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PERSPECTIVE

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NFR to Restore Agartala-Khongsang Jan Shatabdi Service After Three-Year Suspension

IMPHAL
The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) is set to resume the Agartala-Khongsang Jan Shatabdi Express and local passenger train services on the Jiribam-Khongsang rail section after a suspension of nearly three years caused by ethnic unrest in Manipur.Railway officials said services will restart every Friday following successful security assessments and trial runs conducted along the route, marking a significant step towards restoring rail connectivity in the violence-affected state.

The 348-km Agartala-Khongsang route links Tripura and Assam with Khongsang in Manipur's Noney district, with the journey taking approximately seven hours and 40 minutes. Before services were suspended, the Jan Shatabdi Express operated three days a week-Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.The restoration of train services is expected to improve connectivity for passengers and facilitate the movement of goods between the northeastern states, while also signalling a gradual return to normalcy in parts of Manipur.

The operational line forms the first phase of the 111-km Jiribam-Imphal railway project, one of the country's most challenging railway infrastructure ventures. The project is targeted for completion by December 2028.At present, the 55.36-km Jiribam-Khongsang section is operational, while construction is progressing on the remaining stretches leading to the state capital.Once completed, the railway line-being developed at an estimated cost of ₹22,274.57 crore-will provide Imphal with its first direct rail connection to the national railway network, significantly improving passenger and freight transportation.

WHO SAID WHAT

Mr. Modi, our students are demanding Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation.

Don't insult their intelligence with this pathetic midnight video.

1. Sack Pradhan.
2. Punish those who beat them.
3. Apologise.

~ **Rahul Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition**

KRC TIMES

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Supreme Court Pushes for Special Courts to Fast-Track Manipur Violence Cases

NEW DELHI
The Supreme Court on Friday proposed the creation of dedicated special courts to conduct day-to-day trials in criminal cases arising from the 2023 ethnic violence in Manipur, while directing investigating agencies to expedite pending probes and ensure victims receive copies of chargesheets without further delay.

The directions came during the hearing of a batch of petitions related to the Manipur violence before a bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V. Mohana.

Expressing concern over delays in the criminal justice process, the court noted that several victims and their families had not yet been supplied copies of chargesheets filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Manipur Special Investigation Team (SIT), limiting their ability to effectively pursue legal remedies.

To address the issue, the bench permitted legal aid counsel representing the victims to approach the offices of the Chief Justices of the Gauhati High Court and the

Manipur High Court to obtain the necessary documents. It also directed both the CBI and the SIT to provide copies of the chargesheets to the affected parties within one week.In a move aimed at accelerating the prosecution of violence-related cases, the Supreme Court sought comprehensive data from the investigating agencies on the status of all registered cases. Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, appearing for the Manipur government, the CBI and the SIT, was asked to furnish details of completed investigations, chargesheets already filed, and cases where investigations remain pending. The bench observed that the information would help determine the number of dedicated special courts required to conduct continuous hearings and ensure the timely disposal of cases linked to the violence. The court also directed the Manipur High Court to examine cases involving 30 people who have remained missing since the outbreak of the ethnic conflict in May 2023. Further, the Supreme Court ordered the CBI, the Manipur SIT and the Supreme Court-appointed monitoring committee,

headed by former Maharashtra Director General of Police Dattatray Padsalgikar, to submit fresh status reports on the progress of ongoing investigations.

The monitoring committee was constituted by the apex court to oversee investigations into serious offences arising from the violence and to ensure accountability in the probe process.The ethnic conflict in Manipur began on May 3, 2023, following a "Tribal Solidarity March" organised in the hill districts to protest the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status. The unrest rapidly escalated into widespread violence between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities.Since then, the conflict has claimed more than 200 lives, injured hundreds of people and displaced thousands, making it one of the most prolonged episodes of ethnic violence in the state's recent history.Friday's directions underscore the Supreme Court's continuing oversight of the investigation and prosecution process, with the court seeking to ensure faster investigations, timely trials and greater access to justice for victims affected by the violence.

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Centre sanctions Rs.2,998.87 crore for 60 tourism projects across NE

NEW DELHI
The Centre has sanctioned ₹2,998.87 crore for 60 tourism infrastructure projects across the Northeast under various central schemes, Union Tourism Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat informed the Rajya Sabha .The information was provided in a written reply to an unstarred question by Rajya Sabha MP Rungwra Narzary.Shekhawat said the projects have been approved under the Swadesh Darshan, Swadesh Darshan 2.0, Challenge-Based Destination Development (CBDD) and Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive (PRASHAD) schemes.He clarified that the projects are sanctioned subject to compliance with scheme guidelines, submission of Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) and the availability of funds.

The minister said the Centre has also undertaken several initiatives to promote the Northeast as a major tourism destination.

He highlighted the Ashtalakshmi Mahotsav 2024, organised by the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) in New Del-

hi from December 6 to 8, 2024, which showcased the region's handicrafts, art, culture and cuisine.Quoting information provided by the DoNER Ministry, Shekhawat said the event significantly enhanced the branding and visibility of the Northeast while creating business opportunities for artisans, entrepreneurs and local producers.

He further noted that the Ministry of Tourism organises the International Tourism Mart annually on a rotational basis across the northeastern states to promote tourism, attract investment and strengthen engagement with industry stakeholders.The minister also referred to the Rising North East Investors Summit, organised by the DoNER Ministry in New Delhi in May 2025, as part of efforts to attract investment to the region.

Highlighting tourism growth in Assam, Shekhawat said the Centre continues to provide financial assistance for developing tourism circuits, including those centred around national parks, while promoting destinations through digital campaigns, tourism events and other outreach initiatives.

Landslide Damages Railway Tracks , Disrupts Train Services on Lumding-Badarpur Route



HAFLONG
Train services on the strategically important Lumding-Badarpur hill section of the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) were disrupted on Friday after a landslide triggered by heavy rainfall damaged railway tracks near New Harangajao railway station in Assam's Dima Hasao district.

According to railway officials, the landslide occurred during the night of July 23 within the New Harangajao station yard, between kilometre markers 118/1 and 118/3. The incident severely damaged nearly 200 metres of railway track on Lines 1 and 2, causing both tracks to bend and rendering them unsafe for train operations.

Following the incident, railway authorities suspended train movement on Lines 1 and 2 as a precautionary measure to ensure passenger safety.

While Line 3 remains operational, trains are being allowed to pass through the affected stretch at a restricted speed

of 10 kmph. The speed restriction has led to delays in the movement of both passenger and freight trains on the hill section.

The Northeast Frontier Railway has initiated restoration work on a war footing to repair the damaged tracks and restore normal operations at the earliest. Engineering teams have been deployed at the site, and senior railway officials are closely monitoring the restoration efforts.Railway authorities said that all necessary measures are being taken to ensure the safe resumption of train services. Normal operations will be restored only after the affected tracks are repaired and certified fit for traffic.

The Lumding-Badarpur hill section is a crucial rail corridor connecting the Barak Valley, Tripura, Mizoram and parts of Manipur with the rest of the country. Heavy monsoon rains frequently trigger landslides in the hilly terrain of Dima Hasao, posing recurring challenges to rail connectivity during the rainy season.

'I will give my best': Mirabai

GLASGOW
India's Olympic silver medallist Saikhom Mirabai Chanu believes the country's weightlifters are well prepared to meet the high expectations at the 2026 Commonwealth Games, saying the entire team is working hard to bring home medals despite a smaller competition field.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Games, the 30-year-old acknowledged the growing expectations from Indian weightlifting, a sport that has emerged as one of the country's strongest medal prospects at the Commonwealth Games.

