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PERSPECTIVE

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## Assam Worker Among 10 Dead in Sikkim Tunnel Collapse; Rescue Operations Continue

GANGTOK

At least 10 people, including a worker from Assam, have died after a landslide triggered the collapse of an under-construction tunnel linked to the NHPC Teesta Stage VI Hydroelectric Project in Sikkim's Namchi district, as rescue teams continued efforts to search for survivors and clear the affected site.

According to a statement issued by Namchi Police on Tuesday, 10 bodies had been recovered from the disaster site till 9:30 am. Authorities said seven of the deceased have been identified, while three bodies remain unidentified and have been shifted to District Hospital Singtam and STNM Hospital for further procedures.

Among the identified victims, one hailed from Assam, four were residents of Jalpaiguri district in neighbouring West Bengal, while one each belonged to Punjab and Dehradun in Uttarakhand. Another victim was a resident of Namchi district in Sikkim.

Officials cautioned that the death toll could increase as search and rescue operations continue inside and around the collapsed tunnel. Authorities have not yet clarified whether all those who died were trapped workers, previously rescued workers or members of rescue teams involved in the operation.

The tunnel collapse occurred on Monday at the Samardung site in Jholungey, part of the NHPC Teesta Stage VI Hydroelectric Project, after a massive landslide struck the area amid adverse weather conditions.

Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang said the incident had prompted immediate rescue efforts involving multiple agencies.

WHO SAID WHAT



Deeply saddened by the loss of precious lives due to a landslide at the under-construction tunnel in Namchi district, Sikkim. My thoughts are with all those who have lost their loved ones and prayers with those who are injured. Rescue ops are currently underway to assist all those affected.

~ Rajnath Singh, Defence Minister

**AGARTALA**  
Mystery continues to surround the death of Tripura Director General of Police (DGP) Anurag Dhankar, who was found unconscious inside the bathroom of his office chamber at the Police Headquarters on Monday. As investigations begin and authorities await the post-mortem report, the Opposition has demanded a judicial inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the senior IPS officer's death. According to officials, Dhankar was discovered unconscious inside the washroom attached to his office chamber and was immediately rushed to the state-run Govind Ballabh Pant (GB Pant) Hospital in Agartala. Despite extensive efforts by doctors to revive him, the state's top police officer could not be saved.

Confirming the incident, senior physician Dr Pradip Bhowmik said Dhankar was brought to the emergency department in an unresponsive condition.

"On arrival, there was no pulse and no measurable blood pressure. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation



(CPR) and all necessary life-saving measures were initiated immediately and continued for approximately 48 minutes. However, there was no response, and he was declared dead at 12:48 pm," Dr Bhowmik told reporters.

The doctor said the precise cause of death would be known only after the completion of the post-mortem examination.

"It was almost a brought-dead case. The body has been sent for post-mortem, and only the examination report will establish the exact

cause of death," he added.

The sudden death of the state's police chief has triggered widespread speculation, particularly on social media. However, neither the Tripura government nor the state police has officially commented on the nature of the incident or confirmed any claims circulating online.

Authorities have urged the public to refrain from speculation until the medical examination and investigation are completed.

Following the incident, the body was shifted to the hospital mortuary.

# Landslides Sever Imphal-Silchar Highway, Over 500 Vehicles Stranded



IMPHAL

Continuous heavy rainfall has triggered multiple landslides along National Highway-37 in Manipur, cutting off the crucial Imphal-Silchar route and leaving more than 500 vehicles stranded, raising fresh concerns over the movement of essential supplies into the state. The highway, which links Imphal with Silchar through Jiribam and serves as one of Manipur's key lifelines, has remained closed for the second consecutive day after incessant rain caused landslides and mudslides in Noney and Tamenglong districts. Officials said the most severely affected section is located between Awangkhul Part-I and Awangkhul Part-II, where massive quantities of earth and debris have engulfed the roadway, rendering the stretch completely impassable. As a result, hundreds of vehicles, including goods-laden trucks, fuel tankers and passenger vehicles, have been stranded on both sides of the affected corridor. Transporters and travellers have been forced to wait as restoration teams battle adverse weather conditions to reopen the route.

Authorities have temporarily suspended security escorts along the highway and advised commuters, transport operators and the general public to avoid travelling on NH-37 until the road is cleared and declared safe for movement.

The closure has added to the growing

transportation challenges facing Manipur. The disruption comes at a time when the Imphal-Dimapur highway, another major supply route into the state, continues to be affected by an indefinite blockade, raising fears of potential shortages of essential commodities if connectivity is not restored quickly.

Officials noted that prolonged disruption on NH-37 could affect the transportation of fuel, food items and other critical supplies to the state capital and adjoining districts. Restoration efforts are currently underway, with teams from the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL), security agencies and road construction company ABCI carrying out inspections and debris-clearing operations in the affected areas. Heavy machinery, including excavators and dumper trucks, has been deployed to remove mud, rocks and other debris from the highway. However, officials said continuous rainfall has significantly hampered the pace of restoration work.

Authorities are also monitoring vulnerable hill slopes along the route amid fears of fresh landslides. Safety measures have been put in place to protect workers involved in the clearance operation as well as stranded motorists awaiting the reopening of the highway. Officials expressed hope that traffic could be restored at the earliest if weather conditions improve, but cautioned that further rainfall may delay efforts and pose additional risks along the landslide-prone stretches. With both major transport corridors facing disruptions, the situation has once again highlighted Manipur's vulnerability to monsoon-related disasters and the critical importance of maintaining road connectivity for the movement of people, goods and emergency supplies.

## Tripura's Chandamita Roy Wins Best National Costume Title



AGARTALA

Tripura brought home national honours at the Miss Teen Diva 2026 pageant after Chandamita Roy secured the Best National Costume Award with a visually striking ensemble that celebrated the state's indigenous heritage and India's rich tribal traditions. The award-winning costume was conceptualised and designed by Yana Ngoba Chakpu, Founder and CEO of Northeast India Fashion Week 'The Artisans Movement'. The creation highlighted the artistry and craftsmanship of Tripura's indigenous communities while presenting a contemporary interpretation of traditional cultural elements.

At the centre of the ensemble was an authentic handwoven Debbarman (Tripuri) textile, crafted using the traditional loom technique that has been preserved by generations of indigenous weavers. The costume drew inspiration from Nagkesar, Tripura's state flower, and featured elaborate floral wings symbolising the state's natural beauty, resilience and cultural pride. Adding to its visual appeal were intricately designed accessories, including Indian coin jewellery, vibrant red beads and silver tribal ornaments inspired by indigenous communities from different parts of the country. Together, these elements created a powerful tribute to India's diverse tribal heritage while maintaining a strong connection to Tripura's cultural identity. The national costume segment received support from Tripura Tourism Minister Sushanta Chowdhury, reflecting the state government's efforts to promote Tripura's culture, traditional crafts and tourism through national and international platforms. Expressing her gratitude after receiving the award, Chandamita Roy said representing Tripura on a national stage through a costume rooted in indigenous heritage was a matter of immense pride.



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# Tripura DGP Anurag Dhankar Found Dead; Opposition Demands Judicial Inquiry

Family members, including Dhankar's son, were expected to arrive in Agartala before the mortal remains are taken to his hometown in Uttar Pradesh for the last rites.

Several senior officials rushed to the hospital after news of the incident emerged. Among those present were Chief Secretary J.K. Sinha, Health Secretary Kiran Gitte, and West Tripura District Magistrate Dr Vishal Kumar. Chief Minister Manik Saha also visited the hospital to review the situation and meet officials.

Political leaders across party lines expressed shock over the sudden demise of the senior officer. Leader of Opposition Jitendra Choudhury and former Chief Minister Manik Sarkar visited the hospital to pay their respects and seek information about the incident.

As questions mounted over the circumstances leading to Dhankar's death, the CPI(M)-led Opposition called for an independent judicial probe.

