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PERSPECTIVE

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Assam CM Holds Talks With Director Aditya Dhar on Hindi Film Based on Lachit Borphukan

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has begun discussions with acclaimed filmmaker Aditya Dhar on the possibility of producing a Hindi feature film on legendary Ahom military commander Lachit Borphukan, a move aimed at bringing the iconic Asamese hero's legacy to a wider national and international audience.

Speaking during a Facebook Live session on Thursday evening, Sarma said he had recently spoken with Dhar, best known for directing Uri: The Surgical Strike and the upcoming film Dhurandhar. According to the chief minister, the filmmaker showed interest in the proposal and is expected to meet him in August for further discussions.

Sarma said a large-scale cinematic project on Lachit Borphukan could play a crucial role in introducing one of Assam's greatest historical figures to audiences across India and beyond.

"Lachit Borphukan's story deserves national and global recognition. A well-made Hindi film can help showcase his extraordinary leadership, patriotism and military achievements to future generations," the chief minister said.

Lachit Borphukan remains one of the most revered figures in Assam's history. As commander of the Ahom forces, he led the decisive victory against the Mughal army in the Battle of Saraighat in 1671, a turning point that prevented Mughal expansion into Assam and cemented his reputation as one of India's finest military strategists.

The chief minister expressed confidence that a pan-India film would significantly enhance awareness of Borphukan's role in defending the region and preserving the sovereignty of the Ahom kingdom.

WHO SAID WHAT



Mobile Phone Manufacturing Scheme (MPMS) will focus on improving competitiveness, achieving scale, increasing domestic value addition and building Indian mobile brand. ~ Ashwini Vaisnaw, Minister for Railways, Information & Broadcasting, Electronics & Information Technology, GoI

GUWAHATI

The Assam government will restart the rollout of several flagship welfare schemes from August after a temporary pause during the Budget period, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced .

Speaking during a live interaction from the CM Library, Sarma said the next phase of the Orunodoi scheme will commence on August 3, with meetings to be held in every panchayat where beneficiaries will receive the first instalment of assistance.

The Chief Minister also announced that certificates under the Nijut Moina Asoni and Nijut Babu Asoni schemes will be distributed in colleges on August 6 and 7 after the completion of the admission process. Students will be required to complete the necessary formalities and return the certificates, following which regular



Randeep Hooda Calls for Peace and Unity During Meeting with Manipur CM



IMPHAL

Bollywood actor Randeep Hooda has appealed for peace, unity and reconciliation in Manipur during a meeting with Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh, amid ongoing efforts to restore normalcy in the conflict-affected state.

Hooda, accompanied by his wife and Manipuri actor Linthoingambi Laishram, met the chief minister at his official residence in Imphal on July 16, according to an official statement. During the interaction, the actor congratulated Singh on assuming office at a challenging time and acknowledged the complexities of governing a state grappling with prolonged ethnic tensions and security concerns. He urged people from all communities to come together as one family and work collectively towards lasting peace and harmony.

Responding to the appeal, Chief Minister Singh said he remained optimistic that normalcy would gradually return to the state despite the continuing challenges. He noted that efforts undertaken by the government to promote dialogue and reconciliation were

yielding positive results in some areas.

Highlighting recent developments in Jiribam district, Singh said initiatives aimed at rebuilding trust among communities had helped narrow longstanding divisions. According to him, people in the district had begun living together more peacefully, signalling progress in restoring social cohesion.

The chief minister reiterated the government's commitment to protecting citizens and ensuring stability across the state. He also called on all communities and civil society groups to actively support ongoing peace-building efforts and contribute to creating an atmosphere of mutual understanding and cooperation.

The meeting concluded with the chief minister, Hooda and Laishram sharing a traditional meal of khechri as part of the Rath Yatra, locally known as the Kang festival, symbolising communal harmony and cultural celebration.

Manipur has witnessed ethnic unrest since May 2023, and the state government continues to engage with various stakeholders in an effort to rebuild trust and restore lasting peace.

Congress to Press Government on Manipur, Foreign Policy During Monsoon Session: Gaurav Gogoi

NEW DELHI

Congress MP and Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Gaurav Gogoi, on Friday said the party would raise a range of issues affecting citizens during the upcoming Monsoon Session of Parliament and seek answers from the Centre on key national concerns, including the situation in Manipur and India's foreign policy.

Addressing reporters in New Delhi, Gogoi said the Congress would focus on matters that directly impact the public and questioned whether the government was prepared to respond to concerns raised by the opposition.

"We will raise all important issues which are foremost in the public's life. More important is will the government answer and give its response on Ayodhya, the education system, the automobile industry, foreign policy and Manipur?" Gogoi said.

The Congress leader alleged that the government could attempt to avoid discussions on sensitive issues by disrupting the functioning of Parliament.

"My fear is that the government will not allow Parliament to run properly and it will not allow these issues to be raised because they want to run away from their responsibility on these important issues," he said.

Gogoi also indicated that the Congress would coordinate with its INDIA bloc partners and other opposition parties before taking a unified position on bills introduced during the session.

"Once the bills come, we will discuss with our alliance partners and with other opposition parties. A decision will be taken after due consensus," he added.

The Monsoon Session is expected to witness sharp exchanges between the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and the opposition, with issues such as governance, economic challenges, foreign policy and the prolonged situation in Manipur likely to feature prominently in parliamentary debates.

Assam PWD to Take Over Silchar's Capital Point-Rangirkhari Road for Reconstruction

SILCHAR

The Assam government has decided to transfer the Capital Point-Rangirkhari road in Silchar from the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL) to the Public Works Department (PWD) to facilitate its reconstruction and permanently restrict heavy vehicle movement on the stretch.

The decision was announced by Cabinet Minister Kaushik Rai after a review meeting on the condition of roads in Silchar held at the Cachar District Commissioner's office on Thursday.

Rai said the process of de-notifying the 2.3-km road stretch from NHIDCL and handing it over to the State PWD would begin immediately, allowing the government to undertake long-term repairs without waiting for the proposed flyover project.

"We do not want to wait for the flyover project before addressing the present condition of the road. The transfer process will begin immediately," Rai said.



NHIDCL had carried out repair work worth about Rs 2.3 crore on the Capital Point-Rangirkhari stretch last year. However, sections of the road deteriorated following heavy rainfall that began in late March. After a review in June, the agency was directed to undertake emergency restoration work.

According to the minister, NHIDCL has started temporary repairs using paver blocks, with work continuing on the remaining 1.5-km portion of the

road. He described the ongoing repairs as a short-term measure aimed at providing relief during the monsoon season.

"The paver-block work is only a temporary solution. A permanent remedy will come through comprehensive reconstruction by Assam PWD," Rai said, adding that large-scale bituminous resurfacing is not feasible during the rainy season.

The State PWD will prepare a fresh project estimate and undertake com-

plete reconstruction of the road within the next two months, subject to favourable weather conditions.

As part of the plan, the government has also decided to permanently prohibit heavy vehicles from using the Capital Point-Rangirkhari corridor. Police authorities will issue a notification directing trucks, buses and other heavy vehicles to use NH-37 and the Silchar bypass instead.

"This will not be a temporary diversion. Once the road comes under PWD, heavy vehicles will be permanently restricted to protect the city road from further damage," Rai said.