"...There is a lot of expectation this time that weightlifting will win more medals. We will give it our best, and we are working very hard. Our team is performing well. Whether we win medals or not will only be known on the day of the event, but we will give our full effort. I, too, will do my very best," Mirabai told.

Mirabai, however, expressed concern over the reduced number of athletes competing in weightlifting at this edition of the Games.

"It is great to see so many participants from different places this time. One bad thing is that the number of athletes is less. For this, it is not good for the sport. On one hand, it is not good. But whoever has come to participate, we will do our best for India," she added.

The Commonwealth Games have been the most successful multi-sport event of Mirabai's career. She won silver on her CWG debut at Glasgow 2014 before producing a record-breaking gold medal performance at Gold Coast 2018. She successfully defended her title with another dominant gold at Birmingham 2022, making her one of India's most successful weightlifters in Commonwealth Games history.

Over 7.35 Lakh Students Leave Assam Government Schools in Nine Years as Private Enrolment Climbs



GUWAHATI
Student enrolment in Assam's government and provincialised schools has declined by more than 7.35 lakh over the past nine years, while private schools have witnessed a sharp increase of nearly 9.41 lakh students during the same period, according to data tabled in the Assam Assembly.The figures were shared by Education Minister Ranaj Pegu in a written reply to a question raised by Rajior Dal MLA Akhil Gogoi during the ongoing Budget Session.According to the minister, enrolment in government and provincialised schools, from pre-primary to Class XII, fell by 7,35,446 students between the 2016-17 and 2025-26 academic years. In contrast, private educational institutions recorded an increase of 9,40,566 students, reflecting a significant shift in parental preference towards private schooling. The Assembly was also informed that the number of government schools in Assam has declined by 8,591 over the last nine years.

Teacher strength has also undergone a marked change during the period. Government schools lost 15,326 teachers, while private

institutions added 51,214 teachers, underscoring the growing expansion of the private education sector.Providing an update on staffing patterns in government schools, Pegu said the state currently has 3,031 single-teacher schools, 15,270 schools with two teachers, and 8,115 schools with three teachers, highlighting the continued challenge of ensuring adequate teaching staff in many institutions.

The minister further pointed to infrastructure deficiencies that persist in several government schools across the state.

According to the data presented in the Assembly:

- 676 government schools are yet to receive electricity connections.
- 730 schools do not have internet facilities.
- 12,353 government schools continue to operate without ceiling fans in classrooms, affecting students during periods of extreme heat.

The data paints a picture of a changing educational landscape in Assam, with rising enrolment in private institutions coinciding with declining student numbers and teacher strength in the government school system.

The issue is expected to draw renewed attention to the quality of public education, infrastructure development, teacher deployment and measures needed to strengthen government schools as the state seeks to improve learning outcomes and retain student enrolment.

Assam Floods Affect 6.43 Lakh People; Amit Shah Promises Central Team, CM Warns Death Toll Could Rise

GUWAHATI
Assam's flood crisis remained critical on Thursday, with more than 6.43 lakh people affected across 10 districts, even as Union Home Minister Amit Shah assured Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma that an inter-ministerial central team would soon visit the state to assess the damage and recommend Central assistance.

According to the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), the floods have affected 6,43,350 people in 35 revenue circles and 889 villages across the districts of Charaideo, Dibrugarh, Golaghat, Hojai, Jorhat, Kamrup, Kamrup Metro, Karbi Anglong, Nagaon and Sivasagar.

The official death toll has reached 41, but the Chief Minister cautioned that the number could rise as 70 to 80 people remain missing.

In a post on X, Sarma said Union Home Minister Amit Shah had spoken to him and assured the Centre's full support.

"In view of the unprecedented flood situation in Assam, he informed me that an inter-ministerial central team will soon visit the state to assess

the extent of the damage and help determine the Central assistance required for rebuilding livelihoods," the Chief Minister said.

Sarma thanked the Union Home Minister for the prompt response and reiterated that the devastating floods were triggered by a cloudburst in neighbouring Nagaland, which sent massive volumes of water into Assam's river systems.

Speaking during a visit to a relief camp at Komarbondha in Golaghat district, the Chief Minister said officials from various Union ministries were expected to arrive "today or tomorrow" to conduct an on-ground assessment.

He also voiced concern over the likelihood of the casualty figure increasing.

"So far, 41 people have died, but according to our assessment, there are still 70 to 80 people missing. I estimate that the casualty figure will rise further," Sarma said.

The Chief Minister said thousands of families have suffered extensive losses, with homes inundated, agricultural land submerged, livestock washed away and important personal



documents destroyed.

"The people are in a difficult situation, and the government will try to help them in all possible ways," he said.

The flood situation may worsen as water is being released from the NEEPCO-operated Doyang Hydel

Power Project in Nagaland following rising reservoir levels. The Assam government has alerted downstream districts and is closely monitoring the river situation.

Sarma said that unusually intense rainfall and upstream cloudbursts had contributed to the scale of the disaster. He noted that 436 per cent above-normal rainfall in upstream areas had inundated villages that had not experienced such flooding in recent memory.

The Chief Minister also announced that the state government, in coordination with the Centre, would prepare a comprehensive rehabilitation package for every affected family. He said Assam would initiate discussions with neighbouring states to develop a long-term strategy to mitigate the impact of upstream cloudbursts and sudden water surges.

ASDMA said 99 relief camps are currently sheltering 24,596 displaced people, while 24,891.66 hectares of agricultural land remain under floodwaters.

Several rivers continue to flow above the danger level, including:

- Buridihing at Khowang

" Dikhou at Sivasagar
Disang at Nganglamura-ghat
Dhansiri at Numaligarh
Kushiya at Sribhumi

Rescue and relief operations are continuing with the deployment of the Indian Army, Indian Air Force, National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) personnel across the affected districts.

The flood crisis also dominated proceedings in the Assam Assembly for the second consecutive day.

Rajior Dal MLA Akhil Gogoi was suspended from the House for the remainder of the day after climbing onto his desk to protest the Speaker's decision to reject his adjournment motion seeking an immediate discussion on the flood situation. Assembly marshals later escorted him out.

With rescue operations continuing and several rivers still in spate, authorities remain on high alert as concerns grow over further rainfall, additional upstream water releases and the possibility of more casualties in one of Assam's worst flood episodes in recent years.



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HYDROGEN ON TRACK

The ceremonial flagging off of India’s first hydrogen-powered train by Prime Minister Narendra Modi between Jind and Sonapat in Haryana last week was more than another addition to the long list of infrastructure inaugurations. It marked the beginning of a potentially transformative chapter in the evolution of Indian Railways—one that could redefine how one of the world’s largest transport networks approaches sustainability, energy security and technological innovation.

Hydrogen-powered railways are still a relatively new concept globally. Yet India has chosen not merely to adopt the technology but to do so on an ambitious scale. The newly launched train is reportedly a 3,200-horsepower, ten-coach service, making it significantly more powerful than the smaller hydrogen trains currently operating in parts of Europe. This achievement is not simply symbolic; it demonstrates India’s growing confidence in designing and deploying advanced transport technologies suited to its own unique requirements.

The importance of this milestone becomes clearer when viewed against the sheer magnitude of Indian Railways. Few transport systems in the world operate on such an enormous scale. Every day, the railway network carries around 24 million passengers and transports nearly three million tonnes of freight. It connects densely populated metropolitan regions, industrial centres, remote villages, deserts, forests and mountainous terrain through more than 68,000 kilometres of track.