Describing Dhankar as one of the

most upright and dedicated officers in the state's police force, Choudhury said the incident warranted a thorough and impartial investigation.

"This is an extraordinary and deeply concerning incident. If investigations indicate any unusual circumstances, every aspect leading to the death must be examined. We demand a judicial inquiry under the supervision of a sitting judge of the Tripura High Court so that the truth can emerge transparently," he said.

Dhankar, a senior Indian Police Service officer, was serving as the head of the Tripura Police at the time of his death and was widely regarded as an experienced and professional officer.

Police officials have stated that the investigation is underway and that more details are expected to emerge after the post-mortem report is received. Until then, the exact circumstances surrounding the death of Tripura's top police officer remain unclear, leaving many questions unanswered.

# Cachar on Flood Watch as Barak River Rises; Residents Urged to Remain Alert

SILCHAR

The Cachar district administration has issued a flood alert following a steady rise in the water level of the Barak River amid continuous rainfall, while the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast heavy rain across several parts of Assam over the next two to three days.

In an advisory issued on Monday, the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) warned that persistent rainfall could lead to urban flooding, flash floods and severe waterlogging, particularly in low-lying and vulnerable areas of the district. The administration said the situation is being closely monitored round the clock, with all departments, emergency response agencies and field-level officials placed on high alert to deal with any emerging situation. Officials stated that preparedness measures have already been activated and response teams are ready to respond swiftly in the event of flooding or related emergencies.

As a precaution, residents have been advised to avoid unnecessary travel, especially through waterlogged and flood-prone areas. People have also been urged to stay away from rivers, streams, culverts and submerged roads, where strong currents and hidden dangers may pose significant risks.

The DDMA cautioned residents against attempting to cross flooded roads or inundated stretches on foot or by vehicle, warning that submerged potholes, damaged road surfaces and open drains could lead to serious acci-

idents.

Households have been advised to take preventive measures, including switching off electricity if floodwaters enter their homes and moving electrical appliances, valuables and important documents to safer and elevated locations. People residing in vulnerable and low-lying areas have been asked to remain prepared for possible evacuation and cooperate fully with district authorities and emergency response teams if the need arises. The administration has also urged families to keep emergency supplies ready, including dry food, drinking water, essential medicines, flashlights, spare batteries and copies of important documents. Residents have been encouraged to closely follow official weather bulletins and flood advisories issued by the district administration and DDMA, keep mobile phones charged and avoid circulating rumours or unverified information on social media.

For emergency assistance, citizens can contact the District Emergency Operations Centre (DEOC), local revenue circle offices, Block Development Officers (BDOs), the Silchar Municipal Corporation control room or the nearest police station.

The DEOC can be reached through landline numbers 03842-239249 and 03842-234005, mobile number 94016-24141, or via email at ddma-cachar@assam.gov.in.

The district administration reiterated that it will continue monitoring the situation on a 24x7 basis and issue further advisories as required to safeguard lives and property across Cachar district.

# Ancient Cave Discoveries in Nagaland Reveal 3,500-Year-Old Human Settlement in Northeast

GUWAHATI

A groundbreaking archaeological expedition in eastern Nagaland has uncovered evidence of human habitation dating back nearly 3,500 years, shedding new light on the prehistoric past of Northeast India and its role in early human migration across Asia.

The discoveries were made in the limestone cave systems of the Naga Hills Ophiolite Belt in present-day Noklak district, where researchers unearthed ancient pottery, stone tools, hearths and carbonised grains, offering rare insights into the lives of some of the region's earliest inhabitants.

The findings emerged from the first systematic archaeological exploration of the cave systems in Chiphur village, conducted in March by a joint team from the Department of History and Archaeology, Nagaland University, and the Nagaland Department of Art & Culture.

The expedition was led by archaeologist Tiatoshi Jamir and included researchers Heme Lamthaiu, Limasanen Long-



kumer, Khumeng T., Robinson Huidrom and Victoria Leyri of the University of Delhi.

Working closely with the Chiphur Village Council, the team surveyed the rugged limestone karst landscape and documented five caves and four rockshelters, many of which had never before been examined through scientific archaeological methods.

Excavations at selected sites yielded a rich collection of artefacts, including cord-marked pottery fragments, ground stone tools, ancient hearth remains and charred grains of foxtail

millet (*Setaria italica*) and Job's tears (*Coix species*). Researchers also recovered remains of wild animals, indicating that the prehistoric communities relied on a mixed economy combining early agriculture with hunting and foraging.

To determine the age of the sites, samples were subjected to Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (AMS) dating at the Beta Analytic Laboratory in Florida, United States.

The results revealed that the Lello Kaa rockshelter was occupied approximately 3,500 years

ago, making it one of the oldest scientifically dated habitation sites in Nagaland. Meanwhile, the Kathso Kaa cave showed evidence of occupation around 1,000 years ago, suggesting that these natural shelters continued to be used across different cultural periods, from prehistory into the historical era.

Archaeologists believe the discoveries strengthen the growing body of evidence that Northeast India served as a significant corridor for prehistoric human movement between South Asia and Southeast Asia.

The Naga Hills Ophiolite Belt and the adjoining Naga Metamorphic Complex, which extend towards the Indo-Myanmar frontier, are increasingly being recognised as critical landscapes for understanding the region's ancient human history and cultural evolution.

Beyond establishing a timeline of human occupation, the discoveries offer valuable clues about prehistoric food systems, agricultural practices, ceramic traditions and stone tool technol-

ogies. Researchers say the findings provide a rare glimpse into how early communities adapted to the challenging hill environment and developed sustainable livelihoods.

Experts involved in the project believe that continued archaeological and scientific investigations of Nagaland's caves and rockshelters could significantly transform current understanding of early settlement patterns, migration routes and the origins of agriculture in Northeast India.

The recovered artefacts are expected to be showcased later this year at a public exhibition jointly organised by the State Museum under the Department of Art & Culture and Nagaland University, offering the public an opportunity to view some of the most significant archaeological discoveries made in the state in recent decades.

The findings mark an important milestone for archaeological research in Northeast India and open a new chapter in the study of the region's prehistoric heritage.

# Northeast Echoes Nationwide Protest Against Exam Leaks, Congress Backs 'Chhatron Ki Goonj' Campaign

ITANAGAR/GANGTOK/KOHIRA

Political parties and youth groups across the Northeast have joined the nationwide chorus against examination paper leaks, with Congress units in Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland intensifying the "Chhatron Ki Goonj" campaign and protest demonstrations being held in Sikkim in support of demands for greater transparency and accountability in the examination system. In Arunachal Pradesh, the state Congress unit threw its weight behind the nationwide campaign, accusing the Centre of failing to safeguard the future of students and job aspirants amid recurring incidents of examination paper leaks. Addressing the issue, Arunachal Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) spokesperson Johnny Yangbo alleged that repeated leaks of competitive examination papers had created uncertainty among lakhs of students and eroded confidence in the country's education and recruitment processes. He claimed that the recurring incidents had adversely affected the aspirations of young people and called for urgent reforms to restore the credibility of examinations. According to Yangbo, the campaign launched under the leadership of Congress pres-

ident Mallikarjun Kharge and Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi seeks to amplify the concerns of students and press for accountability in the conduct of examinations.

The Congress leader also criticised the Centre's handling of the issue, alleging that adequate corrective measures had not been taken to prevent repeated breaches in examination integrity.

Meanwhile, thousands of youths participated in a protest march in Itanagar on Monday, expressing solidarity with activist Sonam Wangchuk and demanding stringent action against those responsible for alleged examination paper leak scandals. Organised by a youth group, the rally commenced from Akashdeep and proceeded to IG Park, with participants carrying placards and raising slogans demanding transparent and merit-based examinations.

Protesters argued that repeated paper leak incidents have undermined the credibility of competitive examinations and demoralised students who invest years preparing for them. They urged authorities to ensure that future examinations are conducted in a fair and transparent manner and that strict action is taken against those involved in malpractice.



