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**NPF office burnt down amid protest over 6 abduction deaths**

**IMPHAL**  
The Naga People's Front (NPF) Manipur headquarters in the Liangmai Taphou area was set on fire on Thursday, amid protests over the death of six Naga individuals.

The incident is said to have taken place in connection with anger over the abduction of the six individuals on May 13, 2026, from Leilon Vaiphei village. Further details are awaited.

Meanwhile, the bodies of six Naga men, who had been missing since May 13 after being allegedly abducted from Leilon Vaiphei village, were brought to the Jawaharlal Institute of Medical Sciences (JNIMS) mortuary in Imphal on Thursday early morning amid tight security arrangements. Speaking to reporters here, Liangmai Naga Council president Timothy Wizunamei said the community was "totally shocked" after receiving the bodies. "Yes, we have just received six bodies of those who were abducted on May 13. To our utter shock, we received them as dead bodies today, and we are shattered," he said. Wizunamei said the bodies arrived at the JNIMS mortuary, but family members and community leaders had not yet identified them.

"We have not identified who is who yet. We are waiting to identify the faces and ascertain whether they are indeed our six missing people," he said.

Wizunamei further stated that the relatives and community leaders would collectively decide whether to formally claim the bodies after they have been identified and verified.

Expressing dissatisfaction over the handling of the case, he said, "It took them 28 days to bring the dead bodies here. We are very disappointed with the way the government has acted."

**WHO SAID WHAT**

**Deeply touched by the good wishes conveyed by people from all walks of life today and over the last few days. While I may not have been able to respond to each message individually, I cherish every greeting conveyed.**

**I consider it a privilege to have the opportunity to serve Bharat and contribute to our nation's development journey. Over the years, the people of India have repeatedly voted for stability, good governance and development. Their trust has been my greatest source of strength. I remain fully committed to working with even greater dedication to realise the vision of a Viksit Bharat and fulfil the aspirations of 140 crore Indians**

~ Narendra Modi, PM

**Manipur govt won't remain 'mute spectator' to atrocities: CM Khemchand Singh on 'killing' of Naga hostages**

**NIA Team Examines Bodies as Probe Into Deaths of Six Alleged Naga Hostages Continues**

**IMPHAL**

The Manipur government "will not remain a mute spectator to these atrocities", Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh said on Thursday after police recovered the mortal remains of six people believed to be among missing Naga men abducted by armed groups in Kangpokpi district.

The six members of the Naga community were allegedly abducted from Leilon Vaiphei village on May 13.

In an official statement, Singh said that the state government would not tolerate such violence and said, "Culprits responsible for the murder will be arrested and punished as per law."

The bodies were recovered a day after 14 Kuki individuals, abducted nearly a month ago in Senapati district, were released on June 9.

"After nearly 24 hours of sustained search operations involving around 450 personnel of the Manipur Police, CRPF, and Assam Rifles, assisted by sniffer dogs and forensic expert teams, the mortal remains of six persons were recovered this afternoon. The deceased are believed



to be among those taken hostage from Leilon Vaiphei on May 13, 2026," Manipur Police said in a post on X on Wednesday.

The six Nagas and the 14 Kukis were reportedly abducted in the aftermath of the killing of three church leaders in Kangpokpi district on May 13.

In a separate post on X, the chief minister expressed grief over the incident, stating: "Deeply anguished by the brutal murder of six innocent Naga villagers abducted from Leilon Vaiphei village, Kangpokpi district. My heartfelt condolences

to the bereaved families."

"The Government of Manipur strongly condemns this heinous act and is committed to ensuring that the perpetrators are brought to justice. The case is being investigated by the NIA. Violence has no place in our society. We remain steadfast in our commitment to peace, security, and the rule of law in Manipur," Singh said.

As part of the investigation, a team of the National Investigation Agency visited the JNIMS mortuary in Imphal after the bodies were brought to the hospital in the early hours of Thursday.

Tensions escalated following the recovery, with protesters allegedly vandalising the Naga Peoples' Front's Manipur unit office at Liangmai Taphou in Senapati district late Wednesday. Officials said furniture and office property were set on fire.

Miscreants also allegedly torched two trucks near a school in the Karong area on Wednesday evening.

Meanwhile, the United Naga Council, the apex body representing Nagas in Ma-

nipur, announced a 24-hour shutdown in parts of the state from 6 am Thursday to protest the killings.

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has maintained silence over the ongoing investigation into the deaths of six alleged Naga hostages whose bodies were recovered earlier this week and taken to the mortuary of the Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences (JNIMS) in Imphal. An NIA team, accompanied by officials from state security agencies, visited the JNIMS mortuary on Thursday to examine the mortal remains as part of the investigation.

The visit followed the recovery of the bodies on June 10. The victims were reportedly among six civilians alleged to have been abducted on May 13, 2026. Officials involved in the investigation declined to comment on the findings or provide details regarding the progress of the probe when approached by journalists. Authorities indicated that the investigation is at a sensitive stage and that no official statement would be issued until preliminary procedures are completed.

According to sources, investigators are undertaking a range of forensic processes, including post-mortem examinations, DNA profiling and evidence collection, to determine the identity of the victims and establish the circumstances surrounding their deaths.

The case has generated widespread concern across Manipur, with civil society groups and local residents demanding a comprehensive and transparent investigation into the alleged abduction and killing of the six civilians.

Security has also been tightened around the JNIMS premises following unrest on Tuesday evening, when hundreds of people gathered at the hospital awaiting the arrival of the bodies. Tensions escalated during the gathering, leading security personnel to fire tear gas shells to disperse the crowd and restore order. Authorities have urged the public to remain calm and allow investigators to complete the forensic and legal procedures. Officials said further information is likely to be made public after the initial stages of the investigation are completed.

**Fresh Violence Erupts in Manipur's Kamjong; Two Feared Dead, Six Houses Torched**



**IMPHAL**

Fresh violence broke out in Manipur's Kamjong district on Thursday morning after unidentified miscreants allegedly set fire to six houses in Kultuk Kuki Village, with preliminary reports indicating that two people may have been killed in the attack.

According to initial reports, the incident occurred in the early hours of June 11 at Kultuk Kuki Village, a small settlement of around 25 households located nearly 30 kilometres from the Kamjong district headquarters.

Authorities said six houses were destroyed in the blaze. While local sources claimed that two persons lost their lives in the attack, officials have not yet confirmed the casualties, and the identities of the victims remain unknown.

Kamjong Police have dispatched a team to the village to assess the situation and conduct a detailed investigation. Officials said efforts are underway to verify the extent of the damage, establish the circumstances surrounding the incident and identify those responsible.

"The facts are still being ascertained. A police team has reached the

area and an investigation is in progress," officials said.

The latest incident comes amid heightened tensions across Manipur following the recovery of six bodies believed to be those of Naga civilians who were allegedly abducted last month.

On Wednesday night, an office of the Naga People's Front (NPF) at Liangmai Taphou in Senapati district was set ablaze by a mob amid growing anger over the deaths of the six civilians. The attack occurred hours after the United Naga Council (UNC) announced that six hostages taken on May 13 had been found dead. The recovery of the bodies from Karam Vaiphei village in Kangpokpi district triggered widespread outrage in several Naga-inhabited areas, leading to protests and unrest across parts of the state.

According to local reports, protesters attacked and torched the NPF office, accusing authorities of failing to ensure the safe return of the abducted civilians. No injuries were reported in the incident.

Tensions also spread to other districts, with reports of goods-laden trucks being set on fire in Karong, Senapati district, and demonstrations taking place in Tamei.

Police have not announced any arrests in connection with the attack on the NPF office. Security forces have since been deployed in sensitive areas to prevent further escalation and maintain law and order.

The state government and the Naga People's Front had not issued official statements on the latest incidents at the time of filing this report.

Authorities have appealed for restraint as investigations continue into both the Kamjong attack and the deaths of the six civilians whose bodies were recovered earlier this week.