Managing such a network efficiently is a formidable challenge. Transforming it into an environmentally sustainable system is an even greater one.

The hydrogen train is not an isolated innovation. It represents the latest phase in a long process of modernisation that has fundamentally reshaped Indian Railways over the past decade.

For much of the twentieth century, India’s railways depended first on steam locomotives fuelled by coal and later on diesel engines that became the backbone of railway operations. While these technologies served the nation well during periods of rapid industrialisation and economic expansion, they also left behind a substantial environmental footprint.

Recognising the urgency of reducing carbon emissions, Indian Railways embarked on one of the world’s largest railway electrification programmes. Today, more than 95 per cent of the country’s broad-gauge network has been electrified—a remarkable achievement considering the vast geographical spread and operational complexity involved.

Electrification has already produced multiple benefits. It has reduced dependence on imported diesel, lowered operating costs, improved train speeds and significantly reduced greenhouse gas emissions. More importantly, it has created the foundation for India’s ambitious target of becoming a net-zero carbon emitter in railway operations by 2030, decades ahead of the country’s overall net-zero target of 2070.

Yet electrification alone cannot solve every challenge. One misconception surrounding hydrogen trains is that they are intended to replace electric trains. That is neither practical nor necessary.

Instead, hydrogen should be viewed as a complementary technology designed for routes where conventional electrification is difficult, expensive or environmentally disruptive.

India possesses several railway lines that pass through ecologically sensitive regions, steep mountain gradients and heritage corridors. Installing overhead electric wires in such locations often involves cutting trees, constructing numerous poles, altering landscapes and undertaking expensive engineering work that may not be justified by relatively low passenger traffic.

These trains generate electricity onboard through hydrogen fuel cells, emitting only water vapour as a by-product. Since they do not require overhead power lines, they preserve the visual and ecological character of heritage routes while reducing emissions.

This explains why Indian Railways has identified hydrogen technology primarily for its “Hydrogen for Heritage” initiative. The plan envisions deploying 35 hydrogen-powered trains across eight heritage and hilly routes, including regions where conventional electrification presents significant engineering and environmental challenges. Such an approach reflects practical planning rather than technological enthusiasm.

Critics often point to the high costs associated with hydrogen technology. Their concerns are not entirely misplaced. Hydrogen trains remain considerably more expensive than diesel locomotives in terms of initial investment. Producing green hydrogen through electrolysis is still costly, while fuel-cell systems and specialised storage tanks add further expense.

However, focusing solely on today’s costs ignores the long-term economic picture.

Technologies almost always become cheaper as production scales up. Solar power offers perhaps the best example. Two decades ago, solar electricity was considered prohibitively expensive. Today, it is among the cheapest sources of power in many parts of the world because governments invested early, manufacturing expanded and technological improvements steadily reduced costs. As India’s National Green Hydrogen Mission gathers momentum, domestic production of electrolyzers, renewable-powered hydrogen plants and storage infrastructure could substantially reduce costs over time. The railway sector itself can help create stable demand that encourages private investment across the hydrogen value chain. Viewed over the lifetime of railway assets—which often exceed three decades—the economics become far more favourable than today’s price comparisons suggest. Perhaps the strongest argument in favour of hydrogen lies beyond environmental considerations.

Modern economies increasingly recognise that energy diversity is a strategic necessity.

Indian Railways has benefited immensely from electrification, but complete dependence on a single source of energy also introduces vulnerabilities. Power grid failures, natural disasters, cyberattacks on critical infrastructure or disruptions during geopolitical conflicts could affect electricity supplies. Recent international events have illustrated how quickly energy markets can become unstable. Conflicts in West Asia, disruptions in global shipping routes and fluctuations in fuel supplies have underscored the risks associated with excessive dependence on any one energy source. A diversified railway energy system—combining electrification, battery technologies, diesel backup where necessary and hydrogen fuel cells—offers greater operational resilience.

Hydrogen trains can function independently of overhead electric infrastructure, making them valuable during emergencies or in regions where power supply remains less reliable.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

You have to know the past to understand the present.

- Carl Sagan

Myanmar Drug Cartels Shift to Remote Border Routes



S. BHATTACHARJEE

Sustained enforcement by Indian anti-narcotics agencies has forced Myanmar-based drug trafficking syndicates to abandon many of their traditional cross-border smuggling corridors, pushing them towards remote forests, riverine stretches and difficult terrain along the India-Myanmar border in a bid to evade detection.

Officials from the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) and intelligence agencies say the changing tactics reflect the growing pressure on international drug networks following an intensified crackdown by law enforcement over the past two years. The NCB’s Guwahati and Imphal zonal units, in particular, have stepped up surveillance and interception operations, resulting in several major seizures of heroin, methamphetamine and other narcotics during 2025 and 2026.

While the volume of trafficking attempts has not diminished significantly, officials say the methods employed by smugglers have evolved rapidly as conventional routes come under tighter surveillance.

Traditional routes no longer safe For years, traffickers relied on established crossing points and familiar transit corridors connecting Myanmar with India’s northeastern states. However, enhanced monitoring, coordinated intelligence operations and increased patrols have made those routes increasingly risky.

According to officials, drug syndicates are now directing couriers through dense forests, mountainous terrain and isolated river channels where surveillance is more difficult and security forces face significant logistical challenges.

“With conventional routes remaining under constant watch, traffickers have increasingly shifted to forested and riverine areas where monitoring is considerably more challenging,” an official involved in anti-narcotics operations said.

The India-Myanmar border stretches through rugged hills, thick forests and sparsely populated regions, making comprehensive surveillance a difficult task. Smugglers exploit this challenging geography to avoid security checkpoints and law enforcement patrols.

Weather becomes an ally Officials say traffickers have also adapted their timing to exploit adverse weather conditions.

Drug couriers frequently move consignments during the night, while heavy rainfall and poor visibility associated with the monsoon season often provide additional cover for their movements. Such conditions complicate aerial surveillance, restrict mobility for security personnel and make ground operations significantly more difficult.

The difficult terrain, coupled with unpredictable weather, continues to present one of the biggest operational challenges for agencies working to intercept cross-border narcotics consignments.

Heroin and methamphetamine remain dominant

Investigators say heroin and methamphetamine continue to account for the bulk of narcotics trafficked from Myanmar into India.

Myanmar remains part of the notorious “Golden Triangle” region, one of the world’s most significant centres for illicit drug production. The country’s ongoing political instability and the presence of armed groups in several border regions have complicated efforts to curb narcotics production and trafficking.

Officials believe substantial quantities of narcotics continue to enter India’s northeastern states before being transported to other parts of the country through well-organised distribution networks.

A highly compartmentalised trafficking network

Intelligence officials describe the cross-border drug trade as a sophisticated, multi-layered supply chain designed to conceal the identities of those involved and minimise the risk of exposure.

ing higher-level operators.

Once narcotics are produced or assembled within Myanmar, consignments are first transferred to cross-border couriers responsible for transporting them across the international boundary.

The drugs are subsequently handed over to transport coordinators, who arrange movement through various transit points. Local facilitators then provide logistical support, including temporary storage, transportation and communication, before the narcotics eventually reach receivers responsible for distribution in domestic markets.

“Each participant performs a specific role within the network, making it extremely difficult to penetrate the entire supply chain,” an Intelligence Bureau official said.

Officials say the distribution network extends well beyond the border states, with Assam and Manipur serving as important transit points before narcotics are moved to markets across India.

The compartmentalised structure also means that the arrest of individual couriers rarely leads investigators directly to cartel leadership, making long-term intelligence gathering essential for dismantling entire networks.