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## VIKRAM-1 AND INDIA'S SPACE RENAISSANCE

The successful launch of Vikram-1 by Hyderabad-based Skyroot Aerospace is far more than a technological achievement or a milestone for a single company. It is a defining moment in India's evolving space story-one that signals the emergence of a new era where private enterprise, public institutions and national ambition converge to reshape the country's place in the global space economy.

For decades, India's identity in space was almost inseparable from the remarkable achievements of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). From launching satellites at a fraction of global costs to reaching Mars on its first attempt, ISRO established India as a respected space-faring nation. Yet the success of Vikram-1 demonstrates that India's space ecosystem has matured beyond dependence on a single institution. It reflects the rise of a broader innovation-driven ecosystem capable of transforming the country into a major commercial space power.

The significance of Vikram-1 lies not merely in the fact that it is India's first privately developed orbital launch vehicle. More importantly, it validates a strategic vision that policymakers, scientists and entrepreneurs have collectively pursued over the past several years. The mission provides perhaps the clearest evidence yet that India's ambitious space-sector reforms are beginning to deliver tangible results.

In the rapidly expanding global space economy, orbital launch vehicles occupy a crucial position. Unlike suborbital rockets that briefly touch the edge of space, orbital launch vehicles place satellites into stable Earth orbits, enabling communications, navigation, weather forecasting, Earth observation and scientific research. With the global demand for small-satellite launches growing steadily, Vikram-1 enters a market that is both competitive and full of opportunity.

The rocket itself showcases the growing sophistication of India's private aerospace capabilities. Built with an all-carbon composite structure, powered by advanced solid-fuel boosters and equipped with a 3D-printed liquid engine, Vikram-1 represents the convergence of cutting-edge materials science, digital manufacturing and indigenous engineering. Such technologies are not merely technical achievements; they are critical enablers of lower costs, shorter production cycles and greater competitiveness in the commercial launch market.

The maiden mission, aptly named Agaman, carries significance beyond its engineering success. By deploying multiple customer satellites into orbit, the mission demonstrates India's readiness to serve global commercial clients. Payloads from both Indian and international partners underline the growing confidence in India's launch capabilities and point toward the country's expanding role in international space collaboration.

Particularly noteworthy is the inclusion of a robotic arm designed to capture orbital debris. As thousands of satellites are expected to enter orbit in the coming years, space sustainability has become one of the most pressing challenges facing the global space industry. By carrying technology aimed at addressing orbital congestion, the mission sends an important message: commercial success in space must be accompanied by responsible stewardship of the orbital environment.

The symbolic payloads aboard Vikram-1 also deserve attention. Artistic tributes to scientific icons such as C. V. Raman, Vikram Sarabhai and A. P. J. Abdul Kalam serve as reminders that every breakthrough is built upon the vision and dedication of earlier generations. These gestures reinforce a deeper truth: India's current achievements are rooted in a long tradition of scientific aspiration and national investment in knowledge.

Yet the story of Vikram-1 began long before launch day. Its origins lie in a series of policy decisions that fundamentally transformed India's space sector.

The opening of the space industry to private participation marked one of the most significant reforms in recent years. Rather than remaining the sole operator, ISRO gradually assumed the role of facilitator, mentor and technology partner. The creation of the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe) provided the institutional framework necessary to support private participation while maintaining regulatory oversight.

This shift represents a profound change in India's approach to innovation. The Indian Space Policy 2023 and the establishment of IN-SPACe have provided entrepreneurs and investors with the regulatory certainty needed to enter a capital-intensive and high-risk sector. Access to ISRO's facilities, expertise and technologies has enabled startups to build upon decades of national investment rather than duplicating existing capabilities.

The results are increasingly visible. A growing number of startups have emerged across the space value chain, attracting investment, securing commercial orders and developing technologies that were once the exclusive domain of government agencies. Companies such as Skyroot Aerospace, Agnikul Cosmos, Pixxel, Bellatrix Aerospace and Dhruva Space represent a new generation of Indian enterprises seeking to compete globally.

This development carries implications far beyond the space sector itself. Successful innovation ecosystems are not built solely through scientific breakthroughs. They require supportive policies, regulatory clarity, investor confidence, research partnerships and long-term vision. Vikram-1 demonstrates how these elements can come together to create globally competitive industries.

The timing could hardly be more significant. The global commercial space economy is projected to exceed one trillion dollars over the coming decades. Satellite communications, climate monitoring, precision agriculture, disaster management, navigation services, defence applications and emerging technologies such as autonomous transportation will all depend increasingly on affordable access to space. India possesses several advantages in this race, including cost-effective engineering talent, strong educational institutions, proven launch expertise and an established scientific base.

At the same time, the rise of private launch providers offers benefits for ISRO itself. As commercial companies assume responsibility for routine launch services, the national space agency can focus greater attention on high-value scientific missions, deep-space exploration, planetary research, reusable launch systems and human spaceflight programmes. Far from creating competition, the growth of private enterprise strengthens the broader ecosystem and allows each stakeholder to focus on its comparative strengths.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

People who are unable to motivate themselves must be content with mediocrity, no matter how impressive their other talents.

- Andrew Carnegie

# INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY UNDER A SEVERE TEST



DR. THOMAS GERLACH

The war in Iran and fears of a wider conflict in West Asia have placed India's multidimensional foreign policy under severe strain. India's strategy of expanding its presence in East Asia, fostering cordial relations with neighboring countries, and ultimately emerging as a global power is now facing significant challenges.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's apparent support for Israel's position on the Palestinian issue and its policy toward Iran could have unintended consequences for New Delhi. The opposition sharply criticized Modi's visit to Israel in February 2026, just days before Israel and the United States launched attacks on Iran, arguing that it weakened India's security interests. However, the visit was consistent with India's broader ambition to establish itself not merely as a regional power but as an influential global leader.

Today, the growing militarization of international relations is intensifying competition for global influence. Alongside the United States and China, countries such as Japan, South Korea, and Russia, as well as North Korea and Iran, have emerged as important players in the evolving balance of power.

At the 2009 Shangri-La Dialogue, then U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates described India as a potential "net security provider" for countries bordering the Indian Ocean. He envisioned India ensuring regional security and, when necessary, employing its military and naval capabilities as instruments of "military diplomacy."

This concept aligned closely with India's long-term strategic interests. India has long viewed the Indian Ocean region as part of its sphere of influence. Indian diplomacy considers the region highly important from the perspectives of economic investment, cultural ties, and shared civilizational heritage.

Prime Minister Modi's MA-HASAGAR initiative, launched in 2025-Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions-aims to ensure collective security and comprehensive development across South Asia. The strategy extends beyond South Asia and incorporates the concept of an "extended neighborhood."

Before this, India pursued the SAGAR policy-Security and Growth

for All in the Region-to strengthen maritime cooperation with Indian Ocean littoral states. The initiative was also viewed as a response to the maritime component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

India proposed the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) in 2019. Earlier, at the 2017 QUAD summit in Manila, India, the United States, Japan, and Australia reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening strategic and diplomatic cooperation to balance China's growing ambitions, particularly in the South China Sea.

India has also been playing an active role in regional platforms such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework and the Indian Ocean Rim Association. Under its Act East Policy, India has sought to strengthen ties with East Asian countries and identify new strategic partners, bringing it closer to areas traditionally regarded as within China's sphere of influence.

However, the success of the Act East Policy depends heavily on maintaining balanced and stable relations with neighboring countries. Given the Himalayan barrier to the north, efficient road connectivity and regional infrastructure projects are essential for India. Sustaining a cooperative environment across the region is therefore critical, especially in areas with significant Muslim populations.

India's "Neighborhood First" policy remains one of the central pillars of its foreign policy. Its focus lies on the Indian Ocean region, which is considered strategically vital. Yet many of India's neighboring countries have already become part of the maritime expansion of China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Chinese investments and influence in Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port, the Doralah Port near Djibouti, the Maldives, Myanmar, and Pakistan have heightened India's strategic concerns. To counter these developments, India has invested in projects such as Iran's Chabahar Port and Myanmar's Sittwe Port. However, if these projects succeed fully, they could also affect American strategic interests in the region.