**Assam, Nagaland Join Hands for Oil and Gas Exploration Along Border Areas**

**GUWAHATI**

In a significant step towards unlocking the hydrocarbon potential of Northeast India, Assam and Nagaland on Thursday signed a landmark Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) aimed at facilitating oil and natural gas exploration in resource-rich areas along their shared boundary. The agreement is being viewed as a major breakthrough in inter-state cooperation, with officials describing it as a move that could transform the energy landscape of the region while fostering stronger ties between the two neighbouring states.

The MoU seeks to create a framework for exploration and development of hydrocarbon reserves in border areas that have remained largely untapped for decades. Despite indications of substantial oil and gas deposits, exploration activities in several stretches along the Assam-Nagaland boundary have been constrained by long-standing border disputes and administrative challenges. Officials said the new arrangement is expected to provide a conducive environment for coordinated exploration efforts, allowing both states to leverage their natural resources while ensuring mutual benefits.

The agreement comes at a time when India is intensifying efforts to increase domestic energy production and reduce dependence on imported crude oil and natural gas. By facilitating exploration in previously underutilised regions, the initiative is expected to contribute to the country's broader energy security objectives.

According to officials familiar with the development, the MoU is designed to establish mechanisms for cooperation between the two states in matters related to hydrocarbon exploration, project implementation, security arrangements and administrative coordination. It is also expected to address issues related to revenue sharing and operational management, creating a transparent framework for future energy projects.

**ED Uncovers Border Surveillance Network During Tripura Drug Trafficking Probe**

**AGARTALA**

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has uncovered an extensive surveillance network, including more than 25 CCTV cameras mounted on trees and monitoring forested areas and sections of the India-Bangladesh border, during raids linked to an alleged cross-border drug trafficking and money laundering syndicate. The searches were carried out on June 8 by the ED's Aizawl Sub-Zonal Office under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002, at four locations across Tripura, Mizoram and West Bengal as part of an ongoing investigation into suspected financial transactions exceeding Rs 142 crore. The probe stems from a case registered by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), Agartala Zonal Unit, under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. The case relates to the interception of a convoy on National Highway 66A in Mizoram on August 21, 2025, which resulted in the seizure of 49.101 kilograms of methamphetamine tablets and 40 grams of heroin. Eight individuals were arrested following the operation. According to the ED, proceeds generated from the narcotics trade were allegedly routed through a complex network of bank accounts operated by Myanmar-based individuals using border-area addresses. Investigators suspect that shell entities, conduit accounts, cash transactions and hawala channels were used to layer and integrate the illicit funds into the financial system.

The agency said it has so far identified suspicious credits amounting to more than Rs 142 crore linked to the alleged network.

Officials stated that the principal Myanmar-based supplier of the narcot-

ics, identified as Chintuang alias Tuanaga, along with key transportation facilitator Jabrul Haque, had already been arrested by the NCB during the course of the investigation.

The ED conducted searches at the residential and official premises of four individuals and entities believed to be connected to the syndicate. Among them were Anowar Hossain alias Suman Mia, popularly known as "Crorepati Suman", and Jashim Mia, both residents of Sonamura in Tripura's Sepahijala district. Investigators have identified the duo as the alleged ultimate recipients of the seized narcotics. Premises linked to two other suspects in Mizoram and West Bengal were also searched. During the operation, officials discovered more than 25 CCTV cameras installed on trees around the residences of Suman Mia and Jashim Mia. The cameras were reportedly positioned to monitor surrounding forest areas as well as stretches of the barbed-wire fencing along the India-Bangladesh border, raising suspicions that they may have been used to track movement in the region. A dog squad was deployed during the searches to detect hidden narcotics and other contraband. Given the proximity of the targeted locations to the international border, the ED sought assistance from the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the Border Security Force (BSF) to secure the operation. Investigators also seized several incriminating documents, digital devices and other materials believed to be relevant to the case. The ED said further investigation is underway to trace the financial trail, identify additional beneficiaries and uncover the full extent of the alleged cross-border trafficking and money laundering network.

**Seven Manipuri Artistes Earn Prestigious National Honours, Showcasing State's Cultural Excellence**

**IMPHAL**

Manipur's rich cultural heritage has received national recognition once again, with seven artistes from the state being selected for the prestigious Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards and the Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar for the years 2024-25. The honour is being seen as a significant acknowledgment of Manipur's enduring contribution to India's performing arts traditions and its continued role as a cradle of artistic excellence. The recognition has brought pride and celebration across the state, with cultural bodies, artists, and the government hailing the achievements of the awardees. Known for its classical dance traditions, vibrant folk music, indigenous cultural expressions, and deeply rooted artistic practices, Manipur has long held a distinguished place in India's cultural landscape. The selection of seven artistes in a single year further reinforces the state's reputation as one of the country's foremost centres of performing arts.

Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh congratulated the awardees and described their achievements as a matter of immense pride for Manipur. In a message shared on social media platform X, the Chief Minister said the honours reflected not only the individual accomplishments of the artistes but also the strength and vitality of Manipuri cultural traditions.

"These prestigious national honours celebrate their outstanding contributions to Manipuri dance, music and folk traditions. Their achievements are a matter of immense pride for Manipur and an inspiration to future generations," he stated.



The Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards, conferred by India's apex body for the performing arts, are among the highest national recognitions in the fields of music, dance, and theatre. Instituted to honour artists who have made exceptional and sustained contributions to their respective disciplines, the awards carry immense prestige within the cultural community.

This year, three eminent artistes from Manipur have been selected for the coveted Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards. They are Irengbam Nalini Devi for Manipuri Dance, Lourembam Bedabati Devi for Folk Music, and Rajkumari Thambalsana Devi for Manipuri Dance. Their selection reflects decades of dedication to preserving, promoting, and enriching the artistic traditions of Manipur. Through years of performances, teaching, and cultural advocacy, these artists have played a vital role in ensuring that traditional forms continue to thrive in an era of rapid social and technological change.

Manipuri dance, one of India's eight recognised clas-

sical dance forms, is renowned for its grace, spiritual depth, and intricate storytelling traditions. The recognition accorded to Irengbam Nalini Devi and Rajkumari Thambalsana Devi underscores the continuing relevance and appeal of this unique art form, which has been nurtured and refined across generations in Manipur.

Similarly, the honour bestowed upon Lourembam Bedabati Devi for Folk Music highlights the importance of preserving indigenous musical traditions that form an integral part of the state's cultural identity. Folk music in Manipur reflects the social history, customs, rituals, and collective memories of its diverse communities, serving as a living repository of cultural knowledge. Alongside the senior awardees, four young artistes from the state have been selected for the Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar, a prestigious honour aimed at recognising exceptional young talent in the performing arts. Named after the legendary shehnai maestro Ustad Bismillah Khan, the award seeks to encourage emerging artists and support the continuation of India's rich artistic traditions through the next generation. The recipients of the Yuva Puraskar from Manipur are Phurishabam Debajani Devi for Manipuri Dance, Lukram Tamphamani Singh for Music for Dance (Manipuri), Yumnam Bimota Devi for Folk Music, and Tongbram Roneld Meetei for Manipuri Dance.

Their achievements are being celebrated as evidence of the strong foundation of artistic training and cultural transmission that continues to flourish in the state. Cultural observers note that the emergence of talented young

performers alongside seasoned masters reflects a healthy and dynamic artistic ecosystem in Manipur.

The selection of artists from both senior and younger generations also demonstrates how traditional knowledge is being successfully passed down, ensuring continuity while allowing room for innovation and creative expression. Many of the awardees have spent years studying under respected gurus, participating in cultural festivals, and dedicating themselves to mastering their chosen disciplines.

For many in Manipur, the announcement serves as a reminder of the state's extraordinary contribution to India's cultural heritage. Despite its relatively small geographical size, Manipur has produced an impressive number of acclaimed dancers, musicians, theatre practitioners, and cultural scholars whose work has earned recognition at both national and international levels. The state's artistic traditions are deeply intertwined with its social and spiritual life. Festivals, religious ceremonies, community gatherings, and cultural celebrations often feature performances that have been preserved over centuries. These traditions not only provide entertainment but also serve as powerful vehicles for cultural identity, historical memory, and community cohesion.