The NH-37 section running through Tarapur towards Rangpur will remain under NHIDCL, which has also been instructed to continue repair works, including the laying of paver blocks. The agency has been asked to identify suitable weather windows and temporarily restrict heavy traffic at night to facilitate uninterrupted repairs.

The review meeting also assessed progress on the proposed Silchar bypass flyover project. The nearly 3-km

corridor includes around 2 km under NHIDCL and 1 km under Assam PWD jurisdiction.

Rai said construction machinery and materials required for the project had been delayed due to damage to a bridge at Gumrah along the transport route. The equipment is expected to reach the site within the next few days, enabling work on the flyover to begin.

"The project is crucial for easing congestion and diverting through traffic away from the city," he said.

In a second phase, the Rangirkhari-Sonabarighat road will also be transferred to Assam PWD after NHIDCL completes drainage-related works. Once the transfer is completed, the entire road corridor from Capital Point to Sonabarighat will come under the State PWD, while the Silchar bypass will remain the designated national highway route.

The meeting further reviewed the condition of the 1.9-km road connecting Birbal Bazar in Meherpur to Silchar Medical College and Hospital. Of the nearly Rs 26 crore allocated for

land acquisition, around Rs 12 crore has already been disbursed.

Officials aim to complete the remaining land acquisition and utility-shifting processes and hand over the full stretch to the contractor by August 20. The contractor has also been directed to immediately begin maintenance work on the existing road.

To improve traffic movement, police personnel will be deployed round the clock at key points between Birbal Bazar and the Silchar Medical College bridge.

Acknowledging public dissatisfaction over Silchar's deteriorating road infrastructure, Rai said the government was committed to providing both immediate relief and long-term solutions. "The hardship faced by residents is genuine, and the government fully recognises it. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has been personally monitoring the issue. Our focus is on delivering immediate improvements while ensuring durable and technically sound solutions for the future," he said.



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VOLUME:1, ISSUE 825

PUNJAB'S UNFINISHED RECKONING

The long and troubled journey of Satluj from production to public release tells a story far larger than cinema. Completed in 2022, delayed for years by censorship objections, renamed, contested and briefly withdrawn after its eventual streaming release, the film has become a symbol of India's continuing discomfort with some of the most difficult chapters of its democratic history. That the film centres on Jaswant Singh Khralra-a human rights activist who documented alleged disappearances during Punjab's insurgency-only deepens the irony. A story about disappearance nearly disappeared itself.

Yet the controversy surrounding Satluj should not distract from the deeper question it raises: how does a constitutional democracy confront violent insurgency without sacrificing the constitutional principles it seeks to protect?

Punjab's insurgency remains one of independent India's most painful and politically sensitive experiences. The violence of the 1980s and early 1990s scarred an entire generation. Militants targeted civilians, public officials, judges, police personnel and migrant workers. Fear became a daily reality. The State responded with extraordinary force. Counterinsurgency operations intensified. Thousands died. Entire communities lived under the shadow of violence and suspicion.

The challenge for any democratic State confronting such a crisis is profound. Governments have a fundamental duty to protect citizens and preserve territorial integrity. A State that proves incapable of confronting armed rebellion risks losing legitimacy, authority and eventually sovereignty itself. Security forces are often compelled to make decisions in circumstances far removed from the certainties of peacetime governance.

But democracies are judged not merely by whether they survive crises, but by how they survive them.

Punjab's counterinsurgency campaign is often remembered through sharply contrasting narratives. One narrative highlights the success of security forces in defeating a violent separatist movement and restoring peace to a troubled State. Another focuses on allegations of extrajudicial killings, disappearances and abuses committed in the name of restoring order. Neither narrative alone captures the full complexity of that era.

The legacy of former Punjab Police chief K.P.S. Gill exemplifies this divide. To many, Gill remains the officer who led the decisive campaign that crushed militancy and prevented Punjab from descending further into chaos. To others, his tenure symbolizes the dangers of unchecked State power and the erosion of legal safeguards during extraordinary times.

Similarly, Jaswant Singh Khralra occupies a powerful place in India's human rights discourse. His efforts to document disappearances forced uncomfortable questions into the public sphere and challenged the State to account for its actions. His work became a reminder that constitutional accountability cannot be suspended indefinitely, even during periods of grave security threats.

The enduring significance of Punjab lies precisely in this tension.

Too often, public debates reduce complex historical experiences into simplistic contests between heroes and villains. Yet democratic crises rarely present such clear moral choices. More often, they involve competing imperatives that are both legitimate and difficult to reconcile. Security and liberty, order and accountability, collective safety and individual rights frequently collide in moments of national emergency.

This is where Punjab continues to offer lessons for contemporary India.

The central dilemma remains unresolved. If a democratic State hesitates to act firmly against armed insurgency, innocent lives may be lost and constitutional institutions weakened. But if the State begins to regard legal restraints as obstacles rather than safeguards, it risks undermining the very constitutional framework it claims to defend.

The danger is not merely operational excess. It is the gradual normalization of exceptional powers. Emergency measures introduced to confront extraordinary threats can become entrenched unless subjected to scrutiny and review. Democracies must therefore maintain a delicate balance: they must possess sufficient strength to defend themselves while retaining the capacity for self-examination.

This is why artistic works such as Satluj matter, regardless of whether one agrees with their interpretation of history.

Films are not court judgments, official records or academic histories. Their purpose is not necessarily to present a comprehensive account. Rather, they illuminate particular experiences, raise difficult questions and challenge public memory. A healthy democracy should be capable of engaging with such narratives without either suppressing them or accepting them uncritically as definitive truth.

The impulse to censor controversial representations of history often reveals insecurity rather than confidence. Democratic societies grow stronger when they allow competing interpretations to coexist and be debated openly. The answer to disagreement is not erasure but engagement.

At the same time, there is equal danger in viewing any artistic work as the final word on historical events. Punjab's insurgency involved multiple actors, conflicting motivations and enormous human suffering on all sides. No single book, film or official account can fully capture that complexity.

India's challenge, therefore, is not to choose between remembering security imperatives and remembering human rights concerns. It must remember both.

The peace that Punjab enjoys today was achieved through difficult and often controversial decisions. But peace alone cannot close historical debates. Democracies distinguish themselves from authoritarian systems precisely because they retain the ability to revisit their past, question official narratives and examine the exercise of State power.

More than three decades after the insurgency's peak, Punjab's story remains unfinished. The dead are still counted differently. The memories remain contested. The moral questions remain unresolved.

That is why Satluj deserves attention-not because it settles the argument, but because it reminds the nation that the argument still matters. A mature democracy must possess enough confidence to confront its own contradictions. It must be strong enough to defeat violence and wise enough to question the methods employed in doing so.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

We look up at the same stars and see such different things.

- George R. R. Martin

BRITAIN MUST STOP WHITEWASHING THE EMPIRE



PAWAN KHERA

Britain has spent decades asking the world to admire its empire while refusing to acknowledge its damage. That is the oldest trick in imperial politics: take the wealth, and rewrite the theft as a gift. Suella Braverman's latest intervention belongs squarely in that tradition. In her version of events, the ex-colonies owe Britain for the empire's supposed "investment" and "development".

