabricate wartime conditions" with the drones had undermined state security.

This sentence comes after Yoon was given life in jail in February for leading an insurrection to "paralyse" South Korea's National Assembly with his martial law declaration.

Yoon was "given 30 years in jail" for the charges involving the drones, a spokesperson for

the Seoul Central District Court told AFP Friday, without giving further details.

Prosecutors had also argued that the operation heightened tensions with North Korea and led to the leak of classified information, including details about force capabilities after the drones crashed, the Yonhap news agency reported. Yoon has appealed against the insurrection conviction, insisting that he declared martial law "solely for the sake of the nation".

Yoon's legal team had denied the charge involving the drones and said there was "no prior order or subsequent approval" by him for the drone operation cited by prosecutors.

They said the operation was in response to North Korea sending balloons carrying trash

across the border that year and was "a legitimate act of self-defence" unrelated to Yoon's martial law declaration.

His lawyers dismissed the prosecution's claims as a "speculative and false novel".

Drone flights remain a flashpoint in tensions between the two Koreas, which remain technically at war. South Korean President Lee Jae Myung expressed regret earlier this year after an investigation found government officials had sent drones into the nuclear-armed North in January.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's powerful sister called Lee's statement "wise behaviour", but hopes for a rapprochement faded after the diplomatically isolated nation returned to calling the South its "most hostile" enemy.

## Tripura's Female Labour Force Participation Rate Jumps to 45.9%, Signalling a Shift in Women's Economic Empowerment



Tripura has emerged as one of the brighter success stories in women's economic participation in India, with the state recording a significant rise in its female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) to 45.9 per cent, according to Chief Minister Manik Saha. The development reflects the growing role of women in the state's economy and highlights the impact of targeted government interventions aimed at improving education, skill development, entrepreneurship and employment opportunities for women.

The Chief Minister shared the figures while addressing a meeting of the Governing Council of NITI Aayog, where he outlined Tripura's progress across a range of socio-economic indicators. He attributed the rise in women's workforce participation to a combination of welfare schemes, self-employment initiatives, enhanced access to education and a sustained push toward gender-inclusive development.

The increase in female labour force participation is particularly significant in a country where women's workforce involvement has historically remained below global averages. Economists and policymakers have long argued that improving women's participation in economic activity is one of the most effective ways to accelerate growth, reduce poverty and improve social outcomes. Tripura's latest figures suggest that the state may be making meaningful progress on this front.

The female labour force participation rate measures the proportion of women who are either employed or actively seeking employment. A rate of 45.9 per cent indicates that nearly one in every two women of working age in Tripura is engaged in economic activity, either through formal employment, self-employment, agriculture, small businesses or other income-generating occupations.

The improvement reflects broader changes taking place across the state's socio-economic landscape. Over the past several years, the Tripura government has focused on expanding opportunities for women through self-help groups, livelihood missions, vocational training programmes and financial inclusion initiatives.

Officials believe these interventions have helped create an enabling environment for women to participate more actively in the economy. Increased access to education and skill training has also expanded employment opportunities beyond traditional sectors, allowing more women to enter services, entrepreneurship and small-scale industries.

One of the key drivers behind the rise in women's workforce participation has been the growing network of women-led self-help groups (SHGs) across Tripura. These groups have become important vehicles for financial inclusion, savings, credit access and micro-enterprise development.

Through various government-supported programmes, thousands of women have been organised into SHGs, enabling them to access loans, receive training and start income-generating activities. From handicrafts and food processing to livestock rearing and retail businesses, women entrepreneurs have increasingly become visible contributors to local economies.

The success of SHGs has not only enhanced household incomes but has also improved women's decision-making power within families and communities. Development experts often point to such grassroots economic participation as a crucial step toward long-term empowerment.

The state government has also prioritised skill development programmes designed specifically for women and young girls. Training initiatives covering information technology, tailoring, beauty and wellness services, food processing, hospitality, healthcare assistance and entrepreneurship have helped equip women with marketable skills.

By linking skill development programmes with employment opportunities and credit support, authorities have sought to ensure that training translates into actual economic participation. The strategy appears to be yielding results as more women enter the workforce or establish small enterprises.

Officials say the emphasis on skill-based employment is particularly important in a changing economy where traditional agricultural livelihoods alone may not be sufficient to support growing aspirations and income needs.

The expansion of educational opportunities has played an equally important role in improving women's participation in economic activities. Over the years, Tripura has made significant strides in increasing school enrolment among girls and improving educational infrastructure.

Higher levels of literacy and educational attainment have contributed to greater workforce readiness among women. Educated women are more likely to seek employment, pursue professional careers or engage in entrepreneurial ventures.