Manipuri dance, in particular, occupies a special place within India's classical dance heritage. Characterised by fluid movements, expressive storytelling, and devotional themes, the dance form is closely associated with Vaishnavite traditions and the celebrated Ras Lila performances. Over the years, Manipuri dancers have

helped introduce audiences across India and around the world to the unique beauty and sophistication of the art form.

Folk music, another area recognised through this year's awards, remains an essential component of cultural life in Manipur. Traditional songs often accompany agricultural activities, rituals, festivals, and important life events. They preserve linguistic diversity and offer insights into the history and worldview of different communities within the state.

Cultural experts believe that national recognition through institutions such as the Sangeet Natak Akademi plays a crucial role in strengthening efforts to safeguard these traditions. Such honours not only celebrate individual excellence but also draw attention to the broader cultural ecosystems that sustain artistic practices. The awards come at a time when many traditional art forms across the country face challenges related to modernization, changing lifestyles, and declining opportunities for practitioners. Recognition at the national level can help generate renewed interest among younger generations and encourage greater institutional support for cultural preservation.

Artists and cultural organisations in Manipur have welcomed the announcement, describing it as a proud moment for the state. Many have expressed hope that the recognition will inspire more young people to pursue careers in the performing arts and contribute to the preservation of the region's unique cultural heritage.



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## BUCKING TRENDS IN KARNATAKA

**F**inally, the much-debated change of guard in Karnataka was taken forward by the Congress's central leadership and the state has a new Chief Minister. For the past few months, it was becoming increasingly clear that D K Shivakumar taking over was not an 'if' but a 'when' question.

While it is true that in the past, similar promised transitions in Congress regimes had not been carried forward in Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, the Karnataka case seemed different. Shivakumar has been a key strategist for the Congress and a party loyalist close to the central leadership. It was also increasingly clear that outgoing CM Siddaramaiah, in his second term, would not lead the party in the 2023 Assembly polls. A new leader needs at least two years to establish himself in the position and take the campaign forward.

The leadership change has wider implications for the state's politics, the Congress's internal dynamics as well as the strategy of the leading opposition party, the BJP. Interestingly, in all this commotion over the past few weeks, very little was heard about the distant third player in state politics—the Janata Dal (S), a part of the NDA whose leader, HD Deve Gowda, would no longer be in Parliament three decades after relinquishing the post of the Prime Minister.

DKS's takeover was not without its share of political drama. In the run-up, both the outgoing CM and the successor consistently maintained that a change of guard would be decided by the Congress's central leadership. When the final action began, Siddaramaiah kept asserting that he had been asked to step down and was thus making way. He did not accept the offer to move to national politics. Being an influential OBC leader who had the longest chief ministerial tenure in the state, the party's central leadership was keen to placate him. His son was made a minister, as were some key followers.

As is already evident, the real challenge for the new CM lies in expanding his ministry. Most of the 135 Congress MLAs (save Siddaramaiah) see themselves as potential ministers in the DKS ministry. Fourteen slots are filled and another 20 remain. The new government's stability and capacity to take forward governance would rest on providing appropriate 'political accommodation' to its aspiring legislators and managing dissent.

The social coalitions that political parties have built up in Karnataka have played a key role in their success. For the Congress, the 2023 Assembly victory was on account of a rainbow coalition that included carving away a slice of the Lingayat vote from the BJP, strengthening its support among the Vokkaligas in Old Mysore, retaining support among the non-dominant OBCs and strengthening its base among Dalits and minorities.

Siddaramaiah's chief ministership in 2023 was, among other things, a recognition of the non-dominant OBCs he represented. On the other hand, the new CM hails from the dominant Vokkaliga caste, indicating a clear attempt at social balancing. The new state Congress president is from the non-dominant OBCs and the Deputy CM is a Dalit. Both the non-dominant OBC ministers hail from the Kuruba (shepherd) community, to which Siddaramaiah belongs. So the next expansion would need to cater to the wider rainbow coalition the party hopes to sustain.

The new CM will surely be a man in a hurry. He will need to work on the five guarantees implemented. He has already extended the free bus travel concession to students, but will need a re-look at the way some of the guarantees have been implemented. As the minister for Bengaluru in the Siddaramaiah government, DKS had promised several initiatives that he would now want to take forward too. The Bengaluru development portfolio has been passed to the capable hands of Krishna Byre Gowda.

Past changes of guard in Congress governments in Karnataka (1989-1994) were accompanied by a drift in governance. The party would expect its new CM to ensure this does not repeat. Also, after 1985, Karnataka has never seen a ruling party win consecutive majorities in the Assembly. The new CM will want to reverse that trend.

Meanwhile, the BJP has its fair share of challenges. Factionalism within the state unit is patently visible. This has prevented the party from launching a unified attack on the government. Its alliance with the JD(S) for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections was stitched to ensure a unified fight against the Congress. The BJP contested as many seats as it had won from the state in 2019, as it had to leave three seats to the JD(S). But Assembly elections involve different political calculations. The BJP has never won a majority by itself in the state, which it will hope to do this time. Yet, any alliance with the JD(S) would require them to share a significant chunk of seats.

There are already murmurs on both sides on whether an alliance is feasible for the Assembly election. Deve Gowda's absence in the Rajya Sabha may be one indication of the emerging trends. Further, the new CM has already spoken of consolidating his electoral base in the Vokkaliga heartland. The JD(S), whose presence is largely in the same Old Mysore region, thus faces a stiff challenge.

It's sure that Karnataka is in for two interesting years of political action. Each passing day is witnessing an interesting twist. While this keeps politics vibrant, citizens will be hoping for a greater focus on governance from the ruling party.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

Better to have loved and lost than to have never loved at all.

- Alfred Lord Tennyson

# NEHRU AND MODI: A TALE OF TWO PRIME MINISTERS



BERJIS DESAI

Jawaharlal Nehru was sworn in as the country's first democratically elected Prime Minister on May 13, 1952. He remained in office for a period of 4,397 days until his passing on May 27, 1964. For the alert student of constitutional history, on August 15, 1947, Nehru was head only of the interim government responsible to the Constituent Assembly that sat as the provisional Parliament. Today, Narendra Modi transcends Nehru's term in office by completing 4,398 days as Prime Minister.

Modi and Nehru, our longest-standing PMs, are a picture in contrast—diametrically opposite in upbringing, mindset, belief, temperament, style of functioning, value system and political philosophy.

Nehru was attended to by English governesses and Irish tutors along with a retinue of attendants in a 42-room house of his prosperous barrister father, before studying at Harrow, where British aristocrats schooled their children, and Trinity College, Cambridge. He wrote in his autobiography that he had a garden, a tennis court and a swimming pool and a pet pony to ride. His childhood, he wrote, "was sheltered and uneventful".

Narendra, whose father ran a tiny tea shop at a railway station, lived with his five siblings in a dingy house without electricity. He received sub-standard education in the vernacular and did not have access to radio or newspapers. There was no toothbrush, shower, toilet, or even tap water in Modi's household, which he left at 17 on a personal spiritual journey, never to return.

Jawaharlal, the child, was aghast to watch his father sip imported red claret, which he thought was blood, as he puts it in his autobiography. Narendra, the child, watched his mother clean utensils of others with glass-mixed ash, which often made her fingers bleed.

Nehru's clipped English accent endeared him to the elite, which felt he was one of them. Hyper-conscious of his international image, Nehru perceived the country through the prism of Fabian socialism, which cost the nation dear. He inordinately delayed Kashmir's accession into India, promised a plebiscite, took the matter to the UN, and denied permission to the Indian Army to take over what later permanently became Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. His naivety in trusting the Chinese resulted in the loss of the strategic Aksai Chin, which he dismissed as 'barren land'. He signed the one-sided Indus Waters Treaty, giving Pakistan 80 percent of the water by volume, and said that he did not understand the fuss over it.

Seventy-two years later, Modi performed the near-impossible constitutional feat of abrogating Kashmir's special status, which was providing a fig leaf to Pakistan's pernicious propaganda. He boldly suspended the IWT. He shaped the military strategy of proactive calibrated response and secured the nation's borders. Yet, a section of the intellectual elite remains allergic

to sons of the soil like Modi, who do not speak King's English. A super performer indeed, they concede, but not one of us.