Illegal financial channels sustain operations

Beyond the physical movement of narcotics, investigators say the financial infrastructure supporting the trade is equally sophisticated.

Money collected from buyers is allegedly channelled back to Myanmar-based cartels through informal and illegal financial networks operated by intermediaries who often remain outside the reach of investigators.

These underground systems enable traffickers to transfer large sums without relying on formal banking channels, making financial tracking and asset recovery particularly difficult.

Officials believe dismantling these financial networks will be as important as intercepting drug consignments if authorities hope to significantly disrupt the operations of international trafficking syndicates.

Human couriers still dominate Myanmar route

Security agencies point to a significant operational difference between narcotics trafficking along the In-

dia-Myanmar border and the India-Pakistan border in Punjab.

In recent years, Pakistan-based smugglers have increasingly relied on drones to transport narcotics, weapons and other contraband across the international border, presenting a new technological challenge for security agencies.

In contrast, Myanmar-based trafficking networks continue to depend largely on human couriers carrying consignments through forests, mountain tracks and remote villages.

“Unlike the Punjab border, where drone technology has become a major factor, the Myanmar route still relies heavily on people physically transporting narcotics through difficult terrain,” an official said.

This dependence on human networks makes investigations particularly complex, as agencies must identify and track multiple individuals operating at different stages of the trafficking chain.

Continuous surveillance required Officials acknowledge that eliminating cross-border drug trafficking will require sustained operations over a long period.

Unlike isolated criminal cases, narcotics trafficking involves interconnected networks operating across multiple jurisdictions, requiring close coordination among central agencies, state police forces and intelligence organisations.

Enforcement agencies must simultaneously monitor border crossings, transportation routes, communication channels and financial transactions while gathering intelligence on cartel operations within Myanmar.

The challenging terrain, limited infrastructure in some border areas and the constantly evolving tactics of traffickers add further complexity to anti-narcotics operations.

Arrest of alleged international supplier

Investigators recently secured what they describe as a significant breakthrough with the arrest of Nengzatuan alias Tuanpi, a resident of Haichin in Myanmar’s Chin State, in Manipur.

Wanted in connection with multiple narcotics cases, Tuanpi is believed to be an important international supplier associated with Myanmar-based drug syndicates.

Officials say his arrest could provide investigators with valuable insights into the organisational structure of trafficking networks operating between Myanmar and India.

According to investigators, Tuanpi is suspected of having knowledge of supply routes, logistics, communication methods and the identities of several individuals involved in cross-border drug trafficking.

“He is not a low-level operative. Information gathered during his interrogation is expected to help investigators understand the functioning of major supply chains and how narcotics entering India are subsequently moved through domestic and international distribution networks,” an official said.

Authorities expect the investigation to shed light on the routes currently being used after traffickers abandoned traditional corridors under increasing law enforcement pressure.

Strengthening the fight against cross-border narcotics

Officials believe intelligence ob-

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

My appeal to the member countries of the Security Council:

Summon the spirit of compromise that is essential to peace.

Keep the channels of dialogue open.

And spare no effort in the pursuit of peaceful settlements of disputes — a founding principle of the @UN

~ Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General, United Nations



tained from recent investigations, including the arrest of key operatives, will strengthen ongoing efforts to disrupt Myanmar-based drug syndicates.

The changing tactics adopted by traffickers underscore the need for continuous adaptation by enforcement agencies. As security forces increase surveillance along one route, syndicates often respond by identifying alternative pathways, making the fight against narcotics trafficking an evolving challenge.

With northeastern states remaining a critical gateway for drugs entering India from the Golden Triangle, agencies are expected to further enhance intelligence-led operations, strengthen inter-agency coordination and expand surveillance across vulnerable stretches of the India-Myanmar border.

Authorities maintain that sustained enforcement, combined with intelligence-driven investigations targeting both trafficking networks and their financial infrastructure, remains the most effective strategy for weakening the influence of international drug cartels operating along India’s eastern frontier.



Assam govt defends school merger policy, says over 15,000 teachers provincialised

GUWAHATI
The Assam government defended its school amalgamation policy in the Legislative Assembly, stating that the exercise was aimed at improving educational infrastructure and resource utilisation rather than shutting down institutions.
Replying to questions during the tenth day of the Budget Session, Education Minister Ranoj Pegu said 7,380 schools had been amalgamated between 2016 and 2026, while more than 15,000 teachers and over 4,300 schools had been brought under the provincialisation process.
No new venture schools after 2006
Responding to a query by Congress MLA Tanzil Hussain, Pegu said no new venture schools could legally be established after the enactment of the Assam Non-Government Educational Institutions Act, 2006.
“There is no provision for setting up



new venture schools after 2006. Any institution established thereafter is treated as a private school,” the minister said.
He noted that an earlier attempt to provincialise schools through legislation enacted in 2011 was struck down by the Gauhati High Court. Subsequently, the government introduced the Assam Education (Provincialisation of Services) Act, 2017, under which large-scale provincialisation has been carried out.
Over 15,000 teachers provincialised
Providing details of the exercise, Pegu informed the House that 3,805 Lower Primary (LP) and Middle English (ME) schools, along with the services of 9,855 teachers, had been provincialised under the 2017 Act, subject to the professional

qualifications prescribed by the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE).
He added that 511 Higher Secondary and Senior Secondary schools, along with 5,346 teachers, had also been provincialised.
Following amendments to the Act in 2025, the government launched an online portal to receive fresh applications for provincialisation.
According to the minister, applications have been received from 3,709 schools, 52 colleges, 125 degree college streams and 23,420 teachers, with the verification process nearly complete.
Government defends school amalgamation
Defending the school merger policy, Pegu said the government had sought to rationalise educational infrastructure in areas where multiple schools were operating within close proximity despite low student enrolment.
“Between 2016 and 2026, around 7,380 schools were amalgamated. Of these, 2,639 schools were merged during 2017-18, while nearly 1,000 schools were amalgamated between 2021 and 2026,” he said.
The minister explained that the policy focused on merging schools with fewer than 30 students to ensure better utilisation of teachers, infrastructure and public resources.
Akhil Gogoi raises concerns
Independent MLA Akhil Gogoi questioned the need for further provincialisation, arguing that only a few venture schools remained outside the system.
He claimed that only 500 to 600 venture schools were still listed on the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) portal and alleged that nearly 8,000 schools had already been closed under the government’s rationalisation policy.
Responding, Pegu maintained that every pending application would be thoroughly verified before any decision was taken.
“The fewer the schools requiring provincialisation, the better it is for the education system. We have already received around 3,000 applications, and each application will be verified before approval,” he said.
Demand for TET, ADRE centre in Hailakandi
The Assembly also discussed a demand by Hailakandi MLA Zubair Anam Mazumdar for establishing a Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) or Assam Direct Recruitment Examination (ADRE) centre in the district.
Pegu clarified that no TET examination was currently being conducted and said the allocation of ADRE examination centres did not fall under the Education Department’s jurisdiction.