India seeks to establish a leading role in the Indian Ocean, but not all countries in the region are prepared to accept Indian leadership. Historical experiences have created skepticism and anti-India sentiment in some states, where India is often

viewed as an interventionist power. Complex domestic political environments and Muslim-majority social structures in several countries may further complicate the implementation of India's regional policies.

Relations between India and Pakistan remain particularly tense. New Delhi fears that terrorist activities in Kashmir could intensify again, especially under the Sharif government. Political instability within Pakistan and recent Pakistan-Afghanistan tensions have provided opportunities for both the United States and China to exert strategic pressure on India.

India-Bangladesh relations have also entered a period of uncertainty following the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government. Cross-border militant infiltration and mutual distrust have affected bilateral ties. Although the new government led by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman appears interested in improving relations, it is equally determined to preserve its political independence.

The Maldives has emerged as another concern for India. President Mohamed Muizzu came to power in 2023 under the slogan "India Out." His government has moved toward expanding military cooperation with China and rolling back previous defense agreements with India, creating setbacks for India's strategic objectives in the Indian Ocean.

Meanwhile, under the Act East Policy, India is developing road connectivity projects through Myanmar. Despite criticism from Western countries, maintaining pragmatic relations with the military government led by General Min Aung Hlaing has become necessary for India.

At the same time, China continues to strengthen its territorial claims in Ladakh and the Galwan Valley region. Nepal has also engaged in what some describe as "cartographic diplomacy" by presenting maps that claim certain territories administered by India.

Across this broader region, Indian and Chinese political interests and economic investments frequently collide. Nevertheless, both countries appear eager to avoid direct military confrontation. China operates under a highly centralized communist system, while India functions as a democracy. Diplomats on both sides therefore attempt to balance mutual distrust with practical cooperation.

Indian policymakers are well aware that President Donald Trump's administration views South and Southeast Asian countries as strategic barriers against China's expanding influence. From Washington's perspective, India forms an important component of its broader strategy to balance China.

The key question, therefore, is whether India can advance its MA-HASAGAR policy while avoiding excessive pressure from both the United States and China and simultaneously preserving its independent foreign policy.

Indian policymakers recognize that, given current economic, technological, industrial, and military realities, India cannot pursue direct power competition with either China or the United States. Consequently, New Delhi is attempting to safeguard its national interests through strategies of "diplomatic resistance" and "soft disagreement."

This may explain why India has avoided taking unequivocal

### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

On the NEET examination, the Prime Minister said that the government acted immediately after reports of the paper leak surfaced, and 13 people were arrested and sent to jail.

At the same time, to ensure that students' future was not affected, the NEET re-examination was given priority, conducted successfully, and the results were declared without delay.

he Prime Minister also said that strict steps have been taken to prevent such paper leaks in the future. Those found involved in the paper leak racket have been arrested and jailed. He appealed that they should be given the strictest possible punishment, with the support of the country's top lawyers, so that those involved in such a grave offence face exemplary action and such incidents do not recur.

- Kiren Rijiju, Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister



positions on international disputes such as the Ukraine war, the Gaza conflict, and allegations surrounding the abduction of Venezuela's president. Instead, New Delhi has generally adopted balanced and relatively ambiguous positions grounded in interpretations of international law.

Recent U.S. tariffs have also strengthened anti-American sentiment in India. Many Indians reject the notion that India should prioritize American strategic objectives over its own national interests or function merely as a "useful partner" in implementing U.S. global policies.

Frequent high-level visits and bilateral dialogues between the two countries demonstrate that India-U.S. relations, while cooperative, remain complex. Their strategic interests and regional priorities differ on many issues.

There is a widespread perception that the United States will confine pressuring India to align more closely with its foreign policy objectives. One reason is India's ambition to establish itself as the world's fourth major power after the United States, China, and Russia.

In this environment, India's greatest challenge will be managing relations with Washington effectively-avoiding isolation from America's broader Asia strategy while preserving its independent foreign policy and strategic autonomy.

According to the author, India's independent foreign policy is increasingly becoming a source of discomfort for the Trump administration. He points to the FBI's arrest of Ashley Tellis, a prominent analyst associated with the Carnegie Foundation and regarded as supportive of India, as an indication of this trend.

The United States is not entirely comfortable with India's policy of independently determining its immediate and long-term strategic objectives. This has been reflected in measures such as tightening visa regulations, suspending student visas, criticizing India's close ties with Russia, and other restrictive actions. Washington also appears concerned about the possibility of an emerging strategic alignment among India, Russia, and China.

India's foreign policy is currently navigating a period in which it must maintain balance on multiple fronts simultaneously. China's growing regional activism, American strategic expectations, instability in West Asia, and shifting political conditions in neighboring countries are all testing New Delhi's diplomatic capabilities.

At such a time, India's greatest challenge will be balancing its strategic autonomy, national interests, and global ambitions. If it succeeds in maintaining this balance, India could further strengthen its position not only as a regional power but also as a significant global power.

Dr. Thomas Gerlach  
(Expert, Centre for International Relations, Poland)



# Upper Assam Floods Disrupt Rail Services, Hundreds Stranded at Lumding Junction

GUWAHATI/LUMDING

Severe flooding triggered by heavy overnight rainfall in Upper Assam disrupted railway operations on Monday, leaving hundreds of passengers stranded at Lumding Junction after floodwaters submerged tracks and railway infrastructure near Simaluguri in Sivasagar district.

The disruption occurred after the overflowing Dikhow River inundated the Simaluguri station yard, railway tracks, railway colony and surrounding areas, forcing the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) to suspend train services between the Simaluguri-Namtiali and Simaluguri-Selenghat sections as a precautionary safety measure.

The suspension affected rail con-



nectivity across Upper Assam, leading to the cancellation of several passenger and intercity trains, while multiple long-distance services were diverted, short terminated or short originated.

At Lumding Junction, hundreds of passengers, including women, children and elderly travellers, were left stranded following the sudden cancellations. Many passengers expressed frustration over the disruption and complained of inadequate information regarding alternative travel arrangements.

With large numbers of commuters waiting at the station for hours, railway authorities took measures to ease congestion and assist affected travellers.

The NFR operated a special train from Lumding to Jorhat for passengers heading towards Upper Assam. However, the service was unable to accommodate the entire rush of stranded passengers.

The Lumding Division subsequently established a passenger assistance

booth at the station to provide real-time updates on train movements, guide passengers and facilitate alternative travel plans.

Among the services cancelled due to the flooding were:

Tinsukia-Jorhat Town Passenger  
Tinsukia-Lumding DEMU  
Ledo-Guwahati Intercity Express  
Ledo-Rangiya Intercity Express  
Dibrugarh-Simaluguri Passenger  
Railway authorities also cancelled several return services, including the Jorhat Town-Tinsukia Passenger, Lumding-Tinsukia DEMU, Rangiya-New Tinsukia Intercity Express, Simaluguri-Dibrugarh Passenger and the Guwahati-Ledo Intercity Express.

Several long-distance trains, including Rajdhani Express services and

Vivek Express trains, were diverted through the Rangiya-Rangapara-Dibrugarh route to avoid the flooded section. A number of other trains were either short terminated or short originated as operational adjustments.

To minimise inconvenience, the NFR arranged food packets, drinking water, ticket refunds and help desks for passengers affected by diversions and cancellations.

Additional transport arrangements were also made at Namtiali, where Assam State Transport Corporation (ASTC) buses and local vehicles were deployed to ferry passengers to Sibsagar Town station. From there, railway authorities planned special train services towards Dibrugarh and New Tinsukia.

Passengers stranded on trains that were short terminated at Selenghat and Mariani were also provided assistance for onward travel.

Railway officials said continuous monitoring and inspection of the affected track section are underway and services will resume only after safety conditions are restored.