As generations of bureaucrats have testified, Modi is a brilliant learner on the job. He listens; he is curious; he delves into the minutest detail. He follows up, evaluates, decides. No room exists for those who are underprepared and sloppy.

Details bored Nehru. Temperamental, prone to making emotional decisions, highly opinionated and a mediocre administrator. JRD Tata, who adored him, said that Nehru had no interest in discussing economics, and he would look out of his window at a giant panda playing in the garden.

Nehru adapted Soviet-style five-year plans with emphasis on land reforms, dams and heavy industry without thought as to how the benefits of development will percolate to the ground level. Modi revolutionised a religion-neutral, efficient welfare state to scientifically alleviate poverty—direct cash benefit transfer to the poorest, cooking gas cylinders and water on tap, direct housing assistance, health insurance for the poor, financial inclusion through Jan Dhan bank accounts, cash payments for maternal welfare, sanitation and hygiene, separate toilets for women—the list is endless. Modi rescued the country from an existential crisis during Covid-19 by insisting on the 'whole of government approach' and well-timed lockdown. Nehru was an abstract rationalist ideologue; Modi is an efficient administrator.

A self-confessed atheist, Nehru tried his furious best to prevent President Rajendra Prasad from consecrating the newly-reconstructed Somnath Temple and directed All India Radio to blank out the President's speech on the

occasion. In sharp contrast, Modi has actively promoted civilisational resurgence through innumerable cultural projects.

No family. No friends. No vacations. A minimum 16-hour working day. Modi has been relentless on round-the-clock national service for 25 years. Prior to that, he had 30 years as a full-time Sangh pracharak and BJP functionary—that is, a total of 55 years in public service. Yet Modi shows not the slightest sign of fatigue or slowing down.

He says his work ethic keeps him energised. He is grateful to the cosmic for what he calls an "Avirat dhara" (perennial flow) of freshness and vitality he experiences every living second. He is a hard-working global leader with a hands-on approach and mastery of minute details. "Discipline is in my DNA," says Modi.

Gandhiji overruled the choice of Sardar Patel as Congress president—and therefore as PM—by 12 of the 15 party provincial committees, in favour of Nehru; the rest three abstained. Later, Nehru, as the first great Indian dynasty, assiduously planned the eventual succession of Indira.

Modi won many elections for the BJP but never sought elected office until, at age 51, he was asked by his party to urgently take over as Gujarat CM. What distinguishes Modi from most other leaders and politicians is his purity of purpose. His objective has never been the pursuit of raw power. Like Gandhi, service and sacrifice are not empty words for Modi.

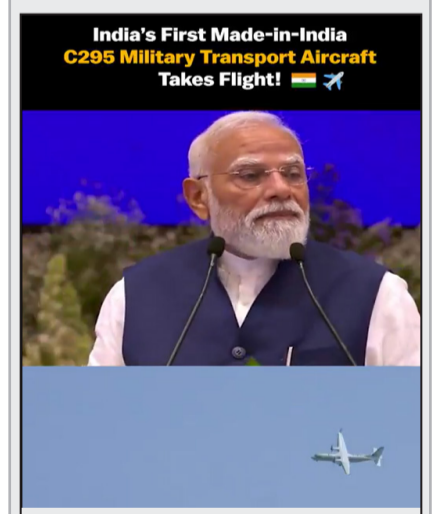
Narendra Modi will become iconic in the next few decades. The Prime Ministers who will follow him, irrespective of party affiliation, will endeavour to emulate him. For all will be evaluated against Modi's yardstick.



### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

**A proud moment for every Indian. India's first Made-in-India C-295 military transport aircraft has successfully completed its maiden flight. From being a major importer to innovator, India's transformation reflects PM Modi's determination to make**

**#AtmanirbharBharat a reality. Every indigenous aircraft, every defence breakthrough and every Make-in-India success is a fitting answer to those who mocked India's self-reliance ambitions. ~ Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)**



# Six Bodies Recovered in Manipur's Kangpokpi; Feared to Be Missing Naga Hostages

IMPHAL

The bodies of six individuals were recovered from the Karam Vaiphei area of Manipur's Kangpokpi district on Wednesday following an extensive search operation, raising fears that they may be among the Naga civilians reported missing after being taken hostage during the recent ethnic violence in the state.

According to Manipur Police, the recovery was made after nearly 24 hours of coordinated search efforts involving around 450 personnel from the state police, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), and the Assam Rifles. The operation was supported by sniffer dogs and forensic experts.

In an official statement, the police said the deceased are believed to be



among those allegedly abducted from Leilon Vaiphei on May 13, 2026. However, authorities have not yet formally confirmed their identities.

The bodies are expected to be transported to the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS) in Imphal for post-mortem examinations and identification procedures. Officials said legal formalities are being completed and an investigation into the incident is underway.

The case stems from violence that erupted on May 13 when several individuals from different communities, including members of the Naga community, were reportedly taken hostage from the Leilon Vaiphei area. The alleged abductions occurred in the aftermath of an ambush near Saheibung village in Kangpokpi dis-

trict, where three Thadou church leaders were killed.

Authorities had earlier reported that of the 38 people from various communities who were held captive by armed groups during the unrest in Kangpokpi and Senapati districts, 31 were released on May 15. The fate of the remaining six missing Naga individuals had remained uncertain.

The recovery of the six bodies comes a day after 14 Kuki hostages were released following 27 days in captivity. The handover was facilitated by the United Naga Council (UNC) in the presence of district administration officials, police personnel, and security forces.

Speaking on the development, UNC president Ng Lorho said the decision to facilitate the release of

the Kuki hostages reflected the Naga community's commitment to humanitarian values and established norms during conflict situations.

Lorho noted that the council's intervention was influenced by assurances from both the Union and Manipur governments regarding efforts to trace the six missing Naga individuals. He also cited appeals from church organisations, tribal bodies, and civil society groups across the region seeking a resolution to the hostage crisis.

Authorities are awaiting post-mortem examinations and identification to conclusively establish the identities of the deceased. Investigations are continuing, and further details are expected as the inquiry progresses.

## Gaurav Gogoi Alleges BJP Undermining Democracy, Media Freedom in Assam

GUWAHATI

Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president Gaurav Gogoi on Wednesday accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of weakening democratic institutions and attempting to exert control over the media, while also questioning the functioning of key constitutional bodies and the state government's handling of several pending issues.

Addressing journalists, Gogoi said the BJP had strengthened its political position by encouraging defections and engineering splits within opposition parties, both at the national level and in Assam.

Responding to questions on Prime Minister Narendra Modi completing 12 consecutive years in office, the Congress leader alleged that the ruling party had reduced politics to a process of "breaking and poaching" political organisations.

"The BJP has weakened democracy and reduced politics to a game of breaking and poaching parties. The same has happened in Assam," Gogoi said.

The APCC chief also expressed concerns over media independence in the state and questioned why Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma continues to hold the Information and Public Relations portfolio.

"The BJP wants to control the media. There are growing concerns about how long media freedom will survive under such circumstances," he alleged.

Gogoi further claimed that individuals facing allegations of corruption and involvement in various syndicate-related activities had been rewarded with important ministerial responsibilities. He alleged that those linked to controversies such as the alleged cattle syndicate, Gir cow scam and irregularities in the Assam Legislative Assembly had been entrusted with key portfolios.

Criticising the economic situation in the country, the Congress leader said ordinary citizens continue to face hardships and questioned the BJP's celebration of political achievements amid public concerns.

## Assam Emerges as India's Third-Largest Rubber Producer with 50,000 Hectares Under Cultivation

GUWAHATI

Assam has emerged as India's third-largest producer of natural rubber, with nearly 50,000 hectares brought under cultivation, underscoring the growing importance of the crop in the state's agricultural and industrial landscape.

The development was highlighted during a press briefing in Guwahati, where Rubber Board Executive Director M. Vasanthegesan said Assam now ranks behind only Kerala and Tripura in natural rubber production.