Assam gives MLAs one year to raise school enrolment before further mergers

GUWAHATI
The Assam government has decided to give legislators one year to increase student enrolment in government schools with fewer than 30 students before proceeding with any further school amalgamations, Education Minister Ranoj Pegu informed the Legislative Assembly on Thursday.
Responding to concerns raised by members across party lines over the closure and merger of low-enrolment schools, Pegu said the government was willing to provide an opportunity to save such institutions if enrolment improved within the stipulated period.
“Education is a sector where the ruling party, the Opposition and every stakeholder must work together. The debate should focus on effective implementation rather than questioning the law itself,” the minister said.
Defending the state’s school rationalisation policy, Pegu said the provision for amalgamating schools with fewer than 30 students was based on legislation enacted during the previous Congress government.
He said the government had already shared the list of schools falling below the enrolment threshold with MLAs.
“Several legislators requested one year to improve enrolment in these schools. I have no objection. If they can raise enrolment above 30 within that period, the schools can continue,” Pegu told the House.
However, he made it clear that schools failing to cross the minimum enrolment benchmark after one year would face amalgamation.
“If the numbers do not improve even after a year, we cannot continue with the present system. Maintaining schools with fewer than 30 students is neither financially nor administratively viable, and it also does not address the long-standing issue of single-teacher schools,” he said.

Chirom Joyshree Wins Silver Medal at Asian U19 & U23 Boxing Championships



BISWADEEP GUPTA
IMPHAL:Indian boxer Chirom Joyshree secured a silver medal at the Asian U19 & U23 Boxing Championships, marking a strong comeback after a difficult year.
Expressing her happiness after the achievement, Joyshree said she was delighted to return to the podium. “I am very happy. This was my comeback year. Last year I couldn’t perform well, but I worked hard and came back stronger,” she said.
Her silver medal is a significant achievement and reflects her determination and resilience. The performance is expected to boost her confidence as she prepares for future national and international competitions. Joyshree’s success has been widely appreciated by the boxing fraternity, with many congratulating her on her impressive comeback and outstanding performance at the continental championship.

Banned KCP-PWG rejects Manipur surrender ceremony, calls it a ‘fake surrender drama’

IMPHAL
The proscribed Kangleipak Communist Party-People’s War Group (KCP-PWG) Military Council Unification has rejected the recent surrender ceremony held in Manipur, claiming that none of its active cadres participated in the event and describing it as a “fake surrender drama.”
In a statement issued by its Publicity and Research Officer (PRO), Chingkhelganba, the outfit asserted that no serving cadre or Central Committee member of the organisation had taken part in the July 21 homecoming programme.
The group claimed that it continues to function under the leadership of Chairman Lamyamba Khuman and Vice Chairman Poirai Meitei, maintaining that its organisational structure remains intact and that it is continuing its campaign for what it described as the independence of Kangleipak (Manipur).
Rejecting the government’s claims, the outfit alleged that those who appeared in the surrender ceremony were not active members of the organisation. It claimed that the participants included former members and civilians, including rickshaw pullers and drug users, and likened the programme to what it described as similar “fake surrender” events held in the past.
The statement further alleged that Laishram Ranjit alias



Tam-Nganba, who identified himself as the chairman of the KCP-PWG during the ceremony, had previously been expelled from the organisation for alleged anti-party and anti-social activities. It also claimed that Md Mani alias Ning-Tamba, Moirangthem Moheh alias Pari-Macha and Oinam Somendro alias Lan-Ngamba had been expelled from the outfit.
The KCP-PWG also denied issuing single-barrel or double-barrel firearms to its cadres and al-

leged that the weapons displayed during the surrender programme had been procured by the Assam Rifles from Kuki groups. The allegation could not be independently verified.
Expressing disappointment over the Manipur government’s participation in the event, the outfit said it was issuing the statement to clarify its position following extensive media coverage of the ceremony.
The statement comes days after 46 alleged cadres of the banned KCP-PWG surrendered before Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh at the Mantripukhri Garrison in Imphal East on July 21. Led by Laishram Ranjit alias Tamnganba, the group laid down 28 weapons, which the state government described as a significant step towards restoring peace and encouraging militants to return to the mainstream.
Authorities have not yet responded to the KCP-PWG’s latest claims.

Kaushik Rai reviews flood relief operations, orders strict monitoring of essential commodity prices



GUWAHATI
Assam Food, Public Distribution and Consumer Affairs Minister Kaushik Rai reviewed the supply and distribution of relief materials in flood-affected districts of Upper Assam and North Assam, directing officials to ensure uninterrupted availability of essential commodities and prevent unjustified price hikes.
The review was conducted through a video conference with Deputy Commissioners and

senior district officials from the flood-affected areas.
The meeting assessed the ongoing flood situation, focusing on the lifting and distribution of relief materials, availability of food grains and other essential commodities, stock positions, and the prevailing market conditions in affected districts.
Rai instructed district administrations to maintain close coordination with all concerned departments and agencies to ensure the timely delivery of relief materials to families affected by the floods.
He also directed district-level task forces to remain operational round the clock and intensify surveillance of market prices.
The minister instructed officials to take immediate action against any instances of unjustified increases in the prices of essential commodities.
Emphasising the state government’s commitment to flood relief, Rai said the Assam government, under the leadership of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, was making every effort to ensure that relief materials and essential services reached every affected household without delay. Additional Chief Secretary of the Food, Public Distribution and Consumer Affairs Department, Biswaranjan Samal, stressed the need to expedite the milling of the remaining procured paddy and ensure the timely transfer of rice to the Food Corporation of India (FCI) to prevent deterioration of stocks. He also urged district task forces to strengthen market surveillance and regularly monitor the prices and availability of essential commodities to ensure adequate supplies during the flood situation.

Supreme Court cancels Sonam Raghuvanshi’s bail in Raja murder case, orders surrender within three weeks



NEW DELHI
The Supreme Court cancelled the bail granted to Sonam Raghuvanshi, the prime accused in the 2025 murder of her husband, Raja Raghuvanshi, during their honeymoon in Meghalaya, and directed her to surrender before the police within three weeks. A Bench comprising Justices M.M. Sundresh and P.B. Varale allowed an appeal filed by the Meghalaya government challenging the bail order.
While setting aside the bail, the apex court observed that Sonam would be at liberty to seek fresh bail if the trial neither commences nor concludes within six months. The court directed the accused to surrender before the investigating authorities within three weeks.
Sonam Raghuvanshi, a resident of Indore in Madhya Pradesh, was arrested in June 2025 in connection with the alleged murder of her husband, businessman Raja Raghuvanshi. The couple had travelled to Sohra (Cherrapunji) in Meghalaya for their honeymoon on May 23, 2025, before they were reported missing. Raja Raghuvanshi’s body was recovered from a deep gorge on June 2, 2025, triggering a high-profile investigation by the Meghalaya Police.
According to the police, Sonam allegedly conspired with hired assailants to kill her husband for financial gain. The investigation led to the arrest of Sonam along with the alleged contract killers, with the case drawing nationwide attention because of the circumstances surrounding the murder during the couple’s honeymoon.
With the Supreme Court’s latest order, Sonam Raghuvanshi will now have to surrender within the stipulated three-week period. However, the court has left open the possibility of a fresh bail application if the trial is not initiated and completed within six months.