The problem is not just that this is offensive. It is that it depends on selective memory. When a British-Indian politician suggests that former colonies should pay Britain back, she asks us to forget the scale of what the empire did to India. Before British rule hardened into domination, India accounted for roughly 23 percent of the world economy. By 1947, that share had fallen to around 4 percent. That collapse was not an accident of history. It was the outcome of a system built on extraction, loot and plunder.

The East India Company was the first instrument of this colonial system. It arrived as a trading corporation but rapidly transformed into an engine of extraction. Its model was simple: seize revenue, compel the cultivation of cash crops, dismantle indigenous industries, and redirect India's agricultural and commercial surplus towards British economic and imperial interests.

The consequences were devastating. Peasants were subjected to relentless revenue demands that left little margin for drought, debt, or famine. Indigo cultivators were bound by coercive contracts that enriched European planters while impoverishing farming communities. Indian artisans and weavers, once among the world's most skilled producers, were systematically displaced as British manufactured goods—backed by imperial policy and unequal trade—undercut indigenous industry.

India did not merely sustain the British empire at enormous human and economic cost, we also bore the brunt of Britain's wars. During the First World War (1914-1918), over 1.3 million Indians served overseas or in support roles, including nearly 800,000 combat troops. Around 75,000 Indian soldiers laid down their lives, while tens of thousands more were wounded or captured. India supplied Britain with food grains, horses and mules, cotton, jute, steel, leather, medical supplies and ammunition, and contributed £146 million—roughly 9 percent of India's GDP—to finance Britain's war effort. In return, it rewarded India with another

three decades of colonial subjugation, political repression, economic exploitation and brutal crackdowns on the independence movement.

The injustice deepened during the Second World War (1939-1945). The Indian army in WW2 was the largest all volunteer army that the world has ever seen, rising from 200,000 men in 1939 to over 2.5 million men by 1945. And a very fine force it was too, with men of the Indian army (including British and Gurkha personnel) awarded 31 Victoria Crosses. More than 87,000 were killed, around 65,000 wounded and nearly 80,000 taken prisoner. India became Britain's wartime arsenal, supplying millions of tonnes of food, uniforms, boots, railway equipment, vehicles, ammunition, weapons and medical stores. It also spent approximately £350 million on defence and extended war credits worth £1.321 billion to Britain—equivalent to nearly 30 percent of India's GDP.

Yet, while Indian blood and wealth sustained the British war machine, Britain repaid India with one of the darkest chapters in its history: the Bengal Famine, in which millions died while food continued to be diverted to imperial priorities; the chaotic and hasty Partition that displaced millions and left over a million dead; the legacy of communal division and conflict; and an impoverished nation stripped of its accumulated wealth after nearly two centuries of systematic extraction.

Britain did not leave India prosperous or prepared. It left behind a country exhausted by exploitation, fractured by imperial policy and burdened with rebuilding after nearly two centuries of colonial plunder. Yes, the British built railways,

ports and administrative institutions—but not as gifts to India. They were instruments of the empire, designed to extract raw materials, move troops, tighten imperial control and funnel Indian wealth to Britain.

That is the first great inversion in Braverman's argument. She invites us to celebrate the infrastructure while forgetting the exploitation that made it possible—to remember the railways but not the revenue, the ports but not the peasants, the bureaucracy but not the artisans whose livelihoods were destroyed. The visible monuments of the empire are presented as evidence of benevolence, while the invisible machinery of dispossession, coercion and extraction that financed them is conveniently erased.

The political damage was no less deliberate. Britain understood early that a divided India was easier to govern than a united one. So it sharpened communal identities, institutionalised separate representation and rewarded politics that fractured rather than unified Indian society. Hindu-Muslim differences were not invented by the British, but colonial rule politicised and exploited these fractures. The result is splintering of the subcontinent and a deep-seated mistrust that has outlived the empire itself.

The contrast with the Mughals is important, though it should not be romanticised. Mughal rulers governed India as the centre of their empire, not as a distant colony to be exploited. Their legitimacy depended on the prosperity and stability of the subcontinent. Investment in architecture, patronage of artisans and textiles, and the cultivation of local alliances were not acts of charity; they were integral to sustaining an empire rooted in India.

The British Raj operated on an entirely different logic. It was an extractive colonial regime, structured around racial hierarchy and the transfer of wealth to Britain. Railways, ports, and administrative institutions were built primarily to facilitate imperial control, resource extraction, troop movement, and commercial interests. India was not the heart of the empire but one of its most valuable possessions.

That distinction is fundamental. The Mughal State accumulated wealth largely within India because India was its political and economic centre. The British Empire systematically transferred Indian wealth overseas because India was a colony. One empire sought legitimacy by embedding itself in the subcontinent; the other by governing it from a distance for metropolitan gain.

That is why the claim that Britain "developed" its colonies is such a grotesque inversion of history. Colonial "investment" was built on coerced extraction, not consent-based development. India financed the empire, underwrote British industrial growth and absorbed the human cost of Britain's rise.

As such, the argument that former colonies should somehow repay Britain for these "investments" turns history on its head. If anything, it is Britain that owes a historical debt for the systematic exploitation of India's people, resources, labour and wealth over nearly two centuries.

Jamaica and the Caribbean Community (Caricom) have transformed the case for reparations from a moral appeal into a coherent political programme. Their demands go far beyond symbolism, encompassing a formal apology, reparatory development financing, debt relief, investment in health and education, and the restitution of cultural heritage. This is not a politics of grievance, but a serious framework for historical justice.

India belongs within that broader conversation, albeit on its own terms. Unlike

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

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~ United Nations Geneva

BOT OR HUMAN

4 THINGS TO CHECK

Caricom, New Delhi has not pursued a formal reparations claim, preferring moral argument over legal action and historical critique over diplomatic confrontation. That restraint, however, should not be mistaken for the absence of a claim. India was not a peripheral colony. It was the economic heart of the British Empire—the single-most important source of imperial wealth, revenue and extraction. If the logic of reparations applies anywhere, it applies with equal, if not greater, force to India.

If reparations are defensible for the Caribbean, they are at least as defensible for India. But India's claim cannot be confined to monetary compensation alone. It should encompass a broader framework of historical justice: the restitution of looted artefacts, full archival transparency, a formal apology for colonial exploitation, and a fundamental reassessment of how the British empire is taught and remembered in Britain—not as a source of national pride, but as a project of conquest, extraction and domination.

The timing matters too. With Labour in government, Britain has a rare opportunity to confront its imperial past at the highest political level. Imperial nostalgia from Conservatives may be predictable. But when Labour MPs, Caribbean governments and voices across the Commonwealth are demanding reparative justice, the question becomes far more profound: can Britain finally acknowledge that the empire was not merely a story of railways, institutions, and trade, but also one of conquest, extraction and domination, long obscured by imperial mythmaking?

Braverman's claim is useful only because it strips away the mask. It lays bare a strain of British imperial nostalgia that seeks to recast exploitation as benevolence and domination as development. That historical whitewashing must now be confronted—directly, honestly and without apology.

Pawan Khera | Member of Parliament and head of media and publicity department, AICC



CoBRA Commandos Retrained for Crowd Control as CRPF Expands Role in Manipur



IMPHAL

The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) has provided specialised law-and-order and crowd-control training to personnel of its elite Commando Battalions for Resolute Action (CoBRA) deployed in Manipur, signalling a major operational shift for a force traditionally tasked with anti-Maoist operations.