He noted that Assam has become a key driver of rubber expansion in the Northeast, a region that currently accounts for nearly 1.8 lakh hectares of rubber plantations. According to Vasanthegesan, efforts are now focused not only on expanding plantation areas but also on improving productivity to meet the country's rising demand for natural rubber.

"The focus is not only on increasing the area under cultivation but also on enhancing productivity to address the growing domestic requirement for natural rubber," he said.

Vasanthegesan also highlight-

ed the progress achieved under the INROAD Project, a Rubber Board initiative supported by the Automotive Tyre Manufacturers Association (ATMA). The project aims to expand rubber cultivation across the Northeast and West Bengal.

Against a target of developing two lakh hectares of rubber plantations between 2021 and 2026, the project has already established plantations across 1.79 lakh hectares, benefiting more than 2.07 lakh growers in the region.

Speaking at the event, Kapil Chaudhary, Joint Secretary in the Department of Commerce, Government of India, said Assam's rubber sector possesses immense potential for future growth and investment.

She revealed that the world's first genetically modified rubber plant, developed by the Rubber Research Institute specifically for the climatic conditions of the Northeast, has been planted in Assam. The development is being viewed as a significant milestone that could contribute to higher productivity and greater resilience in rubber cultivation.

## Modi Transformed Assam from a Dependent State to a Growth Contributor: Himanta

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi with fundamentally transforming Assam's development trajectory, stating that the state has evolved from being dependent on central support to becoming a significant contributor to India's growth story.

In a detailed public letter addressed to the Prime Minister, Sarma congratulated Modi as he nears the milestone of becoming India's longest-serving Prime Minister and reflected on what he described as a transformative phase in the relationship between Assam and the Centre.

"His leadership has realigned Assam's development trajectory from being a dependent state to a contributory state in India's growth story," Sarma wrote.

The Chief Minister said that for decades many people in Assam felt disconnected from the national mainstream despite their strong sense of national identity. According to him, that perception changed

significantly during Modi's tenure, with the Northeast moving from the margins of national discourse to a position of greater prominence.

Sarma highlighted Modi's characterisation of the Northeast as "Ashtalakshmi" and his vision of the region becoming the "New Engine of Growth" for India, saying the ideas instilled confidence among people and helped reshape perceptions about the region's potential.

He also pointed to the Prime Minister's frequent engagement with Assam, noting that Modi had visited the state 36 times during his tenure, more than any previous Prime Minister.

According to Sarma, each visit reinforced the message that Assam occupies an important place in the country's future and development agenda.

The Chief Minister recalled several symbolic gestures that resonated with the people of the state, including Modi's appreciation of the traditional Assamese phulam gamosa, interactions with tea garden workers and participation in cultur-

al programmes showcasing Bihu, Bagurumba and Jhumur traditions.

Sarma further credited the Prime Minister with elevating Assam's cultural heritage on national and global platforms. He cited the inscription of Charaideo Moidams as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the granting of Classical Language status to Assamese, and initiatives highlighting the legacy of Ahom general Lachit Barphukan among the notable achievements of recent years.

On the economic front, the Chief Minister listed several major projects undertaken during Modi's tenure, including the expansion of Numaligarh Refinery Limited, the establishment of the Assam Bio-Refinery, the ₹27,000-crore Tata semiconductor facility at Jagiroad and the development of a new terminal at Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport.

He also highlighted significant investments in connectivity infrastructure, including the Dhubri-Phulbari Bridge, the Jorhat-Majuli Bridge, the proposed

Brahmaputra tunnel, the Guwahati Ring Road and the planned elevated corridor through Kaziranga.

According to Sarma, the Prime Minister's government has also played a key role in strengthening peace and stability in the Northeast through various peace accords and sustained engagement with different groups, creating greater optimism among the region's youth.

The Chief Minister additionally pointed to improvements in healthcare, education and digital infrastructure, citing projects such as AIIMS Guwahati, skill development initiatives and investments in higher education institutions.

Concluding his letter, Sarma said that beyond infrastructure projects and economic achievements, the Prime Minister's most enduring contribution to Assam was restoring confidence and a sense of belonging among its people.

"You gave Assam visibility. You gave Assam confidence. You gave Assam dignity. Most importantly, you gave Assam a profound sense of belonging," he wrote.

## Bangladesh Refuses to Accept BSF Pushback, Tension Mounts Along Meghalaya Border

SHILLONG

Tension has reportedly escalated along the Indo-Bangladesh border in Meghalaya's South West Garo Hills district after Bangladeshi authorities and local residents allegedly refused to accept a man pushed back across the border by the Border Security Force (BSF).

The incident occurred in the Nandir Char sector near Mahendraganj, where BSF personnel detained a man on suspicion of having entered Indian territory illegally from Bangladesh.

According to sources, the man was subsequently sent back across the international border as part of a pushback operation. However, after crossing into Bangladeshi territory, he was reportedly denied acceptance by the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) as well as local residents, leaving him stranded in the area



beyond the border fencing.

The development has reportedly created a tense situation in the border sector, prompting security forces on both sides to closely monitor the area.

Sources familiar with the mat-

ter claimed that the individual had acknowledged being a Bangladeshi national. Despite this, Bangladeshi authorities and residents allegedly declined to take custody of him, leading to uncertainty over his status and further complicating the

situation.

Several videos purportedly related to the incident have surfaced on social media, showing increased activity and gatherings near the border. However, the authenticity of the videos and the claims associated with them could not be independently verified.

Officials from both countries remained silent on the matter. No formal statement had been issued by either the BSF or the BGB at the time of filing this report.

The incident comes against the backdrop of ongoing efforts by Indian and Bangladeshi authorities to curb illegal cross-border movement and improve mechanisms for the identification and repatriation of individuals crossing the international border without authorisation.

Further details are awaited as authorities continue to monitor the situation.

## Manipur CM Urges Fast-Track Highway Projects, Seeks Approval for Imphal Elevated Corridor



IMPHAL/NEW DELHI

Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh met Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari in New Delhi and pressed for the expedited implementation of several critical road infrastructure projects aimed at improving connectivity across the state.

During the meeting, Singh briefed the Union minister on measures taken by the state government to resolve long-standing hurdles affecting major national highway projects, including the strategically important Imphal-Jiribam and Imphal-Dimapur corridors.

According to officials from the Chief Minister's Secretariat, the Chief Minister informed Gadkari that land compensation issues that had stalled work on National Highway-37, connecting Imphal and Jiribam, have now been resolved in Noney district following a revised land survey and subsequent approval by the state Cabinet. With the compensation-related disputes settled, construction activities on the highway have resumed. Singh expressed optimism that the pace of work would accelerate in the coming months. The Imphal-Jiribam Highway is regarded as Manipur's principal lifeline, linking the state capital with Jiribam, the state's only railhead. The route plays a vital role in transporting essential commodities, including fuel, medicines, food supplies and construction materials.

On the Imphal-Dimapur Highway project, Singh informed the Union minister that key issues in Kangpokpi district had also been addressed. He noted that a special

package approved by the state Cabinet had helped move the project forward and reiterated the government's commitment to working with all stakeholders to ensure its timely completion.

The Chief Minister also raised concerns regarding the Imphal-Ukhruh-Jessami Highway, where unresolved land-related disputes continue to affect progress in certain stretches. He said the state government is actively engaging with local communities, landowners and other stakeholders to facilitate an early resolution and avoid further delays. Highlighting the broader challenges facing infrastructure development in the state, Singh outlined ongoing efforts to address land acquisition and compensation matters, contractor-related concerns, local objections and various administrative bottlenecks that have slowed the execution of highway projects.

In addition to highway development, the Chief Minister sought the Union minister's support for the proposed elevated highway project in Imphal. He emphasised that the project would significantly improve urban mobility, reduce traffic congestion and enhance connectivity within the capital city and surrounding areas.

Sources said Gadkari responded positively to the proposals and assured Singh that the requests, including the elevated corridor project, would receive due consideration from the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.