Sikkim financially stable, not bankrupt: CM Prem Singh Tamang announces major welfare initiatives

GANGTOK,
Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang on Thursday dismissed speculation over the state’s financial health, asserting that Sikkim remains fiscally stable and fully capable of sustaining its development agenda while unveiling a series of initiatives aimed at supporting farmers, strengthening healthcare, expanding medical education and improving infrastructure.
Addressing reporters, Tamang rejected reports suggesting that the state government was facing a financial crisis, describing them as “baseless rumours” intended to mislead the public.
“If the government were bankrupt, we would not have been able to present an ₹18,455-crore budget or continue paying salaries on time,” the Chief Minister said.
He noted that more than ₹11,000 crore had been earmarked for revenue expenditure, benefiting citizens through salaries, welfare schemes and public services.
Borrowings within RBI limits
Defending the state’s fiscal management, Tamang said all government borrowings had been undertaken strictly within the limits prescribed by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and in accordance with Sikkim’s Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP).
He said the government was servicing both principal and interest payments on schedule, with only about 8.45 per cent of the state’s revenue being utilised for debt repayment.
“Our borrowings have been used to create productive public assets and not to meet routine expenditure,” he said.
Relief for farmers
Announcing measures to support the agriculture sector, the Chief Minister said farmers availing loans under the Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme would effectively pay only one per cent interest, provided they repay their loans on time. The remaining interest burden, he said, would be shared by the Centre and the state government.
He also announced that eligible beneficiaries engaged in agriculture, dairy and piggyery would continue to receive financial assistance of up to ₹5 lakh under the Chief Minister Self Employment Assistance Scheme, without the requirement of collateral or bank guarantees.
Healthcare expansion
In a major healthcare initiative, Tamang announced that STNM Hospital would soon begin offering kidney transplant services, enabling patients to access advanced treatment within the state instead of travelling elsewhere.
The Chief Minister also announced free cervical cancer screening for women aged between 30 and 65 years, complementing the nationwide rollout of free Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination aimed at preventing cervical cancer.
Infrastructure projects
Highlighting ongoing development works, Tamang said the government had planned the carpeting of 570 kilometres of roads, with priority being given to routes connecting tourism destinations, educational institutions and major markets.
He added that work on the Integrated Culture and Sports Village and a new Convention Centre was progressing as part of the state’s infrastructure expansion.
On medical education, the Chief Minister announced that the newly approved Srimati Sikkim Lepcha Medical College would begin operations with 100 MBBS seats.
Of these, 50 merit-based seats reserved for eligible Sikkim students will be tuition-free, while students from economically weaker sections will receive additional assistance under the Chief Minister Education Assistance Scheme.
Tamang also said Sikkim had secured additional MBBS seats in Manipur, providing more opportunities for students from the state to pursue medical education.
“Financial discipline strengthened”
Concluding his remarks, the Chief Minister said improved Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections, tighter financial monitoring and enhanced revenue management had significantly strengthened Sikkim’s fiscal position.
He maintained that the government’s prudent financial management would enable the state to continue implementing welfare programmes and development projects while maintaining fiscal discipline.



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Centre reshuffles top bureaucrats amid student protests; Higher Education Secretary Vineet Joshi removed

NEW DELHI
The Centre on Thursday announced a wide-ranging reshuffle of senior bureaucrats, with the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) clearing a series of Secretary-level appointments, transfers and in-situ promotions across several key ministries and government departments.

Among the most significant changes, Naresh Pal Gangwar, a 1994-batch IAS officer of the Rajasthan cadre, has been appointed Secretary in the Department of Higher Education under the Ministry of Education. Gangwar, who currently heads the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying, will replace Vineet Joshi, who has been shifted as Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj. Joshi will assume his new assignment following the retirement of Vivek Bhardwaj on July 31.

Gangwar takes charge of the Higher Education Department at a time when the education sector remains under intense scrutiny in the wake of the controversy surrounding the NEET examination paper leak. Although the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test is conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA), an autonomous body functioning under the Ministry of Education, the episode has brought renewed attention to the ministry's oversight of the country's examination ecosystem. In another important transfer, K. Srinivas, a 1989-batch Gujarat cadre IAS officer and the current Secretary in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, has been appointed Secretary of the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER). The government has also elevated TK Anil Kumar, presently Additional Secretary in the Department of Rural Development, as Secretary of the Department of School Education and Literacy under the Ministry of Education. His

appointment comes at a crucial time as the Centre continues to push reforms in school education and literacy programmes.

Among other senior-level appointments, Piyush Goyal, a 1994-batch IAS officer of the Nagaland cadre and Secretary in the Ministry of Mines, has been appointed Secretary General of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), carrying the rank and pay of Secretary to the Government of India.

Sushil Kumar Lohani, a 1995-batch Odisha cadre IAS officer serving as Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, has been named Officer on Special Duty in the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying. He will subsequently take over as Secretary of the department after Gangwar assumes charge of the Higher Education Department.

The ACC has also approved in-situ promotions for four senior IAS officers by temporarily upgrading their existing posts to the rank and pay of Secretary to the Government of India. Archana Varma, a 1995-batch AGMUT cadre officer and Mission Director of the National Water Mission under the Ministry of Jal Shakti, has been granted Secretary rank. She is slated to become Secretary of the Department of Official Language in the Ministry of Home Affairs after the retirement of Ansuli Arya on September 30, 2026.

Similarly, B. Rajender, a 1995-batch Bihar cadre IAS officer, has been appointed Director of the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA) with Secretary rank through the temporary upgradation of the post. He will succeed Sriram Taranikanti, who is due to retire on July 31. Chandra Bhushan Kumar, a 1995-batch AGMUT cadre officer, has been appointed Secretary in the Ministry of Labour and Employment. He will take over

from Vandana Gurnani upon her retirement at the end of July.

The reshuffle also brings changes in infrastructure-related ministries. Keshav Chandra, another 1995-batch AGMUT cadre IAS officer, has been appointed Secretary in the Ministry of Mines, succeeding Piyush Goyal.

Within the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, D. Thara, a 1995-batch Gujarat cadre IAS officer and Additional Secretary, has been elevated as Secretary of the Department of Capital Development after the government upgraded a vacant Secretary-level post. Satendra Singh, a 1995-batch Jharkhand cadre IAS officer currently serving as Additional Secretary in the Cabinet Secretariat, has been appointed Secretary of the Department of Urban Development in the same ministry. The ACC has also approved the appointment of Suchindra Misra, a 1992-batch Indian Defence Accounts Service (IDAS) officer and Special Secretary in the Department of Commerce, as Secretary of the National Commission for Minorities with the rank and pay of Secretary to the Government of India.

In addition to these appointments, the government has approved personal in-situ upgradations to the rank of Special Secretary or Secretary for four senior officers by temporarily upgrading their existing posts. The beneficiaries include Mritunjay Kumar Narayan, Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India in the Ministry of Home Affairs; Santosh Kumar Yadav, Chairman of the National Highways Authority of India, whose post has been restored to Secretary level; Rajeev Singh Thakur, Adviser at NITI Aayog; and Dilip Kumar, Director General (Training) in the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.

Wangchuk ends hunger strike after 26-days; CJP to continue protest



NEW DELHI

Activist Sonam Wangchuk ended his indefinite hunger strike after the Centre assured him that his demands would be addressed.

He called off the fast after Union Ministers JP Nadda and Jitendra Singh met him at Medanta Hospital in Gurugram around midnight on Thursday and conveyed the government's assurances.

"Just now in the presence of Union Ministers JP Nadda, Dr Jitendra Singh and the senior leaders of Apex Body of Leh Ladakh, I finally broke my fast after 26 days," Wangchuk said in a post on X.

After Wangchuk announced the end of his hunger strike, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a post on X, "I urge Sonam ji to follow his daily routine as advised by the doctors and regain his weight as soon as possible."

"I pray to the Almighty that Sonam ji remains healthy," the prime minister added.

Reading out the government's assurances to Wangchuk in the presence of his wife Gitanjali Angmo and others at the hospital, Nadda said, "The government is positive on not registering cases against those protesting peacefully at Jantar Mantar in Delhi and those who participated in the march to Parliament on July 20, 2026."

The Union Health Minister further said that the government has already assured discussions in Parliament on paper leaks and education reforms for exams.