Officials said personnel from two CoBRA battalions underwent a month-long pre-induction training programme before their deployment in the violence-affected state. The training focused on crowd management, law-and-order duties and handling the complex security environment arising from Manipur's prolonged ethnic conflict.

The two battalions were moved to Manipur in May after being redeployed

from anti-Naxal operations. Their re-assignment followed the Centre's announcement in March that India had effectively become Naxal-free, enabling specialised units to be redirected to other internal security challenges.

As part of the deployment strategy, CoBRA personnel have been instructed to strictly follow standard operating procedures, avoid unsanctioned movement and maintain close coordination with the Manipur Police and the Indian Army during operations.

To bolster mobility and operational readiness, the CRPF has also deployed around 100 armoured vehicles across the state. Officials said the vehicles are being used for patrols, rapid-response missions and troop movement in sensitive areas, while also providing enhanced protection to security

personnel. The CoBRA units, working alongside regular CRPF formations, have been tasked with maintaining law and order, conducting area domination exercises, dismantling insurgent infrastructure and preventing armed groups from regrouping. In one such operation in June, CRPF-led forces demolished 30 active bunkers in Leimakhong area of Kangpokpi district.

Manipur has been gripped by ethnic violence between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities since May 2023. The conflict has claimed more than 260 lives and displaced thousands of residents, leading to the deployment of large numbers of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) across the state.

Officials said nearly 320 companies of CAPFs are currently stationed in Manipur, including around 200 com-

panies of the CRPF, making it one of the largest security deployments in the country.

Raised in 2008-09 as a specialised anti-Maoist force, CoBRA gained prominence through intelligence-driven jungle warfare operations against Left Wing Extremist groups. With Maoist violence significantly reduced across India, the elite commandos are now being deployed in emerging internal security theatres, including Manipur, where restoring stability remains a key priority.

Meanwhile, CRPF officials said the force has started withdrawing around 60 companies from West Bengal following the completion of Assembly election duties, though nearly 40 companies will continue to remain deployed in the state.

Meghalaya to Adopt Resolution Opposing Uranium Mining, Says CM Conrad Sangma

SHILLONG

The Meghalaya government will introduce a formal resolution opposing and banning uranium mining in the state, Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma announced on Thursday, reaffirming the government's long-standing stand against the controversial activity.

The announcement comes amid renewed speculation and reports regarding the possibility of uranium extraction in Meghalaya, an issue that has generated public debate and opposition for decades.

Clarifying the government's position, Sangma said the proposed resolution would formally reaffirm the state's opposition to uranium mining and eliminate any uncertainty surrounding the matter.

"The Meghalaya Government will pass a resolution to formally oppose and ban uranium mining in Meghalaya," the Chief Minister said, stressing that his government has never approved uranium mining in the state.

According to Sangma, the move is intended to provide a clear and official policy position while addressing concerns raised by various sections of society over the years.

The issue of uranium mining has remained highly sensitive in Meghalaya, with local communities, civil society organisations and environmental groups repeatedly expressing concerns over its potential impact on the state's ecology, public health and traditional livelihoods.

Opponents of uranium mining have long argued that extraction activities could lead to environmental degradation, contamination of water sources, health hazards and displacement of local populations in mining-affected areas. The Chief Minister said the resolution would help put an end to recurring speculation and reaffirm the government's commitment to protecting Meghalaya's environment and the interests of its people.

Meitei IDP Body Urges Immediate Release of Pending DBT Aid in Manipur

IMPHAL

The Apex Committee of Meitei Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) Manipur has appealed to the government to immediately release pending Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) assistance, alleging that thousands of displaced families have not received their monthly financial support for more than two weeks.

In a statement issued on July 16, the committee said the delay in disbursing the assistance has created significant financial difficulties for families living in relief camps and temporary settlements across the state.

The committee noted that the monthly DBT support serves as a crucial lifeline for displaced households, helping them meet essential expenses such as food, healthcare, children's education and other day-to-day needs. The prolonged delay, it said, has left many families struggling to manage basic necessities.

Expressing concern over the sit-

uation, the committee urged the authorities to clear all pending DBT payments within the next three days to provide immediate relief to affected beneficiaries.

It also called for the introduction of a fixed disbursement schedule from next month, proposing that the financial assistance be credited on the first day of every month. According to the committee, a predictable payment system would enable displaced families to better plan their household expenses and reduce uncertainty.

The committee further urged the government and concerned departments to prioritise the welfare of internally displaced persons and ensure that financial assistance reaches beneficiaries on time.

Thousands of people remain displaced in Manipur following the ethnic violence that erupted in May 2023, with many continuing to depend on government support and relief measures for their sustenance.

NEC Approves Rs 13.58 Crore for Meghalaya Healthcare, Education and Infrastructure Projects

SHILLONG

The North Eastern Council (NEC) has sanctioned more than Rs 13.58 crore for a range of healthcare, education, infrastructure, energy and cultural projects in Meghalaya during May and June 2026, providing a fresh boost to the state's development initiatives.

According to the NEC, the approved funds will support projects aimed at strengthening public services, enhancing educational infrastructure, promoting renewable energy planning and improving community facilities across the state.

A significant portion of the allocation will be used to install a 1.5 Tesla MRI machine at Tura Civil Hospital, a move expected to expand access to advanced diagnostic services for patients in the Garo Hills region and reduce dependence on referrals outside the area.

In the education sector, financial assistance has been approved for the upgradation of facilities at Shillong Polytechnic. The council has also supported the establishment of a multi-



disciplinary training-cum-resource centre through the North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Society (NERCORMS) to promote technical skills development, training and research.

The NEC has further extended support to cultural and community infrastructure, including the Seng Khasi Cultural Complex and the Sein-raij Jowai Community Hall, aimed at preserving indigenous heritage and strengthening community engagement.

Funding has also been approved for improvement works at the historic Iewduh Market in Shillong,

one of the region's largest traditional markets. The project is expected to enhance facilities for traders, farmers and daily commuters who depend on the market for their livelihoods.

In the energy sector, the council has sanctioned funds for feasibility studies and preliminary surveys of the proposed Mawblei, Myntdu Leshka Stage-II and Selim hydropower projects. The studies will assess the technical and economic viability of the projects and help guide future investments in renewable energy infrastructure.

Beyond Meghalaya-specific initiatives, the NEC released an additional

Rs 18.98 crore during the same period to universities, technical institutions, non-governmental organisations and other bodies across the Northeast for various developmental and academic programmes.

Among the initiatives supported was the Industry Academia Research Conclave 2025 hosted by the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Meghalaya, as well as the Miss & Mister Beauty Pageant 2026 organised at the North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences (NEIGRIHMS), Shillong.

The council also reported the completion of the Shillong-Umroi Airport Road project in June 2026. The upgraded road is expected to improve connectivity to Umroi Airport, facilitate smoother transportation and strengthen regional mobility.

The latest approvals form part of the NEC's broader efforts to support infrastructure development, healthcare expansion, educational advancement and economic growth across Meghalaya and the wider Northeast region.