The meeting comes as Manipur continues to prioritise infrastructure development as a key component of its economic growth and connectivity agenda.

## Assam Plans Permanent Concert Arena as Live Events Fuel Tourism and Economic Growth

GUWAHATI

Assam is set to establish a permanent concert arena within the next two years as part of its broader strategy to position itself as a leading destination for large-scale live entertainment, tourism and cultural events.

The announcement was made by Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) Managing Director Kumar Padmapani Bora alongside the release of a new report titled The Assam Blueprint: Turning Live Music Economy into a Tourism Multiplier, prepared jointly by BookMyShow, ATDC and EY-Parthenon.

The report examines the economic impact of major live entertainment events in the state, using American music star Post Malone's first-ever solo headline concert in India, held in Guwahati, as a case study. It concludes that a structured calendar of large-scale events could generate more than Rs 700 crore in cumulative economic impact for Assam over the next five years.

Speaking on the state's vision, Bora said the emerging concert economy extends far beyond entertainment and has the potential to drive tourism, cultural promotion, youth engagement and economic development.

"The concert economy is not just about entertainment. It is about creating opportunities for tourism, employment



and local businesses while showcasing Assam to audiences from across the country and beyond," he said.

Bora added that the government is working towards building an ecosystem where large events become recurring attractions capable of generating sustained economic benefits. As part of this vision, a dedicated permanent concert arena is expected to be operational within two years.

According to estimates by BookMyShow and EY-Parthenon, the Post Malone concert generated an overall economic impact of approximately Rs 43 crore. Of this, nearly Rs 32 crore flowed directly into Assam's economy, while the event also contributed around Rs 5 crore in Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenue.

The concert drew nearly 20,000 at-

tendees despite disruptions in airline services during the event period. More than half of the audience travelled from outside Guwahati, representing over 200 cities and towns across India.

The report highlights the significant spending generated by visitors beyond ticket purchases. It found that for every Rs 100 spent on a concert ticket, attendees spent an additional Rs 899 on accommodation, transportation, dining, shopping and related services.

Hotels across Guwahati recorded almost 30 per cent higher occupancy rates during the concert weekend, while transportation providers witnessed demand growth exceeding 50 per cent. Restaurants, cafes and retail establishments also reported increased customer traffic and sales.

The event's impact extended beyond the city, with many visitors exploring popular tourist destinations including Kamakhya Temple, Kaziranga National Park, Majuli and Sivasagar, helping strengthen Assam's position as a gateway to the Northeast.

The report also points to the region's growing significance in India's live entertainment sector. Assam hosted 55 ticketed events during the year, while Guwahati recorded a remarkable 188 per cent increase in live-event attendance in 2025, indicating rapidly growing consumer demand for large-scale entertainment experiences.

Naman Pugalia, Chief Business Officer for Live Events at BookMyShow, said the next phase of growth in India's live entertainment industry would be driven by the emergence of new cultural hubs outside traditional metropolitan centres. He described the Northeast as one of the country's most promising markets,

citing its rich musical heritage, enthusiastic audiences and evolving event ecosystem.

Raghav Anand, Partner and Leader, Media and Entertainment at EY-Parthenon, said Assam's experience demonstrates how live entertainment can be viewed as economic infrastructure rather than merely a one-time event.

According to Anand, the state's progress has been supported by coordinated policy initiatives, institutional support, infrastructure development and efforts to assess economic outcomes through data-driven analysis.

The Post Malone concert also generated significant short-term employment opportunities, engaging around 2,500 workers across sectors such as security, hospitality, logistics, production and venue management. Local vendors involved in food services, branding, payments, staging and sustainability operations also benefited from the event.

BookMyShow founder and Chief Executive Officer Ashish Hemrajani said the collaboration with Assam Tourism was aimed at building a long-term ecosystem rather than simply organising isolated events.

"Live entertainment, done at scale, is one of the most powerful economic multipliers a state can invest in," he said, adding that the five-year roadmap seeks to establish Assam as a recurring destination for world-class entertainment experiences.

The momentum is expected to continue later this year, with legendary rock band Guns N' Roses scheduled to perform in Guwahati on November 17, 2026, further reinforcing Assam's ambition to become a prominent stop on international concert circuits.

Quest!

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

Congress is troubled, but people are happy over PM Modi's historic tenure: Dilip Ghosh



KOLKATA

Amid a political row over Prime Minister Narendra Modi becoming India's longest-serving Prime Minister in consecutive elected terms, West Bengal Minister Dilip Ghosh on Thursday said that while the Congress was "troubled" by the development, people across the country were happy with Modi's leadership and achievements.

Ghosh praised the Prime Minister's tenure and credited him with bringing significant changes to the country. "Congress is troubled, but the people of the country are happy. Prime Minister Modi has done historic work. The public knows that change has come in the country. Everyone is happy. We keep winning new states. May his health always remain good and may

he always continue doing good work," Ghosh said.

His remarks came after Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge criticised the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) over its claims regarding Prime Minister Modi's tenure, accusing the ruling party of "twisting and distorting history" and creating a "new and ridiculous category" to highlight the Prime Minister's record.

In a post on X, Kharge asserted that India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, remained the country's longest-serving Prime Minister and also held the record for the longest continuous tenure in office.

"India's longest-serving Prime Minister was Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. He was also the one who served the longest continuously as Prime Minister. Indira Gandhi was the Prime

Minister with the second-longest tenure. Now, the BJP has to invent a new and ridiculous category to prove who is the longest continuously serving Prime Minister after general elections in independent India," Kharge said.

The Congress chief also accused the Modi government of failing to deliver on key promises related to employment, inflation, farmers' welfare and economic growth, alleging that the past 12 years had been marked by "sloganeering" and "manufactured narratives."

The exchange comes as Prime Minister Modi completed 4,399 days in office.

According to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), he has achieved the milestone of becoming India's longest-serving democratically elected Prime Minister in consecutive terms.

## Firmly opposed to attacks on merchant shipping: India tells UNSC amid ongoing West Asia conflict



NEW DELHI

India has voiced strong opposition to attacks on merchant shipping amid the ongoing Iran conflict, telling the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) that several Indian nationals have died or gone missing due to attacks in the region.

Addressing the UNSC open debate on 'Maintenance of International Peace and Security: Advancing Political Solutions in the Middle East: Mediation and Dialogue for Lasting Peace' on Wednesday, India's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Harish Parvathaneni, expressed concern over the escalating conflict and its wider regional fallout.

"We expressed our deep concern at the conflict in Iran and the Gulf region that unfortunately began in the holy month of Ramadan and urged all sides to exercise restraint, avoid escalation and prioritise the safety of civilians," Parvathaneni said.

Highlighting India's concerns over maritime security, he said the country remains firmly opposed to attacks on commercial shipping, particularly as many Indians form a key part of the global maritime workforce.

"Many Indian nationals have lost

their lives or are missing as a result of attacks against countries of the region and against merchant vessels and sea lanes of communication," he said.

Parvathaneni's remarks came hours after India summoned US Charge d' Affaires Jason Meeks in New Delhi and lodged a strong protest over an attack on the commercial tanker Settebello, carrying 24 Indian crew members, off the coast of Oman.

Three of the 24 crew members aboard the vessel reportedly went missing after the attack.

The incident followed another attack two days earlier, when a Palau-flagged vessel carrying 24 Indians came under attack by the US Navy while attempting to evade the US blockade of Iranian ports.

Parvathaneni noted that nearly 10 million Indians live and work in the Gulf region and stressed that their safety remains a top priority for New Delhi.

"Our trade and energy supply chains are dependent on stability in the region and any major disruption has serious consequences for the Indian economy," he said, adding that the intensifying Iran conflict and its spillover to other countries have triggered growing concern.

"The mounting destruction and deaths and cessation of normal life

and economic activities have deeply impacted India, a proximate neighbour with critical stakes in the security and stability of the region," he said.

Reiterating India's position, the envoy called for diplomacy and dialogue, unhindered freedom of navigation and commerce, an end to military targeting of commercial shipping and civilian infrastructure, and an early resolution to the conflict.