"Besides, the government is also positively considering suitable compensation for the suicide victims of recent NEET paper leaks," Nadda added.

Wangchuk said that a total of 65 Members of Parliament from different

political parties had visited or signed letters urging him to break the fast.

"This was done after long negotiations on various conditions and in view of possible violence in the country. I will explain the conditions in detail in a separate video very soon.

Meanwhile, I urge you all to stay very vigilant about not allowing violence of any kind anywhere," he said in his post on X.

The Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) on Friday said it was "relieved and grateful" that activist Sonam Wangchuk had ended his 26-day hunger strike, but asserted that its peaceful protest at Jantar Mantar would continue until Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigns.

In a post on X, CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke thanked Wangchuk for his "extraordinary courage and sacrifice".

"We are relieved and grateful that

Sonam sir has ended his hunger strike after 26 days. Thank you, sir, for your extraordinary courage and sacrifice. By putting your own life on the line, you awakened the conscience of an entire nation. Your life is far too precious to this country," Dipke said.

"The Cockroach Janta Party's peaceful protest at Jantar Mantar will continue until Dharmendra Pradhan resigns," he added.

Besides seeking Pradhan's resignation, the outfit has demanded accountability over alleged irregularities in competitive examinations, reforms in the education system, Rs 1 crore compensation for families of students who died by suicide following the alleged NEET paper leak, and withdrawal of all FIRs and legal action against peaceful protesters who participated in the movement.

Wangchuk joined the CJP-led agitation at Jantar Mantar on June 28.

He began an indefinite hunger strike in support of students demanding accountability over alleged irregularities in competitive examinations, reforms in the education system and the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

Over the next 26 days, he lost around 11 kg and repeatedly appealed for the movement to remain peaceful despite the police crackdown on the July 20 'Sansad Chalo' march.

On July 18, the Delhi Police shifted Wangchuk from the protest site to Safdarjung Hospital, stating he required medical attention.

His wife, Gitanjali Angmo, challenged the move before the Delhi High Court, contending that he was being kept in the government hospital against his wishes.

The high court subsequently facilitated his transfer to Medanta Hospital in Gurugram, where he continued his fast.

During his stay at Medanta, Wangchuk said he wanted to return to his students and his work as an educator but could not end his fast without safeguards for the young protesters.

INTERNATIONAL

US is ready to help end the 'senseless war' in Ukraine but no quick deal ahead: Rubio



MANILA

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Thursday that the Trump administration is poised to help end the "senseless war" in Ukraine but acknowledged there is no quick path to a deal, saying diplomacy will require sustained effort and new ideas.

Rubio, who held talks with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov in the Philippine capital, alluded to how U.S.-mediated talks have stalled. He called them "unsuccessful or at least unfruitful" in the past but insisted that President Donald Trump was committed to the work "if conditions and factors have changed to make that possible."

"That's been the challenge — an end that both sides can accept," Rubio told reporters. "We've tried and we'll continue to try to see if we can, you know, find a middle ground that brings this about. And we're prepared to play that role if the opportunity presents itself."

Rubio met Lavrov and several other leaders, including China's foreign minister, on the sidelines of an annual gathering by foreign ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian

Nations in Manila.

America's top diplomat said the U.S. is focused on Asia even as it steps up fighting with Iran, seeks a pathway to end Russia's war in Ukraine and pressures the Cuban government to make changes.

Three days of closed-door talks that started Tuesday have centered on the escalating fighting in the Middle East and tensions in the South China Sea, where a new clash flared Thursday.

"There's always going to be a concern that America is so focused on one place that it can't focus on another," Rubio said. But he noted that the U.S. remains "engaged in Asia every single day," citing strong partnerships and economic ties across the region.

After meeting with Rubio, Lavrov largely ignored questions from reporters. The Russian Foreign Ministry in Moscow said he emphasized to Rubio "the unacceptability of further arming" Ukraine and accused European countries of pursuing Russia's "strategic defeat."

Lavrov reiterated Russia's readiness for "a political and diplomatic resolution of the conflict" and commitment to agreements reached at a summit between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Trump in Alaska last year, the Russian ministry said.

But Rubio said "we'll have to find new suggestions and new ideas" that are acceptable to both sides. There has been no change to Washington's military support for Ukraine, with weapons being purchased by NATO allies and transferred to the war-ravaged country, he said.

Separately on Thursday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy reiterated that his priority is finding a way to get back to negotiations.

U.S. efforts to broker an end to the Russia-Ukraine war have been overshadowed by the outbreak of the Iran war earlier this year. Renewed strikes

by Washington and Tehran have been intensifying after an interim ceasefire deal collapsed.

"The price will continue to get higher every single night until they come to their senses," Rubio said. He insisted Tehran is "begging" for talks but Trump does not see the use in responding because "Iran is clearly not ready to make a deal, at least not one they're willing to live by."

Trump has warned Iran that the U.S. will destroy one Iranian bridge or power plant each time Iran shoots at a ship in the Strait of Hormuz. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi responded by saying the country's defense doctrine was an "eye for an eye."

"The president's policy is a head for an eye," Rubio said. "They will pay a very heavy price for the things they're doing."

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong renewed her country's alarm over the Chinese navy's recent test-launch of a missile from a nuclear-powered submarine in the region, saying the lack of notification to the Philippines and Pacific nations where the missile flew over and landed was destabilizing.

"It comes in the context of a rapid military build-up of China's nuclear arsenal without the transparency or reassurance the region expects," Wong told a university forum in Manila on Thursday. "This is why Australia has described the test as provocative and destabilizing."

China has defended its actions, saying the launch was part of annual exercises and that it gave countries in the area appropriate notice in advance. Rubio met Wednesday with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and said they discussed a new altercation this week between Chinese and Filipino forces in a disputed shoal in the South China Sea, which Beijing claims virtually in its entirety. Rubio

called the incident "escalatory."

"Those need to be managed very carefully, because obviously, a conflict — be it economic or otherwise — between the U.S. and China would have a dramatic global impact," Rubio said.

He also said they talked a lot about Chinese leader Xi Jinping's planned trip in September, noting he believes Xi will have a "very positive visit when he comes to Washington."

In Beijing, the Chinese coast guard said it took necessary measures, including monitoring and blocking, to drive away two Philippine ships that disregarded repeated warnings from the Chinese side in a fresh confrontation Thursday. China said its operations were professional and lawful and urged the Philippines to stop its provocative actions infringing on Chinese territory.

The Philippine coast guard, however, said the two fishing vessels were harassed while bringing fuel aid to Filipino fishermen in the Scarborough shoal. It said a Chinese coast guard ship tried to spray one vessel with a powerful water cannon but missed, calling these "illegal, coercive and aggressive actions."

The Trump administration has repeatedly criticized China's assertive actions in the South China Sea to the disadvantage of smaller claimant countries like the Philippines, Washington's oldest treaty ally in Asia. Taiwan and ASEAN members Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei have also been involved in the often-tense territorial standoffs.

ASEAN aims to conclude yearslong negotiations with China on a proposed non-aggression pact by this year, according to a draft of a joint communiqué seen by The Associated Press. The code of conduct aims to prevent a major conflict in the disputed waters, a key global trade route, that could draw in the United States.

Middle East escalation pushes oil prices past \$100 a barrel



TEHRAN

The United States launched fresh strikes on Iran Friday after Tehran-backed Houthi rebels attacked oil tankers in the Red Sea, marking an escalation that pushed crude prices past \$100 a barrel.