Tripura CM Manik Saha Slams CPI(M), Rejects LoP's 'Government of Goondas' Charge



AGARTALA

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Thursday launched a sharp attack on the CPI(M), describing the opposition party as an "institution of lies" while rejecting Leader of the

Opposition Jitendra Chaudhury's allegation that the BJP-led government is being run by "goondas".

Addressing reporters, Saha accused the Left party of repeatedly spreading misinformation and attempting to mislead the public through what he termed politically motivated narratives.

"If there is a party of lies and one needs to learn how to tell lies properly, then the institution of lies is located at Melarnath in Agartala-the office of CPI(M), along with its affiliated organisations," the chief minister said, referring to the party headquarters in the state capital.

The chief minister alleged that CPI(M) leaders frequently make unfounded claims with the expectation that repeated assertions would influence public perception.

"They know how to present matters in a way that they think people will believe. This has been their

approach for a long time," he said.

Responding to Chaudhury's recent remark that the BJP government was a "government of goondas", Saha turned the criticism back on the opposition, accusing CPI(M) leaders and workers of displaying unruly behaviour.

Referring to the controversy surrounding Chaudhury's comments against South Tripura Superintendent of Police Mourya Krishna, the chief minister said the opposition leader's conduct towards the police force had raised questions.

"You have seen how the Leader of the Opposition was speaking against the police. Those officers were recruited during the CPI(M)'s tenure. Now, because they are not listening to them, they are becoming angry. People can understand what is happening," Saha said.

The chief minister further asserted that government officials and the

public were capable of distinguishing between political rhetoric and genuine public service.

"People know who is working in the interest of the state and the country. They have seen the behaviour of the opposition leadership and their workers. They also remember what happened during the Left Front's tenure," he added.

The exchange marks the latest escalation in the war of words between the ruling BJP and the opposition CPI(M), with both sides trading allegations over law and order, political violence and the functioning of state institutions.

The political confrontation intensified after Chaudhury criticised the police response to an alleged attack on CPI(M) workers in South Tripura and later expressed regret for referring to the district superintendent of police as an "idiot" during a public interaction.

Akhil Gogoi Slams 'One Nation, One Election', Calls Proposal Threat to Federalism

GUWAHATI

Rajior Dal chief and Sibsagar MLA Akhil Gogoi on Thursday strongly criticised the Centre's proposed One Nation, One Election (ONOE) initiative, describing it as a threat to India's federal structure and warning that its implementation could trigger widespread public protests across the country.

Addressing reporters in Guwahati, Gogoi alleged that the proposal seeks to fundamentally alter the balance between the Union and state governments by centralising political authority.

"One Nation, One Election is an attempt to transform India from a federal structure into a completely unitary one. It is a fascist move. We will never allow any effort to dismantle the federal framework under which the Union and states coexist," he said.

The Rajior Dal leader argued that the proposal runs contrary to the spirit of the Constitution and democratic governance. He urged the Centre to withdraw the initiative, maintaining that India's federal system is a cornerstone of the republic.

"I demand that the One Nation, One Election proposal be abandoned. It goes against democracy and violates the Constitution and

the spirit of the republic," Gogoi said.

Escalating his criticism, the Sibsagar MLA compared the proposal to authoritarian forms of governance, claiming that restructuring the electoral system in such a manner would undermine democratic institutions and regional autonomy.

"The attempt to reshape the system in this manner is akin to a Hitler-esque move. It must be stopped," he said.

Gogoi also warned that any attempt to implement the proposal without broad political consensus could provoke large-scale public opposition.

"The people's movement will grow, and citizens will be compelled to take to the streets to defend the republic and protect India's federal character," he added.

The remarks come amid an ongoing national debate over the Centre's proposal to hold simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies. While supporters argue that the measure would reduce election-related expenditure and governance disruptions, several opposition parties have raised concerns over its constitutional feasibility, logistical challenges and potential impact on federalism.

ABSU Urges Centre to Open Dialogue with Sonam Wangchuk, End Hunger Strike

KOKRAJHAR

The All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) has appealed to the Union government to initiate talks with activist Sonam Wangchuk over his ongoing protest at Jantar Mantar, while urging the noted educationist and climate campaigner to end his indefinite hunger strike in the interest of his health.

Addressing reporters in Kokrajhar, ABSU president Khwrvmdao Wary expressed concern over Wangchuk's prolonged fast, stating that the activist should not continue to jeopardise his health while advocating for students' rights and educational reforms.

Wary noted that Wangchuk has been on an indefinite hunger strike over alleged irregularities in the NEET examination and said the issues raised during the protest deserved serious attention from the central government.

"ABSU supports peaceful democratic movements and believes the concerns highlighted by Sonam Wangchuk require a constructive and sincere response," Wary said.

Referring to the protest at Jantar Mantar, he said Wangchuk has consistently spoken on matters relating to transparency in the education system, fairness in competitive examinations and the protection of students' rights.

Describing Wangchuk as a respected

educationist, climate activist and recipient of the Upendranath Brahma Soldier of Humanity Award, Wary said his work reflects the values associated with the honour and has inspired many across the country.

He stressed that demands for transparent education policies and error-free competitive examinations directly affect the future of millions of students and therefore merit meaningful engagement by the government.

Calling the demands legitimate, the ABSU leader urged the Centre to open discussions with protest leaders and seek a resolution through dialogue.

"At the same time, we appeal to Sonam Wangchuk to discontinue the indefinite fast and prioritise his health. His leadership and guidance will remain important for the continued campaign to safeguard students' rights," Wary said.

He added that Wangchuk's continued role as a "soldier of humanity" would be vital for advancing the cause through democratic means.

Meanwhile, the Delhi High Court on Thursday directed authorities to monitor Wangchuk's health on a daily basis and provide necessary medical intervention if required during his ongoing fast.

The court was hearing a public interest litigation seeking medical assistance for the activist and urging authorities to engage with him through dialogue while ensuring his right to peaceful protest is protected.

Tripura AIS Associations Condemn LoP's 'Idiot' Remark Against SP, Seek Public Apology

Agartala, July 16: The Tripura Chapter of the All India Services (AIS) Association on Thursday condemned Leader of Opposition Jitendra Choudhury for referring to

the Superintendent of Police (SP) of South Tripura as "an idiot" during a confrontation over a CPI(M) rally in Belonia, and demanded that he withdraw the remark and issue a public apology.

In a joint statement, the state units of the IAS, IPS and Indian Forest Service (IFS) associations described the comment as inappropriate and directed at a serving IPS officer who was carrying out his official duties.

The associations said the South Tripura SP had been performing his responsibilities in accordance with the law and warned that personal attacks on officers acting in good faith could undermine public trust in institutions and adversely affect the morale of civil servants and police personnel.

"While elected representatives have every democratic right to question government policies and administrative decisions, such criticism should remain dignified and should not descend into personal insults," the statement said.

The AIS bodies further alleged that Choudhury had repeatedly made offensive and unverified allegations against senior government officials in recent times, arguing that such conduct weakens public institutions and demoralises officers discharging their duties.

The statement was jointly issued by Rajesh Kumar Das on behalf of the IAS Association, R. Darlong for the IPS Association and S. Prabhu representing the IFS Association.