India also backed all efforts aimed at a peaceful settlement of disputes.

Expressing concern over the broader West Asia crisis, India highlighted the severe humanitarian toll of ongoing conflicts, including loss of life, injuries, mass displacement of civilians, disruption to maritime navigation, and its impact on global trade, supply chains, and energy security.

On Gaza, India said the humanitarian situation remains grave and reiterated the need for a sustained ceasefire, humanitarian access, and a credible roadmap toward a negotiated two-state solution.

"This remains the only path to achieve lasting peace and overall prosperity," Parvathaneni said.

He also announced that India would contribute USD 2.5 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for

Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in the coming days as the first tranche of its annual USD 5 million assistance to the agency.

Amid the crisis in Lebanon, India underscored the need to respect the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, noting that Indian troops are part of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

"We call for ensuring the safety and security of peacekeepers. They carry out a vital mandate entrusted by this Council, and they must not be targeted. India will also be sending medical assistance to Lebanon," he said.

India has also condemned attacks on UN peacekeepers in Lebanon and called for an immediate and thorough investigation to bring those responsible to justice.

Parvathaneni further argued that mediation mechanisms must evolve to remain effective.

"If they fail to fulfil their mandated tasks and new realities emerge that make such earlier frameworks redundant, we must adapt and continue our efforts in tune with the new realities," he said.

Referring to the Palestine issue, he noted that existing mediation structures have become outdated.

"Today's Gaza Peace Plan and the Board of Peace framework are very distinct as compared to earlier frameworks," he said.

India also used the platform to renew its push for reforms at the UN, arguing that ongoing conflicts and humanitarian crises have raised serious questions about the organisation's effectiveness.

"The perception about this organisation has changed considerably among the world citizenry due to its inability to address conflict situations. A primary reason has been an eight-decade-old, outdated architecture of the Security Council, the principal UN organ that is tasked with maintenance of international peace and security," he said.

India called for comprehensive UNSC reforms, including expansion in both permanent and non-permanent membership categories to reflect current geopolitical realities.

## INTERNATIONAL

# Number of forcibly displaced people dips to 118 million: UN



GENEVA

The number of forcibly displaced people worldwide were forcibly displaced from their homes, marking a decline of 5.4 million compared to a year earlier, the UN refugee agency said.

The agency said the number of people who had been forced to flee

due to war, violence and persecution remained "unacceptably high", urging action to dramatically reduce long-term displacement over the next decade.

In its annual report, UNHCR explained that the declining displacement number was linked to "a sharp increase" in the number of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) returning home.

In all, 14.7 million displaced people returned to their places of origin in 2025, said the report.

They included 4.4 million refugees who crossed back into their home countries, marking the second highest number of refugee returns since records began 60 years ago.

UN refugee chief Barham Salih told reporters in Geneva that "more than 90 percent" of refugee returns last year were concentrated in Afghanistan, Sudan and Syria.

But, he stressed, "many of these returns occurred not under conditions of safety and stability, but under pressure".

"They had gone back to "countries where insecurity persists, where infrastructure has been damaged, and where basic services and economic opportunities remain scarce", he warned.

"Returns that are not safe... are not a solution," he insisted. "They risk becoming the beginning of a new displacement cycle."

Among those displaced at the end of 2025, 41.6 million were considered refugees, including nearly 5.4 million people who fled across borders to become refugees in the course of the year, Thursday's report showed.

A full 60 percent of those new refugees fled from just eight countries, including nearly a million coming from war-ravaged Sudan alone, and almost 800,000 fled from Ukraine.

The report also pointed to several crises driving mass displacement since the start of this year. They included the Mideast war launched by United States and Israel in February, which it said had forced 3.2 million people from their homes in Iran alone.

And in Lebanon, Israeli attacks since March have displaced more than one million people, the UNHCR pointed out.

The conflicts in Iran and Lebanon

had spurred many refugees hosted there to return home since the start of the year, often under adverse circumstances, including to Syria and Afghanistan.

The UN refugee agency meanwhile voiced concern over a narrowing space for refugee resettlement last year, estimating that the number of refugees needing to resettle in third countries stood at 2.9 million.

The number of resettlement spots had reached 188,800 in 2024 - its highest level in four decades.

But last year, the number was more than halved to just 81,800, the report showed, pointing in particular to a sharp decline in the numbers accepted by the United States.

"The gap between places and needs is enormous and has been widening," the agency warned.

Salih, a former Iraqi president who was once a refugee himself, also warned that forced displacement was becoming increasingly drawn out, often lasting years and even decades.

"Today, 70 percent of refugees are living in protracted situations," he pointed out. This was unsustainable, he insisted, calling on countries to back a new initiative aimed to lift millions out of long-term displacement and reliance on humanitarian aid. "Humanitarian assistance was designed for emergencies. It was never intended to sustain generations of people indefinitely," he said. The new initiative, he said, aims to slash in half the number of refugees in long-term displacement over the next decade by developing opportunities for voluntary returns, resettlement and humanitarian visas.

He voiced hope that countries would get onboard, realising that "there is a pathway to having a more sustainable situation".

## Philippine town seeks immediate airlift of food to ease hunger in quake-hit villages



GENERAL SANTOS

The mayor of a southern Philippine town that was devastated by a powerful earthquake pleaded Thursday for helicopters to transport food to stave off hunger in several landslide-isolated villages.

The 7.8 magnitude offshore quake, one of the strongest to hit the Philippine archipelago in a half century, struck Monday off the southern province of Sarangani and has left at least 47 people dead and injured 688 with 31 still missing.

More than 45,000 people remained displaced, about half in emergency shelters, after the quake damaged more than 12,600 houses in farming towns and cities. Many were still too traumatized to return home due to aftershocks, provincial officials said.

Sarangani reported 20 dead from the quake, the highest toll from the affected provinces, mostly due to a landslide that

buried houses in the coastal town of Glan, according to the government's Office of Civil Defense, which deals with major disasters.

Glan Mayor Victor James Yap said power has not been restored to his province and 10 of 31 villages in his town of more than 100,000 people remained inaccessible mostly due to landslides. He asked the government to immediately deploy air force helicopters to deliver food and other aid to the stricken areas. "We need food and water but it's difficult to transport them to some of our villages which remain isolated," Yap told DZMM radio network. "Choppers are needed to transport food because people there are already very hungry."

A key access road to the town has been reopened and will allow the delivery of fuel as early as Thursday, but the town remained without power and cellphone services were still spotty, according to Yap.

Most of the deaths from the quake were caused by falling debris from collapsed buildings and landslides in Sarangani, the coastal city of General Santos, and the outlying provinces of South Cotabato and Davao Occidental.

Two swimmers drowned and one remained missing off General Santos after being swept out to sea shortly after the quake hit. Waves of up to 1.4 meters (4.6 feet) above tide level were measured in the country's south and smaller waves washed ashore in Indonesia and Palau and as far away as southern Japan.

The earthquake was one of the strongest to hit the country since an 8.1 magnitude quake and tsunami on Aug. 17, 1976, that killed about 8,000 people.

The Philippines is often hit by earthquakes and volcanic eruptions due to its location on the Pacific "Ring of Fire," an arc of seismic faults around the ocean.

## FIFA World Cup 2026: A New Era Begins as Football Unveils Its Biggest Tournament Ever



The countdown is over. The stadiums are ready, the teams have arrived, and billions of football fans across the globe are preparing for a month-long celebration of the world's most popular sport. As the FIFA World Cup 2026 kicks off, football stands on the threshold of a historic transformation.

This is not merely the return of the World Cup after four years. It is the beginning of a new chapter in the tournament's nearly century-long history.

For the first time since its inception in 1930, the FIFA World Cup will feature 48 nations, making it the largest edition ever staged. Spread across three host countries — Canada, Mexico and the United States — the tournament will comprise an unprecedented 104 matches played over 39 days in 16 host cities, setting new benchmarks for scale, logistics and global participation.

From the iconic Mexico City Stadium to the grand finale at New York New Jersey Stadium in East Rutherford on July 19, the tournament promises not only elite football but also a showcase of the sport's growing global reach.