Passengers have been advised to check the latest train schedules and operational updates before commencing their journeys.

The latest disruption highlights the recurring vulnerability of Upper Assam's rail network during the monsoon season, with floodwaters frequently affecting one of the region's most important transportation corridors and impacting thousands of commuters.

## Nagaland Flood Toll Climbs to Nine; Four Missing, More Than 7,400 Affected

KOHI MA

The death toll from flash floods and landslides triggered by relentless rainfall across Nagaland has risen to nine, with four people still missing and more than 7,400 residents affected, according to the latest report issued by the Nagaland State Disaster Management Authority (NSDMA).

The updated figures released on Tuesday revealed that five additional bodies were recovered in Mon district, the worst-affected area in the state, as search and rescue operations continued in flood- and landslide-hit locations.

Officials said all nine fatalities reported so far have occurred in Mon district. Of these, five people lost their lives in landslides that struck Shanthan Ward in Mon town, underscoring the severity of the disaster caused by days of incessant rain.

The NSDMA report stated that four persons remain unaccounted for, with rescue teams continuing efforts to trace them in affected areas. In a separate incident in Naginimora, four people who were swept away by flash floods were successfully rescued. One of the survivors sustained fractures, while the other three suffered minor injuries and received medical attention.

Preliminary assessments by district disaster management authorities indicate that at least 7,460 people have been affected across the state. The number is expected to rise as authorities continue to gather information from remote and inaccessible areas.

The disaster has caused extensive damage to homes and infrastructure. Initial surveys show that 64 houses have been damaged across 93 villages in 10 districts, though officials cautioned that the actual extent of destruction may be significantly higher as detailed assessments are still underway.

The impact on livestock has also been substantial. At least 83 animals have reportedly perished, including 15 mithuns, 13 cattle and 53 pigs, dealing a major blow to rural households dependent on livestock for their livelihoods.

## BIMSTEC Adopts Action Plan to Combat Illicit Financial Flows at Shillong Meeting

SHILLONG

BIMSTEC member nations have adopted a regional action plan to strengthen efforts against money laundering and terror financing during the 14th Meeting of the BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism (SG-AML/CFT) held in Shillong.

Hosted by the Department of Revenue under the Ministry of Finance, Government of India, the meeting brought together delegations from all seven BIMSTEC member states to enhance regional cooperation in tackling financial crimes and illicit financial networks operating across borders.

The delegates reviewed developments since the previous meeting and exchanged views on national initiatives related to anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT). Discussions focused on emerging risks, evolving criminal methods, regulatory challenges and international best practices aimed at strengthening the region's response to financial crime.

Participants underscored the impor-

ance of deeper regional collaboration, timely intelligence sharing, institutional capacity building and the use of advanced technologies to counter increasingly sophisticated criminal networks.

A key outcome of the meeting was the finalisation of the Paper on Illicit Flow of Funds (IFF), alongside the adoption of the Action Plan to Prevent Illicit Financial Flows in the BIMSTEC Region. Member states also endorsed a Memorandum of Understanding on Capacity Building for Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism, aimed at enhancing cooperation among enforcement agencies and financial intelligence institutions across the region.

The meeting further agreed to develop a BIMSTEC AML/CFT Work Plan for 2026-2028, which will provide a roadmap for coordinated regional action over the coming years. Delegates also stressed the need to operationalise the BIMSTEC AML/CFT Contact Point Network to improve coordination and communication among Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs) of member countries.

## Assam Power Consumers Seek 200 Units Free Electricity, Oppose Mandatory Smart Prepaid Meters

SILCHAR

The Cachar District Coordination Committee of the All Assam Electricity Consumers' Association (AAECA) on Monday submitted a memorandum to the Assam Power Distribution Company Limited (APDCL) office at Itkhola in Silchar, demanding 200 units of free electricity for domestic consumers and opposing the mandatory installation of prepaid smart meters.

The memorandum, submitted as part of a four-point charter of demands, also called for improved electricity supply services and urged authorities to halt any move towards privatisation of the power sector.

Addressing the gathering, AAECA joint general secretary Sanjib Roy alleged that frequent power outages and prolonged load-shedding during the summer season have caused significant hardship for consumers across the district. He said residents continue to face disruptions even during light rainfall and moderate winds,



highlighting what he described as the fragile state of the power distribution network.

Roy urged APDCL to adopt long-term measures to strengthen infrastructure and ensure uninterrupted electricity supply, particularly during adverse weather conditions.

The association also raised concerns over the rollout of pre-

paid smart meters in Assam. Referring to statements made by the Union Power Minister in Parliament, Roy claimed that prepaid smart meters are not compulsory and questioned efforts to expand their installation across the state.

Demanding relief for household consumers, the organisation pointed out that several states provide free electricity to residen-

tial users under various welfare schemes. It called on the Assam government to introduce a similar policy by providing at least 200 units of free electricity every month to domestic consumers.

AAECA leaders said rising living costs have increased the financial burden on ordinary households, making affordable electricity an important public concern.

Among those present during the memorandum submission were Prof. Ajay Roy, Simanta Bhattacharjee, Nakul Ranjan Pal, Bandita Trivedi, Ranjit Choudhury, Prashanta Bhattacharjee and labour leader Mrinal Kanti Som, along with several members and supporters of the association.

The organisation warned that it would intensify its campaign if the demands remain unaddressed. It announced plans to submit similar memoranda at APDCL offices across Cachar district and organise protest programmes in the coming days to press for action on electricity supply issues and consumer welfare measures.

## Dima Hasao Targets Rs 500 Crore Revenue Boost, NCHAC Welcomes Assam Budget 2026-27

HAFLONG

The North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC) has set an ambitious target of increasing its annual revenue collection from around Rs 120 crore to Rs 500 crore, Chief Executive Member (CEM) Deboli Gorlosa announced on Sunday while welcoming the Assam Budget 2026-27.

Addressing a press conference at Vajpayee Bhavan in Haflong, Gorlosa described the state budget as a balanced, people-oriented and development-focused financial roadmap that promises inclusive growth across Assam. He said the budget has made significant provisions for Dima Hasao and prioritises key sectors such as women's empowerment, youth development, tourism, healthcare and road connectivity.

According to Gorlosa, these sec-



tors hold immense importance for the socio-economic advancement of the hill district and are expected to play a crucial role in driving sustainable development.

The NCHAC chief praised Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and Finance Minister Jayanta Mallabarua for presenting a budget that addresses the developmental aspirations of both urban and rural communities while ensuring adequate support for autonomous council areas.

Outlining the council's financial strategy, Gorlosa said a series of measures have already been initiated to strengthen internal revenue generation. He noted that increasing annual revenue to Rs 500 crore would significantly improve the council's financial capacity and reduce its dependence on external sources of funding.

"Strengthening our own revenue base will enable the council to undertake development initiatives more efficiently and accelerate infrastruc-

ture creation across Dima Hasao," he said.

Gorlosa expressed confidence that the enhanced revenue target is achievable and would provide the autonomous council with greater flexibility in implementing projects aimed at improving public services and economic opportunities.

Reaffirming the council's commitment to the welfare of residents, he said the NCHAC would expedite the execution of infrastructure and public welfare schemes to ensure inclusive and sustainable growth throughout the district.

Haflong MLA Rupali Langthasa and BJP Dima Hasao district president Dhriti Thaoen were also present at the press conference.

The announcement comes as the council seeks to strengthen its financial self-reliance while leveraging state support to accelerate development in Assam's only hill district.