The controversy arose from an incident on Wednesday at Chottakhola in Belonia subdivision, where police halted a CPI(M) procession organised in memory of former party leader and Zilla Parishad candidate Badal Chandra Shil, who died in 2024 after allegedly being assaulted by a group of vil-

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Govt developing border villages as country's first villages under VVP: Rajnath



JAMMU

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh today said the Government has been developing border villages, once referred to as the last villages, into the country's first villages under the Vibrant Village Programme. Reaffirming the Government's resolve to provide all forms of connectivity through roads, rail, air and digital infrastructure, the Defence Minister said the focus laid on infrastructure post-independence didn't match the nation's capabilities and requirements.

"We have ensured that no citizen residing in a remote area feels cut off from the mainstream," he said while addressing the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) Strategic Infrastructure Conclave in New Delhi today.

Several border villages are being developed in the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh under the Vibrant Village Programme besides other States.

He said even as state-of-the-art weapons and platforms are being inducted into the defence forces to address challenges posed by evolving nature of warfare, the ports, airfields,

roads and tunnels will continue to play an indispensable role in the future. "While outcome of the war is largely determined by military prowess, precision capabilities, modern technologies and basic infrastructure is central to enabling military operations," Rajnath Singh said.

Asserting that sometimes, the first front of a war is not at the border itself, but on the road that leads our soldiers to the frontline, the Defence Minister said the person who builds that road is as vital a guardian of national security as the soldier who stands at the border. He commended the BRO for adopting niche technologies to establish robust infrastructure and carry forward Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led Government's resolve of building world-class infrastructure, continuously strengthening national security, and transforming India into a Viksit Bharat. Singh highlighted that over the past six-and-a-half decades, the BRO has transformed itself from a mere road construction agency to one of the world's most respected strategic infrastructure organizations.

He underlined achievements such as Atal Tunnel, Umling La

Pass, and Sela Tunnel stand as "living testaments" to the BRO's capability and hard work, adding that its dedicated personnel have repeatedly proven that with a spirit of service to the nation, any challenge can be overcome even in the harshest of conditions.

Terming the BRO as a front-line organisation in adopting latest technologies, Singh made special mention of the tunnelling technology, which he said has brought about the revolution, from metro construction in cities to highway development in mountainous regions.

The speed with which the BRO constructs roads and highways across some of the world's most challenging terrains is "unprecedented", the Defence Minister said, and described it a reflection of the combined strength of human resolve and modern technology. The two-day conclave, which commenced on Wednesday, served as a platform for deliberations on emerging technologies, innovative engineering solutions, digital transformation in planning, project monitoring and execution to improve productivity, sustainable construction methodologies and best practices aimed at accelerating the development of strategic infrastructure in India's border regions. The event brought together senior military leadership, policymakers, infrastructure experts, BRO officers, industry leaders and technology partners to collectively deliberate upon the future of strategic infrastructure development.

The Defence Minister also presented awards for various BRO projects, recognising outstanding performance and excellence in infrastructure development.



NEW DELHI

Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk on Friday said he would remain alive "till July 20 at any cost" as his indefinite hunger strike entered its 20th day, despite doctors warning that his prolonged fast had reached a critical stage.

The protest by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) at Jantar Mantar over alleged examina-

tion irregularities entered its 28th day, with Wangchuk calling for a large turnout at the outfit's proposed march to Parliament on July 20.

Addressing supporters at the protest site, Wangchuk acknowledged that his physical condition had weakened but said his determination remained firm.

"I am weak from the outside but very strong inside. I am sure all of you are strong from the

inside, and outside too. We need this energy for July 20, when we will take out a peaceful march to Parliament. We will go together and present our plea in the temple of democracy," he said.

"I will stay alive till July 20 at any cost. If you don't come and July 20 is not successful, I will come back as a ghost," he said.

Doctors treating Wangchuk had on Thursday warned that his health condition had entered a

critical phase, cautioning that continuing the fast could lead to serious complications, including possible organ damage.

Wangchuk has refused to end the fast, arguing that doing so without a government response would send the wrong message. He said the focus should now remain on ensuring the success of the July 20 march to Parliament.

The Delhi High Court has also taken note of the matter and directed authorities to monitor Wangchuk's health daily and provide medical assistance if his condition worsens.

Meanwhile, the All India Students' Association (AISA), affiliated with CPI(ML) Liberation, said the condition of its members Neha, Manish and Aameen, who are also on an indefinite hunger strike at a separate stage of the protest, had deteriorated.

AISA said Aameen was at risk of hypovolemic shock due to dehydration, Neha's random blood sugar level had dropped to 49 mg/dL and Manish had lost more than 10 per cent of his body weight.

"However, students are determined to remain in solidarity with Sonam Wangchuk until the government faces its crimes," the organisation said.

The CJP has demanded the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and Rs 1 crore compensation for the families of students who allegedly died by suicide over examination irregularities. The group has called for a peaceful march to Parliament on July 20, coinciding with the first day of the Monsoon Session.

The protest began on June 20, while Wangchuk joined the agitation on June 28 and has been on an indefinite hunger strike since then.

INTERNATIONAL

Trump firm plans to sell priority access to Truth Social posts, possibly his own



WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump's media company is planning to charge for special high-speed access to Truth Social posts, including possibly his own affecting national security and financial markets.

The move announced Thursday would allow Wall Street trading firms and other institutions to get news from top Truth Social con-

tributors in milliseconds so they could profit off subsequent moves in stocks, bonds and interest rates.

Called Truth PSI, the new service comes amid a flurry of other deals by Trump and his family company that critics say are exploiting the presidency for profit. It follows similar offers of paid access on rival platforms, though with one key difference: The most popular Truth Social poster is the president

himself and, as the biggest shareholder of the public traded parent company, would directly benefit.

"He's selling expedited, privileged access to information about what he is doing as president," said Kathleen Clark of Washington University School of Law and an expert in government conflicts of interest rules. "It's yet more brazen corruption, an improper exploitation of government power to enrich himself."

The Trump family company declined to comment about whether the new feature is profiting off the presidency. Truth Social's public parent, Trump Media & Technology, did not respond to emailed questions, including whether the president's posts will be excluded from the offering.

A press release states it would allow traders to see "the highest-ranking Truth Social accounts" ahead of others. The president has the most followers — 12.9 million — followed by his oldest son, Don Jr. and, close behind, his son Eric.

The release did not say how much customers would be charged.

In the past few months, Trump has announced major decisions and musings on his platform including posts about the Iran war, tariffs and the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement crackdown in US cities. The Iran posts in particular are impactful because investors are worried that higher oil prices will continue to stoke inflation and possibly force the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates.

Stock in Trump Media & Technology has plunged more than 70% since the president took office last year, erasing \$6 billion in shareholder wealth. Those losses,

along with billions more of investor losses tied to new Trump family crypto businesses, have drawn scrutiny after Trump's annual disclosure of his financial holdings shows he took in more than \$1 billion in revenue last year in the same companies and offerings.

Conflict of interest laws would bar US government officials from owning a company that profits off their office by selling access to their decisions through public posts, says Washington University's Clark. But the president and vice-president, she notes, are excluded from the provision.

Despite that, all presidents since the law was passed decades ago have acted as if it applied — selling individual stocks, dumping business holdings or putting their financial assets in a blind trust so they wouldn't know what was being bought and sold on their behalf while they wielded power — but Trump has refused.