For FIFA, the expansion represents a strategic effort to make football's greatest stage more inclusive. For players and supporters, it offers the possibility of new stories, fresh rivalries and unexpected heroes.

**A Tournament Unlike Any Before**

For decades, the FIFA World Cup was synonymous with 32 teams.

That format, introduced in 1998, produced some of the most memorable tournaments in football history. Yet as the game expanded beyond its traditional strongholds, pressure grew to provide greater opportunities for emerging football nations.

The result is the 48-team World Cup.

The expansion has increased the number of participating countries by 50 percent, bringing dozens of new football cultures into the spotlight. Nations that previously viewed qualification as an almost impossible dream now find themselves competing on the world's biggest sporting stage.

Among the debutants generating excitement are Cabo Verde, Curaçao, Jordan and Uzbekistan, each of whom has completed remarkable qualification campaigns to earn a place in history.

For many of these nations, simply reaching the World Cup represents a milestone that could transform football development for generations.

The expanded field also reflects football's shifting geography. While Europe and South America continue to dominate the sport's elite levels, significant progress has been made across Asia, Africa, North America and the Caribbean.

The World Cup of 2026 will showcase that diversity like never before.

**Three Nations, One Tournament**

The tournament's scale is reflected not only in the number of teams but also in the size of the host region.

For the first time, three countries are jointly staging the FIFA World Cup.

Canada, Mexico and the United States have combined resources to host what is expected to become the most attended sporting event in history.

The opening match will be played at the historic Mexico City Stadium, formerly known as Estadio Azteca, where Mexico will face South Africa.

The venue occupies a unique place in football folklore. It hosted the 1970 World Cup final, where Brazil's legendary team led by Pelé lifted the trophy, and the 1986 final, remembered for Diego Maradona's brilliance throughout the tournament.

Now, it becomes the first stadium in history to host matches in three different FIFA World Cups.

The symbolism is fitting. A stadium that witnessed two of football's greatest icons will now launch a tournament designed to usher the game into a new era.

Across the continent, host cities stretch from Vancouver and Toronto in Canada to Guadalajara and Mexico City in Mexico, and from Seattle and Los Angeles on America's west coast to Miami and Atlanta in the east.

The sheer geographical spread presents challenges never encountered in previous World Cups. Teams will travel thousands of kilometres, crossing multiple

climate zones and time zones. Some matches will be played in coastal cities, others in high-altitude environments, and several in regions known for intense summer heat.

Managing fatigue and travel schedules could prove just as important as tactics and technical quality.

**Understanding the New Format**

The expanded tournament has also brought a new competitive structure.

The 48 teams have been divided into 12 groups of four.

Each team will play three group-stage matches, similar to previous editions. The top two teams from every group will automatically qualify for the knockout rounds.

Additionally, the eight best third-placed teams will also progress, creating a Round of 32 for the first time in World Cup history.

From there, the tournament will proceed through the traditional knockout stages — Round of 16, quarterfinals, semifinals and final.

The format significantly increases the number of matches and extends the route to the championship.

Any team hoping to lift the trophy must now navigate eight matches instead of seven, placing greater emphasis on squad depth, rotation and endurance.

Coaches will need to carefully manage player

workloads across a demanding schedule.

For football supporters, however, the format

promises more drama and more opportunities for surprises.

Third-placed teams that might previously have been eliminated now have a pathway to the knockout rounds, increasing the likelihood of late twists during the group stage.

**The Giants Return**

While the tournament welcomes many newcomers, attention inevitably centres on football's traditional powerhouses.

Defending champions Argentina arrive carrying enormous expectations.

The South Americans remain one of the strongest teams in world football and will seek to defend the title they won in unforgettable fashion four years ago.

Brazil, meanwhile, enters another World Cup determined to end its long wait for a sixth title.

The five-time champions continue to possess one of the deepest talent pools in the sport and remain among the favourites whenever a World Cup begins.

France, finalists in the previous edition, also return with ambitions of reclaiming the trophy. Their blend of experience and youth makes them one of the most formidable sides in the competition.

European heavyweights such as Spain, Germany, England, Portugal and the Netherlands will similarly believe they possess the quality required



workloads across a demanding schedule. For football supporters, however, the format

Yet history repeatedly demonstrates that World Cups rarely unfold according to expectations.

The tournament's unique pressure often produces outcomes few experts anticipate.

**The Appeal of the Underdog**

One of the enduring attractions of the World Cup is its ability to create unexpected heroes.

Every edition produces stories that transcend sport itself.

Whether it is a small nation defeating a giant, an unknown player becoming a household name or a team exceeding all predictions, the World Cup has always been fertile ground for sporting fairy tales.

The expanded format may amplify that unpredictability.

With more nations participating and more teams advancing beyond the group stage, opportunities for surprise results increase significantly.

Countries that previously struggled to qualify now have the chance to gain valuable experience on the global stage.

Some may simply be happy to participate. Others may dream of emulating the achievements of teams such as Croatia, Morocco or South Korea, whose remarkable World Cup runs captured global attention in previous editions.

Football's history suggests that at least one unexpected contender will emerge.

The question is which nation will seize the opportunity.

**Economic and Cultural Impact**

Beyond football, the tournament represents a major economic undertaking.

Billions of dollars have been invested in infrastructure, stadium upgrades, transportation networks and tourism facilities.

Host cities expect millions of visitors over the course of the competition.

Hotels, restaurants, airlines and local businesses are preparing for a surge in activity as supporters travel across North America to follow their teams.

The tournament is also expected to generate substantial broadcasting revenues, with television and digital audiences projected to reach record levels.

Yet the World Cup's significance extends beyond economics.

For many communities, hosting matches offers an opportunity to showcase local culture, history and identity to a global audience.

From Mexican traditions and Canadian multiculturalism to the diverse urban landscapes of the United States, the tournament provides a platform for cultural exchange on an unprecedented scale.

**A Midnight Festival for Indian Fans**

For football supporters in India, the World Cup brings a familiar challenge.

Most matches will take place late at night or during the early hours of the morning due to the time difference between India and North America.

Generations of Indian football fans have grown accustomed to sacrificing sleep for the World Cup, and 2026 will be no different.

The opening match between Mexico and South Africa, scheduled for 12:30 am IST on June 12, marks the beginning of weeks of midnight viewing.

Despite the inconvenient timings, enthusiasm remains immense.

Football enjoys passionate followings across states such as West Bengal, Kerala, Goa, Manipur, Mizoram and Assam, where supporters traditionally gather in homes, clubs and community centres to watch major international tournaments.

For many, the World Cup is not merely a sporting event but a shared cultural experience.

**Expansion: Progress or Dilution?**

The decision to expand the tournament has not been without controversy.

Critics argue that increasing the number of participants could dilute overall quality and reduce the exclusivity that has historically defined the World Cup.

Some observers worry about mismatches during the group stage and concerns regarding player workload.

Others question whether the commercial benefits have been prioritised over sporting considerations.

Supporters of expansion offer a different perspective.

They argue that football's growth demands broader representation and that emerging nations deserve opportunities previously reserved for established powers.

Many point out that every major expansion in World Cup history initially faced scepticism before ultimately becoming accepted.

The debate is unlikely to disappear anytime soon.

However, once the tournament begins, attention will quickly shift from theoretical arguments to events on the pitch.

As history has shown repeatedly, compelling football tends to silence criticism.

The World's Greatest Sporting Theatre

Ultimately, the FIFA World Cup remains unique because it transcends sport.

It is where national identity, sporting excellence and human emotion converge.

It is where children dream of glory, veterans seek redemption and entire countries unite behind a common cause. Over the coming weeks, supporters will witness moments of joy and heartbreak, triumph and disappointment.

Some players will achieve immortality. Others will see lifelong ambitions fade in a matter of minutes.

New heroes will emerge. Old legends may take their final bow.

For billions watching around the world, the World Cup represents football at its purest and most dramatic.

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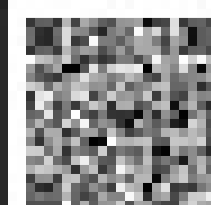


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