## Northeast Youth Crucial to Act East Policy and Viksit Bharat 2047: Arunachal Governor

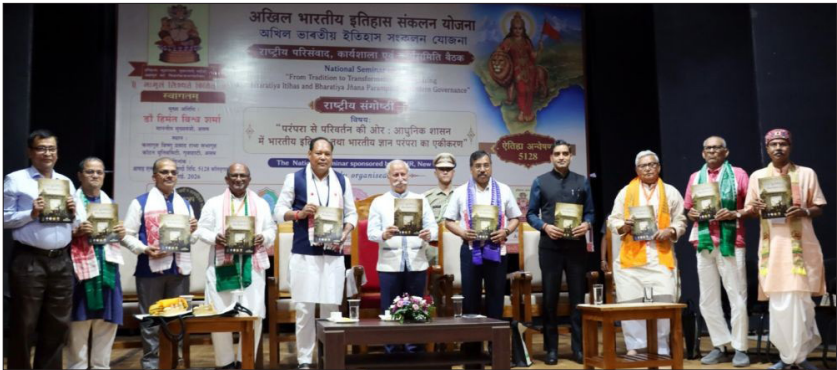
GUWAHATI/ITANAGAR

Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen K.T. Parnaik (Retd) has said that the youth of the Northeast will play a decisive role in advancing India's Act East Policy and achieving the vision of a developed nation by 2047, urging them to combine innovation and entrepreneurship with the region's rich cultural and ecological heritage.

Addressing a three-day national seminar titled "From Tradition to Transformation: Integrating Bharatiya Itihas and Bharatiya Jnana Parampara in Modern Governance" and Aitiya Anveshan 5128 in Guwahati, the Governor highlighted the strategic importance of the Northeast as India's gateway to Southeast Asia.

He said the region's geographical location under the Act East Policy offers vast opportunities for young people to strengthen economic, cultural and strategic engagement with neighbouring countries while contributing to national development.

Calling upon the youth to become active participants in nation-building, Parnaik encouraged them to contribute to border area development, promote national security awareness, adopt renewable energy and green technologies, and embrace digital entrepreneurship. At the same time, he stressed the importance of



preserving indigenous knowledge systems, traditional ecological wisdom and the diverse cultural heritage of the Northeast.

The seminar, which began on July 17, was organised by the Bharatiya Itihas Sankalan Samiti, Assam, in collaboration with the Akhil Bharatiya Itihas Sankalan Yojana, New Delhi.

Reflecting on India's civilisational journey, the Governor said the country's progress has historically been driven by knowledge, innovation, ethical leadership and social harmony. He noted that from ancient centres of learning such as Takshashila and Nalanda to modern institutions of research and innovation, India has continued to evolve while remaining rooted in its enduring values and traditions.

Parnaik said the theme of the seminar aptly captures India's developmental trajectory by drawing inspiration from its civilisational heritage while preparing for future challenges.

Describing India's transition from

tradition to transformation as a story of resilience, renewal and progress, he urged young citizens to carry forward the legacy of wisdom, values and knowledge inherited from earlier generations.

"If every young citizen contributes positively to society, the vision of a strong, self-reliant, prosperous and compassionate Viksit Bharat can become a reality," he said. The Governor also highlighted the enduring relevance of India's intellectual and cultural traditions, citing the contributions of figures such as Veda Vyasa, Valmiki, Chanakya, Aryabhata, Sushruta, Patanjali, Ashoka, Adi Shankaracharya, Guru Nanak Dev, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Dr B.R. Ambedkar.

He said their ideas on governance, science, healthcare, spirituality and nation-building continue to offer valuable lessons for contemporary society.

According to Parnaik, the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 must combine technological progress and economic growth

with values such as integrity, duty, sustainability and social responsibility. He stressed that true development should be measured not only by economic indicators but also by the well-being, harmony and empowerment of citizens.

The Governor said national initiatives such as Digital India, Startup India, Skill India, Make in India, Atmanirbhar Bharat and the National Education Policy have created opportunities for young people to innovate, become job creators and contribute meaningfully to the country's growth.

He encouraged the youth to pursue excellence in education and skill development, embrace entrepreneurship, promote sustainable tourism, protect the environment, strengthen national integration through community service and uphold discipline, integrity and ethical leadership.

Several prominent academicians and dignitaries also addressed the seminar, including Assam Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Tribal Faith and Culture Biswajit Daimary, Akhil Bharatiya Itihas Sankalan Yojana National President Prof. Ishwar Sharan Vishwakarma, North Eastern Hill University Vice-Chancellor Prof. Prabha Shankar Shukla, North Lakhimpur University Vice-Chancellor Prof. Mukul Chandra Bora, Cotton University Vice-Chancellor Prof. Ramesh Chandra Deka and Akhil Bharatiya Itihas Sankalan Yojana National Organising Secretary Balmukund Pandey.

The seminar focused on exploring the relevance of India's historical and knowledge traditions in contemporary governance and development while encouraging greater participation of youth in shaping the nation's future.

## Indian Army Rescues Over 200 Flood-Hit Residents in Upper Assam Under Operation Jal Rahat

GUWAHATI

The Indian Army has rescued more than 200 people stranded by floods in Upper Assam as part of Operation Jal Rahat, with rescue and relief efforts intensifying across several inundated districts amid rising water levels in major rivers. According to the Defence Public Relations Office (PRO), Tezpur, four Flood Relief Columns of the Red Shield Division under the aegis of the Spear Corps were deployed on July 20 following a request from the civil administration to assist in evacuation, rescue and humanitarian relief operations in Sivasagar, Charaideo and Jorhat districts. The Army teams have been operating in flood-affected areas of Nazira and Amguri in Sivasagar district, Sonari in Charaideo district, and several locations in Jorhat district, supported by additional formations under the Spear Corps.

Equipped with rescue boats, medical personnel, engineering detachments and emergency relief supplies, Army columns have evacuated marooned families from submerged villages and provided immediate assistance to affected residents. Medical teams have also been deployed to offer healthcare services, while relief materials are being distributed in inaccessible areas.

In a bid to enhance situational awareness and improve response capabilities, the Army has launched helicopter recon-

naissance missions and drone surveillance operations to assess the extent of flooding and identify vulnerable locations requiring urgent intervention.

Engineering teams have simultaneously been tasked with restoring connectivity in areas where roads, embankments and other critical infrastructure have suffered damage due to the deluge.

Army officials said the operations are being carried out in close coordination with district administrations, the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) and other civil agencies to ensure a swift and effective response.

Additional rescue assets and manpower have been kept on standby for rapid deployment as the flood situation continues to evolve.

Meanwhile, the flood crisis in Upper Assam has deepened following incessant rainfall across Assam and neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. Several rivers, including the Brahmaputra and its tributaries, have witnessed a sharp rise in water levels.

Data from the Central Water Commission showed that the Desang River at Desangpani in Charaideo district was flowing above its previous highest flood level, while the Dikhow, Buridhing, Brahmaputra and Dhansiri (South) rivers remained above danger level or were experiencing severe flood conditions.

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‘We stand with students’: PM Modi tells NDA MPs strict action taken against NEET paper leak accused



NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said the Centre had taken stringent action against those involved in the NEET paper leak to ensure that no one “plays with the future of the youth”, and urged states to work with the Union government to tackle the menace in the national interest.

Modi made the remarks at the National Democratic Alliance’s (NDA) Parliamentary Party meeting, known as Mangal Milan, a day after thousands of students led by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) took part in the ‘Sansad Chalo’ march against irregularities in the NEET exam and to demand Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan’s resig-

nation.

Briefing journalists after the meeting, Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said the prime minister told MPs that the government acted immediately after reports of the paper leak surfaced, and 13 people were arrested and sent to jail.

“At the same time, the prime minister said, to ensure that students’ future was not affected, the NEET re-examination was given priority, conducted successfully, and the results were declared without delay,” Rijiju said after the hour-long meeting.

He said the prime minister also said that strict steps have been taken to prevent such paper leaks in the future.

Modi told the NDA MPs that those found involved in

the paper leak racket have been arrested and jailed.

The prime minister also told the ruling alliance’s MPs that those guilty in paper leaks should be given the strictest possible punishment, with the support of the country’s top lawyers, so that those involved in such a grave offence face exemplary action and such incidents do not recur.