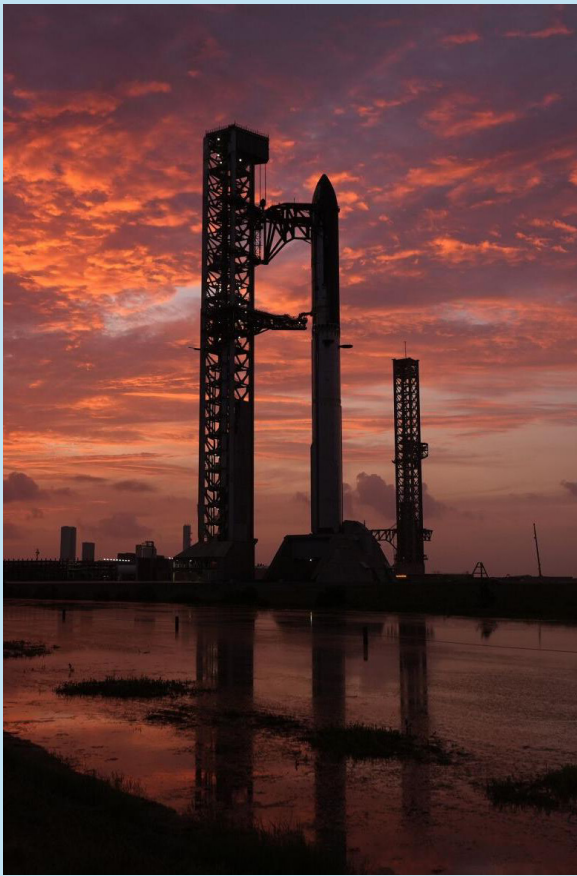
Trump Media has been trying to lift its stock price recently by branching into various businesses, including crypto, financial services and even nuclear fusion. It recently replaced its longtime CEO, former Congressman Devin Nunes, with a seasoned media executive, Kevin McGurn.

In the release, McGurn described the Truth PSI move as part of a "strategy to monetize proprietary assets." He added that he expected it to become a "meaningful, ongoing source of revenue."

Trump Media said that it plans to start the service next month and that it has already signed up customers.

The stock rose 0.6% to \$9.63 on Thursday. Before Trump took office last year, it closed at \$40.

SpaceX Starship launch aborted on the pad at the last moment



NEWYORK

SpaceX's mega Starship rocket came within a second or so from blasting off on a test flight Thursday, but some of the engines failed to ignite, triggering a launch abort amid billowing clouds of smoke and vapor.

Elon Musk, the company's founder and CEO, said two engines will be replaced "to be confident of a good flight" before sending Starship from Texas on a space-skimming journey halfway around the world. It will be the 13th flight for Starship, which at 407 feet (124 meters) tall with 33 main engines is the world's biggest and most powerful rocket.

SpaceX's launch web-

cast showed the start of engine ignition three seconds before the planned liftoff, viewed from a drone high above the pad. Although the company did not elaborate, onscreen data showed four engines not firing, with the remaining 29 engines immediately shutting down and keeping the rocket anchored to the pad. It was the first time a full-scale Starship experienced a last-second abort like this. The launch team immediately began draining the fuel from the rocket. "Most probable launch timing is early next week," Musk said via X. Everything was going SpaceX's way, even the weather, until the partial engine ignition. In the end, the rocket's automat-

ic launch system worked as planned by halting everything. Too few operating engines could have doomed the launch. Some earlier Starship flights ended in explosive fireballs.

Twenty of SpaceX's newest and most advanced Starlinks were on board Starship for release during the planned hourlong flight from Starbase, the company's hub near the Texas-Mexico border. The internet satellites were going to try communicating with Starlinks already in orbit while taking photos of Starship's heat shield.

Neither the first-stage booster nor spacecraft were meant to be recovered, with both ending up in the sea. The rocket's automatic launch system worked as planned by halting everything. Too few operating engines could have resulted in a failed launch. Some earlier Starship flights, for example, ended in explosive fireballs. NASA is counting on Starship to land its astronauts on the moon in the next few years. The space agency has hired SpaceX and Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin to build and fly the lunar landers that will return humanity to the surface of the moon after an absence of more than half a century.

Both companies need to have their landers — Starship and Blue Moon — ready to fly by next year so that the newly named Artemis III crew can practice docking their capsule with them in orbit around Earth. The mission after that — Artemis IV planned for no earlier than 2028 — would use one of those landers to take two astronauts to the moon's south polar region.

“Who Stands With the Soldier?”



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Reflections on Leadership, Command and National Responsibility.

A nation can survive many crises, but it cannot remain secure if it loses the faith of its armed forces.

For generations, the Indian soldier has stood as the ultimate symbol of courage, sacrifice and selfless service. He has guarded the nation's frontiers in the icy heights of Siachen, the dense jungles of the North-East, the deserts of Rajasthan and the troubled valleys of Jammu and Kashmir, may be high sea or sky. He has fought wars, countered insurgencies, responded to natural disasters and, whenever called upon, laid down his life without hesitation.

Yet an uncomfortable question confronts us today is:

Who stands with the soldier when he returns from the battlefield? Who stands with him when he faces injustice, uncertainty or neglect?

The answer to this question has implications far beyond the welfare of soldiers and veterans. It strikes at the very foundations of national security and the relationship between the nation and those who defend it.

A soldier willingly accepts hardship and danger because he believes that the country values his sacrifice and that his family, honour and dignity will always be protected. The moment this faith begins to weaken, the consequences extend beyond the military establishment and affect the morale and resilience of the nation itself. Today, there is an increasing feeling among many serving and retired soldiers that this sacred bond is under strain.

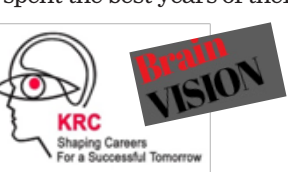
Recent incidents involving serving and retired military personnel have deeply disturbed the military community. Veterans frequently cite examples of delayed justice, bureaucratic indifference and inadequate attention to their concerns. Whether all these perceptions are entirely correct or not is secondary. In matters of morale and trust, perception itself becomes reality. A nation that ignores the sentiments of its soldiers risks weakening one of the strongest pillars of its security.

The Soldier's Growing Isolation.

The soldier of today faces challenges that previous generations could scarcely have imagined. He serves in difficult operational areas, often separated from his family for long periods. He lives in an age of instant communication, social media scrutiny and growing societal expectations. Every operational action is analysed and debated. During my younger days when I was posted in Sri Lanka during Operation Pawan (IPKF), our only connection with home was through letters that often took ten to fifteen days to reach us. We waited eagerly for every letter, as it carried the love and reassurance of our families. Today, technology has changed military life completely. Mobile phones and video calls have brought families much closer. Yet, despite these advances, a soldier's need for emotional support, understanding and the assurance that the nation stands with him remains unchanged. His family worries about his future, his children's education and his financial security after retirement, particularly in the context of rising living costs, changing family structures and the profound financial and demographic changes taking place in society. These concerns inevitably weigh upon the mind of the soldier and his family.