The government has also introduced a range of scholarship schemes and support mechanisms aimed at encouraging girls to continue their education. These efforts are gradually creating a pipeline of skilled and educated women capable of participating in diverse sectors of the economy.

Improved healthcare services and social welfare measures have further contributed to women's economic participation. Better maternal healthcare, nutritional support programmes and expanded access to health facilities have helped improve overall well-being among women.

Experts note that healthier populations are more productive and better able to participate in economic activities. Moreover, welfare schemes aimed at reducing financial vulnerabilities often enable women to take entrepreneurial risks or pursue employment opportunities that might otherwise be inaccessible.

Tripura's emphasis on social development indicators has therefore complemented its economic initiatives, creating conditions that support women's engagement in the labour market.

The rise in female labour force participation is also linked to growing entrepreneurial activity among women. Government-backed schemes promoting start-ups, micro-enterprises and small businesses have encouraged women to explore self-employment opportunities.

Women entrepreneurs are increasingly active in sectors such as agriculture, food processing, handicrafts, handloom production, retail trade and service industries. Digital platforms and online marketplaces have further expanded opportunities by allowing women-owned businesses to reach wider markets.

Officials believe that fostering entrepreneurship among women not only generates employment but also creates local economic ecosystems that benefit entire communities.

Much of the progress in women's workforce participation has come from rural areas, where livelihood missions and community-based development programmes have gained considerable traction.

Agriculture remains an important source of employment for women in Tripura, but rural women are increasingly diversifying into allied activities such as poultry farming, fisheries, mushroom cultivation, horticulture and agro-processing. Government assistance in the form of training, financial support and market linkages has helped strengthen these sectors.

Rural women's participation in collective enterprises and cooperatives has also contributed to increased economic engagement. Such initiatives have created opportunities for women to earn independent incomes while remaining within their communities.

The increase in female labour force participation carries significant implications for Tripura's economy. Greater participation by women expands the productive workforce, boosts household incomes and contributes to overall economic growth.

Research across the world has consistently shown that economies benefit when more women participate in the labour market. Increased female employment often leads to higher consumption, improved family welfare, better educational outcomes for children and reduced poverty levels.

For a state like Tripura, where development challenges are shaped by geography, connectivity and employment opportunities, harnessing the economic potential of women can serve as a powerful growth driver. Economists argue that sustaining and further improving female labour force participation could significantly enhance the state's development trajectory in the coming years.

Despite the encouraging figures, challenges remain. Labour force participation does not necessarily guarantee quality employment or adequate income levels. Many women continue to work in informal sectors where wages, job security and social protections may be limited. Gender disparities in pay, access to higher-paying jobs and leadership positions also persist. Additionally, balancing domestic responsibilities with employment remains a challenge for many women, particularly in rural areas.

Experts stress the need for continued investments in childcare facilities, workplace safety, transportation, digital literacy and financial inclusion to ensure that gains in participation translate into meaningful economic empowerment. There is also a need to create more formal employment opportunities and strengthen market access for women-led enterprises.

Tripura's progress aligns with broader national efforts to increase women's participation in the economy. The Government of India has repeatedly emphasised the importance of women-led development as a cornerstone of inclusive growth.

Programmes focused on entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, digital empowerment and skill development have sought to create opportunities for women across the country. States that successfully implement these initiatives often witness improvements in socio-economic indicators and labour market outcomes.

Tripura's experience demonstrates how targeted interventions at the state level can complement national policies and produce tangible results.

As Tripura seeks to accelerate its development journey, the growing participation of women in the workforce could become one of its most important strengths. The rise in female labour force participation to 45.9 per cent reflects more than a statistical achievement; it signals changing social attitudes, expanding opportunities and the increasing economic agency of women.

The challenge now lies in sustaining this momentum. Continued investments in education, skills, healthcare, entrepreneurship and employment generation will be essential to ensuring that more women can participate in and benefit from economic growth.

If the current trajectory continues, Tripura could emerge as a model for gender-inclusive development in the Northeast, demonstrating how empowering women economically can transform communities, strengthen families and contribute to long-term prosperity. The state's experience underscores a simple but powerful lesson: when women gain access to opportunities, entire societies stand to benefit.

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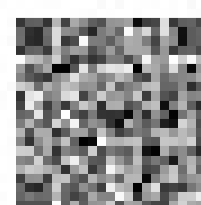


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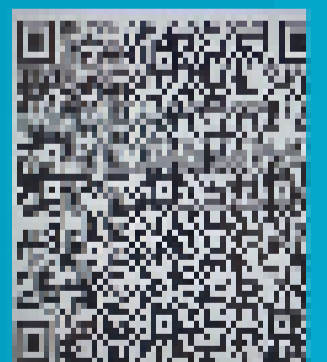
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