“The prime minister said strong action has been taken to ensure that no one plays with future of youth. The prime minister also said that to ensure that no future paper leaks take place, all state governments and the Centre must join hands irrespective of party. This is not a matter of party politics but matter of national interests,” Rijiju said.

‘Not how ‘Mother of Democracy’ treats its children’: Kharge

NEW DELHI

Congress president and Rajya Sabha Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday expressed deep anguish over the police crackdown on student protesters, saying the nation had witnessed lathicharges, tear gas shells and the “crushing” of a peaceful democratic protest by the government.

Citing the developments, Kharge said he had decided not to celebrate his birthday in protest against the use of force on youth demanding justice.

Today is not a day for celebration, but it is a day to seek accountability and restore democracy, Kharge said on X as he turned 84 on Tuesday.

“Yesterday, the nation witnessed lathicharges, tear gas shells, and the crushing of a peaceful Democratic protest by the Government. The voices of students demanding justice were met with force instead of answers,” Kharge said on X.

This is not how a ‘Mother of Democracy’ treats its young children, the Congress president said.

“In these painful circumstances, I have decided not to celebrate my birthday today,” he said referring to the “Sansad Chalo” protest on Monday.

“I am deeply grateful to all Congress leaders, workers, supporters, well wishers, and every citizen who has conveyed their warm wishes. Your affection means a great deal to me, and I thank each one of you from the bottom of my heart,” Kharge said.

“But today is not a day for celebration. It is a day to seek accountability. Restore Democracy,” he said.

Why were students demanding justice met with brutal ‘lathis’ and tear gas, he asked.

“Why was the Parliament virtually sealed and the internet shutdown? Who will take responsibility for repeated paper leaks and the suffering of lakhs of



young people?” Kharge said.

He demanded that the government must immediately allow a full discussion on this issue in Parliament.

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, must resign, taking moral and political responsibility for the matter, Kharge said.

He further demanded a 21st century student centric examination system with secure digital question banks and randomised papers.

He called for an independent and merit driven education system, with higher spending on education, free from the political interference of the RSS.

Kharge also demanded statutory protection for students through mandatory re-examinations and compensation, whenever examination irregularities

occur. “Our children deserve justice, not repression,” he asserted.

The Congress on Tuesday said the police action against protesters during the “Sansad Chalo” march over irregularities in examinations is a “shameful chapter” in the list of injustices inflicted upon the youth by the government.

The opposition party warned that those who beat the country’s youth under orders from people in power will one day have to face the “lathi” of the Constitution.

Opposition parties had launched a blistering attack on the government over the police action against the Cockroach Janta Party-led “Sansad Chalo” march, with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday dubbing Prime Minister Narendra Modi as the

“most anti-youth” prime minister in the country’s history.

The Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) accused the Delhi Police of using excessive force against protesters to prevent them from reaching Parliament, alleging that several students were injured and activist Sonam Wangchuk’s wife Gitanjali J Angmo was pushed around.

Delhi Police, however, denied that Angmo was assaulted, saying the reports were “completely false and misleading”.

“No individuals were subjected to targeted assault,” it said.

Opposition parties protested over the NEET paper leak issue in Parliament and demanded a discussion, stalling proceedings on the opening day of the Monsoon Session.

INTERNATIONAL

South China Sea clash overshadows ASEAN talks as US condemns China’s actions



MANILA

A clash in the South China Sea threatened to overshadow a meeting of Southeast Asian nations on Tuesday as the United States condemned “dangerous” Chinese actions in the contested waterway.

The US statement came minutes after Secretary of State Marco Rubio arrived in the Philippines, where the 11-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is expected to tackle issues including civil war-torn Myanmar’s ongoing pariah status.

Before departing Washington on Monday, Rubio said he was open to the possibility of a sideline meeting with China’s top diplomat Wang Yi, who will also be in Manila.

In an op-ed published Tuesday morning in the Philippines, Rubio touted Washington’s commitment “to free-

dom of navigation in Southeast Asia” and the regional defensive umbrella it has provided.

“This freedom is by no means guaranteed. If these waters were to fall under the control of a power willing to use trade as a geopolitical weapon, both the United States and the ASEAN states would face serious new threats to their sovereignty, security, and economic future,” he wrote, in a clear allusion to China.

Beijing claims sovereignty over almost the entire South China Sea, a vital global trade route, despite an international ruling that its claims have no legal basis.

On Monday, Philippine and Chinese sailors clashed at the Second Thomas Shoal in the South China Sea in what was the first serious seaborne encounter in months.

Manila said China Coast Guard

personnel had assaulted Filipino sailors near a beached vessel that serves as a garrison on the disputed shoal.

Beijing said the Philippines instigated the incident by sending men in small rubber boats to approach their vessel.

The clash casts further doubt on hopes for a long-sought Code of Conduct between ASEAN and China for the waterway, a quest analysts have warned is unlikely to result in a document with teeth. The resumption of hostilities in another strategic waterway, the Strait of Hormuz, also looms large this week, as the rekindled war with Iran is placing traditional American allies under economic strain. The import-dependent Philippines declared a national energy emergency in March and has been forced to cast an ever-wider net for fuel, including purchases of oil

from Russia, whose Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will arrive Tuesday in Manila.

The week is expected to see renewed efforts towards regional energy security, including the ongoing push for ratification of the bloc’s Framework Agreement on Petroleum Security fuel-sharing scheme.

No issue facing Southeast Asia’s foreign ministers has been more fraught than how to reintegrate Myanmar, a member state formally excluded from such summits since its military junta seized power in 2021.

In May, ASEAN leaders emerged from an emotional meeting in Cebu that ended with Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos calling for a “fine-tuning” of the bloc’s long-stalled five-point plan to end Myanmar’s bloody civil war.

Thailand, which shares a long border with Myanmar and hosts millions of its refugees, has led the push for full reintegration.

Last week, days after Myanmar’s foreign minister met with a group of ASEAN counterparts in Bangkok, Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow told AFP that leader Min Aung Hlaing would visit in August. “It’s best to bring Myanmar back into the fold,” Sihasak said.

“We believe that after five years we need to talk, we need to listen, and they need to explain,” he said.

But others in the bloc have bemoaned the lack of progress on a long-stalled five-point peace plan that has formed the basis of engagement. Malaysian Foreign Minister Mohamad Hasan told reporters in May that his country remained opposed to high-level talks while “oppression is still taking place”.

China summons Philippine Ambassador after South China Sea clash



BEIJING

China summoned the Philippine ambassador on Tuesday following a clash at a disputed shoal in the South China Sea, which sparked condemnation of Beijing by Manila’s allies.

Beijing claims sovereignty over almost the entire South China Sea, a vital global trade route, despite an international ruling that found its claims have no legal basis.

Multiple nations in the region, including the Philippines, have territorial claims that overlap with China’s, and altercations regularly occur in the heavily patrolled waterway.

The Philippine military accused the China Coast Guard of clubbing a Filipino sailor with a baton on Monday as they approached a grounded vessel that has long served as a Philippine garrison.

China’s foreign ministry said Tuesday it had “urgently summoned” the Philippine

ambassador “to lodge solemn representations over the Philippines’ deliberate provocation and attack... at Ren’ai Reef”, referring to a flashpoint also known as the Second Thomas Shoal.

“The Philippine side provoked first, yet it has turned the blame upside down, distorted the facts, and maliciously hyped the issue,” the foreign ministry said in a statement.

Philippines says China Coast Guard struck a Filipino sailor with a baton during a confrontation near a disputed South China Sea outpost.

Key Philippine allies condemned the clash, with Australian foreign minister Penny Wong slamming “destabilising and dangerous conduct” by China.

Wong’s comment came after Washington condemned Beijing’s “dangerous and aggressive actions”.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio landed in Manila on Tuesday for a summit of the 11-member Association

of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Rubio has said he is open to a meeting with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, who will also attend the ASEAN summit, though talks have not been publicly confirmed.

The two met last year on the sidelines of an ASEAN gathering in Kuala Lumpur and again in Munich in February.