Among the many concerns voiced by veterans today is the painful experience of some retired soldiers who, after spending the prime of their lives defending the nation, have found themselves fighting lonely battles to protect their own homes and lands. In one such case, three brothers, all veterans of the Armed Forces, have spent years seeking justice after allegedly losing their property in disputed land acquisition proceedings. Their grievance is not merely about land or compensation; it is about the feeling of helplessness when those who once protected the nation's borders are left to navigate complex legal and administrative processes with little institutional support. Their approach to everyone in the hierarchy is yet to get justice. For many veterans, such experiences reinforce the perception that while the nation remembers its soldiers in times of war, it often forgets them when they seek justice in times of peace.

Many veterans also feel that their issues do not receive the priority they deserve. They often speak of prolonged legal battles, administrative delays and a growing disconnect between society and those who have spent the best years of their lives in uniform.



Your age doesn't define your maturity, your grades don't define your intellect, and rumors don't define who you are.

The soldier's loneliness today is not merely physical. It is increasingly institutional and psychological. The concern is not simply about pensions, welfare or administrative



grievances. It is about dignity, respect and the reassuring belief that the nation values those who dedicated their lives to its defence.

The Changing Meaning of Command. The Indian Army's greatest strength has never been its weapons or numbers. Its greatest strength has always been its leadership and traditions.

For generations, officers were taught that command was not a privilege to be enjoyed but a sacred responsibility to be shouldered.

The immortal words inscribed in Chitwood Hall continue to inspire generations of officers:

"The safety, honour and welfare of your country come first, always and every time. The honour, welfare and comfort of the men you command come next. Your own ease, comfort and safety come last, always and every time." Similarly, this has always emphasised leadership by example, character, integrity and selfless service.

These are not mere words engraved on stone. They are the moral foundation of military leadership.

Yet many veterans today express concern that there is an increasing difference between holding command and commanding soldiers. Command is conferred by appointment. Leadership is earned through personal examples, sacrifice and the confidence of one's men.

A commander is remembered not for the rank he wore or the office he held, but for the lives he influenced and the trust he inspired.

The Challenge of Careerism.

There is a growing perception within sections of the military fraternity that increases attention to career progression and post-retirement opportunities risks overshadowing the traditional ethos of command. The Army's pyramid narrows sharply at higher ranks. There are fewer appointments and many more aspirants. Such competition naturally creates career anxieties.

Every officer has responsibilities towards his family and future. It is entirely understandable that senior officers think about life after retirement. However, an important institutional question deserves honest reflection:

When officers begin planning their post-retirement careers while still in uniform, does it inadvertently affect the ethos of selfless service and command?

This is not a criticism of individuals. It is a question that every great military institution must periodically ask itself.

The Indian Army has never suffered from a shortage of brave men. Its enduring strength has been its ethos the conviction that mission comes first, the welfare of men comes next and personal interests come last. The distinction between command and careerism must never become blurred.

The Agniveer Debate. The introduction of the Agniveer scheme has opened an important national debate regarding the future character of the Indian military. The scheme seeks to create a younger profile for the armed forces and reduce long-term financial liabilities. These objectives are understandable and deserve consideration.

At the same time, concerns have also been expressed regarding the long term implica-

tions of a short service model. A young soldier who knows from the very beginning that his military career may end after only a few years will naturally think about his future employment and financial security. This is not his fault. It is human nature.

The Indian soldier has traditionally fought with the belief that the Army is not merely a job but a lifelong profession and a way of life. The long-term impact of the Agniveer model on unit cohesion, regimental traditions and combat motivation can only be fully assessed over time and therefore merits continuous review and objective study.

Similarly, the nation may need to revisit whether every soldier who serves the colours should be assured of a dignified and secure post-service settlement, including appropriate pensionary or social security arrangements.

The future role and scale of short-service models should remain under periodic review to ensure that operational effectiveness, leadership continuity and institutional ethos are not inadvertently affected.

A National Responsibility.

Respect for soldiers cannot be confined to ceremonial speeches on national days or patriotic slogans. It must be reflected in public behaviour, administrative responsiveness and national policy. The welfare of soldiers

compulsory national service or military orientation for young citizens.

Many countries have adopted such models with positive results. Exposure to military life instils discipline, national integration, physical fitness and a deeper appreciation of the sacrifices made by the armed forces. A society that understands military life respects its soldiers more deeply.

Likewise, those who occupy positions of great public responsibility should receive structured orientation in national security and military affairs so that decisions affecting the armed forces are informed by a better understanding of military realities.

National security cannot remain the concern of soldiers alone; it must become a shared national responsibility.

Will the Nation Wake Up?

The bugle call is clear.

Will the nation recognise the growing sense of isolation among its soldiers and veterans? Will we preserve the sacred ethos of command that placed country first, men next and self last? Will we ensure that future generations of soldiers continue to serve with complete faith that the nation stands firmly behind them? Or will this sacred bond slowly weaken through neglect and indifference until it suffers a natural and irreversible decline?

The answers to these questions will determine not only the future of the soldier but also the future strength of the Republic itself.

The issue before us is not merely one of pensions, promotions or post-retirement employment. It is about trust. A soldier can endure hardship, separation and even death, but no soldier should ever feel that the nation he swore to defend has forgotten him. India's soldiers have never demanded privileges. They have only sought dignity, fairness and the assurance that their sacrifices will never be forgotten. The true test of a developed and civilised India will not lie merely in its economic growth or technological achievements. It will be measured by whether every serving soldier and every veteran can say with pride and confidence:

"My nation stands with me, just as I stood for my nation." For a nation can survive without many things, but it cannot remain secure if it loses the faith of its soldiers. The bugle call of history is therefore unmistakable: Honour the soldier. Stand by the veteran. Preserve the dignity of the uniform. For a nation that respects its defenders ultimately safeguards its own future.

Author's Note.

The views expressed in this article arise from over four decades of experience in uniform and public service. Having served in operational, intelligence and instructional appointments in the Indian Army, including in Jammu and Kashmir, the North-East and Sri Lanka, and later in the Cabinet Secretariat and the Bureau of Police Research and Development, I have witnessed first-hand the extraordinary courage, professionalism and sacrifices of India's soldiers.

This article is not intended as a criticism of any individual, institution or policy. It is a sincere appeal for introspection and national dialogue on issues concerning military leadership, the changing nature of command, the welfare of soldiers and veterans, and the sacred bond of trust between the nation and those who defend it.

The strength of the Indian Armed Forces has never rested solely on weapons or technology. It has rested on the character of its soldiers, the quality of its leadership and the unwavering belief that the nation stands firmly behind them. Preserving this bond is not merely the responsibility of the armed forces or the government, it is a collective national duty. If this article encourages even a small measure of reflection on how India treats its soldiers and veterans, it will have served its purpose.

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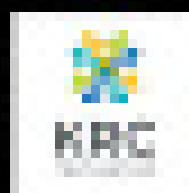


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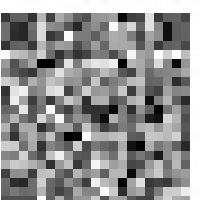


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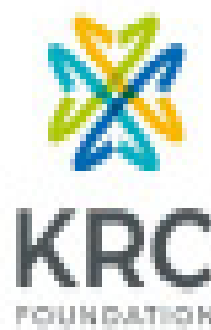
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