The US military insisted that the Strait of Hormuz — through which one fifth of the world's oil passed before the war — was "open for transit" after Iran pressed on with attacks on tankers using the route in a bid to strongarm them into paying for safe passage.

But the Houthis opened a new front in the war this week when they attacked vessels in the Red Sea, intensifying fears over world crude supplies.

The international oil benchmark Brent crude surged past \$100 a barrel on Thursday for the first time since May, up eight percent, as world leaders expressed alarm over the rebels' attacks.

It was hovering just above \$100 on Friday morning.

President Donald Trump has vowed to use frozen Iranian assets to pay for any damage to shipping, a move Tehran warned would set an "incen-

diary precedent".

The warning came as the US military said it had completed its thirteenth night in a row of attacks on Iranian military targets to "hold Iran accountable and diminish threats from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to commercial shipping".

Iranian state media reported that US missiles hit the southwestern city of Ahvaz, and explosions were heard in nearby Omidiyeh, as well as the port city of Bandar Abbas and the island of Qeshm on the Strait of Hormuz.

Trump said the United States would hold Iran responsible for the Houthis' actions and warned both would soon receive a "major military punishment".

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned against further escalation.

"The situation is getting out of control. It is teetering on the edge of the unimaginable," he told a meeting of the UN Security Council.

"One crisis feeds another. One escalation triggers the next."

European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde

warned "the energy shock could intensify further" and push up inflation, feeding speculation about a September eurozone interest rate hike.

German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius warned of "dire consequences" for oil-importing economies and said "nothing — absolutely nothing — suggests that a ceasefire, let alone peace, could be reached".

The war resumed this month after a ceasefire that had lasted just a few weeks, throwing the region back into chaos as Iran and the United States battled for control of the Strait of Hormuz.

Yemen's Houthis joined the conflict this week, declaring a blockade of Saudi ports and claiming attacks on tankers.

"The armed forces' retaliatory attacks will continue as long as the US attacks on the country's infrastructure and coastal areas continue," Iran's army spokesperson Mohammad Akraminia said, according to state television.

US allies Jordan and Kuwait reported intercepting strikes as Iran's military and Revolutionary Guards claimed to be targeting American assets in both countries.

THE BEAUTY OF GOODNESS: A NEEDONOMICS FRAMEWORK FOR HUMAN EXCELLENCE



PROF. DR M. M. GOEL & PROF. DR PARIN SOMANI

The Needonomics School of Thought (NST), a Kurukshetra-based think tank offers a simple yet profound mandate for individuals, institutions, and societies:

“Beauty is not always good, but goodness is always beautiful. Being important is not necessarily good, but being good is always important.”

This guiding principle shifts our focus from outward appearance and social status to the enduring values of character, compassion, and ethical conduct. In an era dominated by image, influence, and instant recognition, Needonomics reminds us that lasting progress is built on moral excellence rather than superficial success.

Being Good

Society often celebrates those who hold positions of power, wealth, or fame. While importance may command attention, it does not automatically earn respect. History repeatedly demonstrates that those remembered with admiration are not merely the powerful but those who used their influence for the welfare of humanity.

Needonomics redefines success by emphasizing goodness over greatness, service over status, and responsibility over recognition.

3 Gita and the Ethics of Goodness
The Bhagavad Gita teaches that one's duty should be performed with sincerity and without attachment to personal glory or reward. This principle of Nishkam Karma lies at the heart of Needonomics.

When actions are guided by right-

ness of society:

- Leaders should place service before status.
- Teachers should nurture values before merely imparting information.
- Businesses should prioritize trust before profit.
- Governments should pursue justice before popularity.
- Families should cultivate character before comfort.

When goodness becomes the guiding principle of decision-making, institutions naturally become more ethical, resilient, and sustainable.

6 Goodness Quotient (GQ): A Needonomics Indicator

The Needonomics School of Thought proposes the Goodness Quotient (GQ) as a value-based indicator of human excellence.

The Goodness Quotient reflects the degree to which individuals and institutions demonstrate integrity, responsibility, compassion, transparency, and commitment to the common good.

Societies with a high Goodness Quotient are better positioned to achieve sustainable development, social harmony, public trust, and enduring happiness.

7 A Mandate for Human Excellence
The future belongs not to those who merely become important, but to those who become genuinely good. Respect earned through character outlives recognition gained through position. Beauty rooted in goodness inspires generations.

The Needonomics School of Thought therefore calls upon every individual to embrace the following mandate:

- Choose goodness over glamour.
- Choose character over charisma.
- Choose service over status.
- Choose values over vanity.
- Choose ethical conduct over empty recognition.

9 Conclusion

The true measure of human excellence lies neither in physical beauty nor in social importance, but in the goodness that enriches individual lives and strengthens society. Beauty may delight the eyes, and importance may attract attention, but only goodness builds trust, inspires respect, and creates lasting value.

The Needonomics School of Thought therefore affirms:

“Beauty is not always good, but goodness is always beautiful. Being important is not necessarily good, but being good is always important.” This is more than a philosophical reflection; it is a practical framework for nurturing ethical leadership, responsible citizenship, and sustainable development. In a world often captivated by appearances and status, Needonomics invites humanity to rediscover the enduring power of goodness as the highest expression of beauty and the truest measure of human excellence.

Prof. Dr M. M. Goel Former Vice-Chancellor &

Prof. Dr Parin Somani, CEO, London Organisation of Skills Development (LOSD)

The Needonomics

— School of Thought —

(NST)

Understanding Needs

Driving Innovation

Building a Better Tomorrow

• Economics that begins with People, Works for Society, Sustains the Future •

1 Beyond Appearance: Beauty of Goodness

Physical beauty is temporary. It may attract admiration, but it does not guarantee honesty, wisdom, or kindness. Genuine goodness, however, radiates through integrity, humility, empathy, and selfless service. Such goodness possesses an inner beauty that neither age nor circumstance can diminish.

Needonomics therefore encourages individuals to cultivate inner excellence rather than external attraction,

recognizing that true beauty is reflected in one's conduct and contribution to society.

2 Beyond Status: Importance of

teousness rather than recognition, goodness naturally becomes the source of true importance. Ethical action is therefore not merely a moral ideal but a practical pathway to personal fulfilment and social harmony.

4 Needonomics versus Greedonomics

Needonomics distinguishes itself from Greedonomics, which glorifies accumulation, competition, and excessive consumption. Instead, it advocates the ethical fulfilment of genuine human needs, balanced with social justice and environmental responsibility.

A truly progressive society is built not by those who seek to appear successful but by those who strive to become useful, trustworthy, compassionate, and accountable.

5 Applying Goodness in Everyday Life

The Needonomics mandate has practical relevance across all sections

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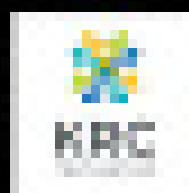


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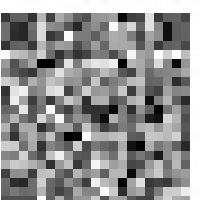


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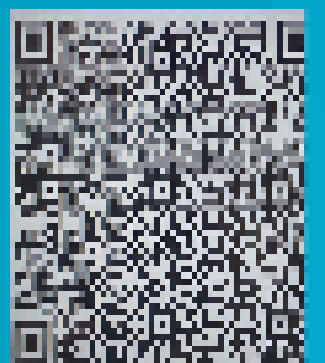
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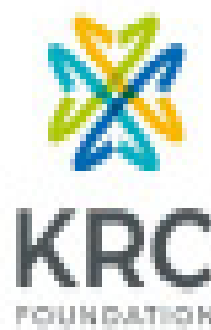
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