In an op-ed published in Philippine media outlets on Tuesday, Rubio heralded Washington’s commitment “to freedom of navigation in Southeast Asia” while reaffirming the US defensive umbrella in the region.

“This freedom is by no means guaranteed. If these waters were to fall under the control of a power willing to use trade as a geopolitical weapon, both the United States and the ASEAN states would face serious new threats to their sovereignty, security, and economic future,” he wrote, in an apparent allusion to China.

## Democracy's True Test: When Citizens Ask Questions, Does the Government Listen?



The scenes from New Delhi's Jantar Mantar in recent days have revived an old but fundamental debate about the nature of democracy. Activist Sonam Wangchuk, whose prolonged hunger strike ended after health concerns prompted authorities to shift him to a government hospital, has once again drawn national attention to the power of peaceful protest and the responsibilities of a democratic state.

Beyond the individual protest or the issues that sparked it lies a larger question that concerns every citizen: In a democracy, who ultimately holds power—the government or the people?

The answer may appear obvious. Every democratic constitution, including India's, rests on the principle that sovereignty belongs to the people. Governments derive their authority from the consent of citizens, expressed through elections and democratic institutions. Yet moments of confrontation between citizens and the state often reveal how challenging it can be to translate that principle into practice.

Throughout India's history, hunger strikes have occupied a unique place in public life. They have never been merely acts of personal sacrifice. They have served as instruments of moral persuasion, intended to compel society and those in authority to pay attention to issues that protesters believe are being ignored.

Mahatma Gandhi transformed fasting into a powerful political and ethical tool during the freedom movement. Bhagat Singh and his fellow revolutionaries used hunger strikes in prison to protest unjust treatment. Decades later, anti-corruption activist Anna Hazare employed the same method to galvanise public opinion. In the Northeast, from Sharmila's extraordinary struggle against the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act lasted nearly sixteen years, becoming one of the longest hunger strikes in modern history.



What unites these examples is not the specific causes they represented but the underlying message. A hunger strike is, at its core, an appeal to conscience. It is an attempt by an individual or a group to be heard when they believe conventional channels of communication have failed.

This is why the debate surrounding Wangchuk's protest extends beyond the individual himself. The larger issue is whether democratic institutions are sufficiently responsive to peaceful expressions of dissent.



**Loyalty is rare. If you find it, keep it.**

In any democracy, disagreement is inevitable. Citizens will not always agree with government policies. Governments, in turn, are not obligated to accept every demand made by protesters. Public policy often involves competing interests, difficult choices, and complex realities.

However, democracy is not measured by the absence of disagreement. It is measured by how disagreement is handled.

The strength of democratic governance lies not merely in electoral victories but in the willingness of those in power to engage with criticism, answer questions, and maintain dialogue with citizens. Elections provide legitimacy, but accountability sustains that legitimacy.

When citizens take to the streets peacefully, organise demonstrations, submit petitions, or undertake symbolic protests such as hunger strikes, the first instinct of a democratic government should ideally be engagement rather than confrontation. Dialogue does not necessarily mean agreement. It simply means recognising that citizens have the right to raise concerns and expect a response.

This principle becomes particularly important when public controversies generate widespread anxiety and distrust. The recent debates surrounding educational policies, examination systems, and governance issues have raised legitimate concerns among students, parents, and civil society groups. Many young people view these matters not as abstract policy disputes but as issues directly affecting their futures.

In such circumstances, silence can be interpreted as indifference. The absence of communication often deepens public frustration and creates space for speculation, mistrust, and polarisation.

The questions being asked today are not confined to one protest movement or one activist. They touch upon broader concerns about accountability in public life.

When controversies emerge, who explains what went wrong?

Who accepts responsibility when institutional failures occur?

How are citizens assured that lessons have been learned and corrective measures implemented?

These questions are not expressions of hostility toward the state. They are central to democratic citizenship. A healthy democracy depends on citizens who remain engaged, informed, and willing to hold institutions accountable.

Unfortunately, modern political discourse often shifts attention away from substantive issues. Public debates increasingly focus on personalities rather than policies. Supporters and critics become locked in arguments about individuals, organisations, motives, or political affiliations. As a result, the original concerns that sparked public mobilisation can fade into the background.

This pattern is visible across political divides. Instead of discussing the issues raised, debates frequently revolve around whether protesters are politically motivated, whether their methods are appropriate, or whether their supporters belong to one ideological camp or another.

Such discussions may have relevance, but they should not overshadow the central questions being posed.

What are the grievances?  
Are they valid?  
What solutions are being proposed?  
How should institutions respond?

Democracy functions best when attention remains focused on these substantive issues rather than on labels and partisan narratives.

Another important aspect of this debate concerns the role of dissent itself. Democracies are often praised for protecting freedom of expression, but the true test comes when that expression is uncomfortable or inconvenient for those in authority.

Citizens do not demonstrate their commitment to democracy by praising governments alone. They demonstrate it by exercising their right to question, criticise, and seek accountability.

Likewise, governments demonstrate democratic maturity not by avoiding criticism but by responding to it constructively.

History shows that societies progress when institutions remain open to scrutiny. Many reforms that are now widely accepted emerged because citizens challenged existing systems, exposed shortcomings, and demanded change. Social movements, public campaigns, and peaceful protests have frequently acted as catalysts for democratic improvement.

This does not mean every protest is correct or every demand should be accepted. Democratic

governments have both the right and responsibility to evaluate demands carefully. But evaluation is different from dismissal. Engagement is different from silence.

The distinction matters because democracy is ultimately a relationship between citizens and institutions. That relationship depends on trust.

Citizens trust governments to govern responsibly.

Governments trust citizens to participate responsibly.

When communication breaks down, trust begins to erode.

The events surrounding Wangchuk's hunger strike have therefore reopened a broader conversation about civic participation and state responsiveness. Whether one agrees with his methods, objectives, or political positions is ultimately secondary to the larger democratic principle involved.

Can citizens still raise uncomfortable questions and expect a hearing?

Can peaceful dissent continue to function as a legitimate part of democratic life?

Can institutions respond to criticism through dialogue rather than defensiveness?

These questions are relevant not only in the present moment but for the future of democratic governance itself.

Democracy is often described as government "of the people, by the people, for the people." The phrase remains powerful because it reminds us that governments are not separate from society. They are created by citizens and operate on their behalf.

Political parties may win elections. Governments may exercise authority. Leaders may hold office.

But the ultimate source of democratic power remains the people.

That principle does not expire after election day. Voting is not the end of democratic participation; it is only one part of a larger process. Citizens continue to have the right—and indeed the responsibility—to ask questions, seek transparency, and demand accountability.

A government confident in its democratic mandate should not view questions as threats. Questions are evidence of public engagement. They reflect a citizenry that cares about institutions and wants them to function effectively.

The health of a democracy is not determined solely by the strength of its government. It is also determined by the confidence of its citizens that their voices matter.

When people speak, protest peacefully, or seek dialogue, they are not weakening democracy. They are exercising one of its most essential rights.

And when governments listen, respond, and engage—even when they disagree—they strengthen the democratic compact that binds citizens and institutions together.

In the end, the real measure of democratic power is not who can command authority. It is whether those who hold authority remain willing to listen to those from whom that authority originates.

Because governments come and go. Political leaders rise and fall. Parties win and lose elections. But democracy endures only when citizens never lose their right to question—and when governments never lose their willingness to answer.

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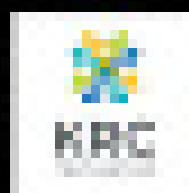


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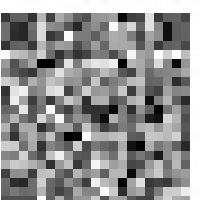


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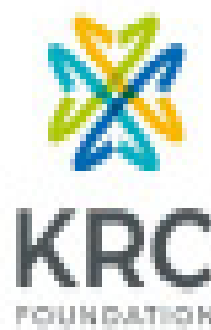
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