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PERSPECTIVE

Thinking burns calories.

## Meghalaya denies KSU permission for Khyndai Lad sit-in after Shillong violence

**SHILLONG**  
The East Khasi Hills district administration has denied permission to the Khasi Students' Union (KSU) to hold a sit-in protest at Khyndai Lad, a day after violence during a rally in Shillong left several people injured and vehicles damaged.

East Khasi Hills Deputy Commissioner Abhilash Baranwal said on Thursday that the decision was taken in view of Wednesday's violence, which disrupted peace and public order in the city.

The KSU rally on Wednesday turned violent, with reports of assaults on several people and attacks on vehicles, including those bearing Assam registration plates.

The unrest triggered panic among motorists and pedestrians along the rally route, with masked individuals allegedly stopping and targeting passing vehicles. Some protesters were also heard raising pro-KSU slogans, although their identities and affiliations could not be independently verified. Several people were reportedly beaten and injured during the clashes. A number of vehicles were allegedly vandalised, while some were set on fire as the situation escalated. Government vehicles and Assam-registered vehicles were among those reportedly targeted, raising concerns over the safety of commuters, drivers and transport workers travelling between Assam and Meghalaya.

The Seven Star Tourist Cab Operators' Union and other motor vehicle workers' organisations have condemned the alleged attacks on drivers, passengers and vehicles. The unions have also raised concerns over the safety of transport workers operating along the Assam-Meghalaya route amid heightened tensions.

The administration's decision to deny permission for the KSU sit-in comes amid increased security concerns in Shillong following Wednesday's violence.

### WHO SAID WHAT



**It's time that tribals start paying income tax...only then will we realise that burning public vehicles is actually burning public money..Right now we are so dependent on the Government of India for every infrastructure cost...from roads, to bridges to buildings and the money comes from the taxpayers of INDIA..So let's not talk big if we are not contributing to the economy of the country..**

**Patricia Mukhim, Writer, Journalist, Meghalaya**

# Tripura set to launch first live tea auction in Agartala in September

### AGARTALA

Tripura is set to launch its first live tea auction centre in Agartala in September, a move aimed at providing local tea producers direct access to buyers from across the country and strengthening the state's position in India's tea market.

Preparations for the proposed auction centre are nearing completion, with tea buyers and producers from Assam and West Bengal showing interest in participating in the new facility, Tripura Tea Development Corporation Ltd (TTDCL) Chairman Samir Ranjan Ghosh said.

Ghosh said a buyer-seller meeting held in Kolkata on July 31 was attended by around 53 buyers associated with the city's tea auction. A similar meeting was organised in Guwahati on August 6, where tea producers and buyers were briefed on the proposed Agartala centre and the auction process.

Officials from the Guwahati tea auction centre also demonstrated the auction procedure to Tripura officials and industry stakeholders as part of the preparations.

"We are hopeful that next month, in September, we will be able to successfully conduct a live auction at the proposed auction centre



in Agartala," Ghosh said.

Officials from the Guwahati auction centre are expected to visit Tripura to assist with the initial auction-related activities and help ensure a smooth launch.

The new centre will operate from a government facility at Gurkhabasti in Agartala, which was earlier associated with the Industries Department. According to TTDCL, the required infrastructure and arrangements at

the premises have been completed.

The Agartala auction will follow the pan-India auction system of the Tea Board of India, similar to the systems operating in Guwahati and Kolkata. The platform will allow tea buyers from different parts of the country to participate in auctions conducted in Tripura.

The initiative is expected to reduce the dependence of local producers on markets out-

side the state and provide them with a more direct route to national buyers.

The move comes as the state government seeks to revive and expand Tripura's tea industry, which Ghosh described as one of the state's oldest industries but one that remained relatively underdeveloped for years.

Investor interest in the sector has also increased, with agreements reportedly signed for proposed investments worth around Rs 831 crore. Ghosh said the proposed investments reflected growing confidence in Tripura's business environment.

"Whenever an industry comes to a state, one of the first priorities investors look at is law and order. The law-and-order situation in our state is very good, and Tripura is also considered an industry-friendly state," he said.

Ghosh credited the state government's support for the progress made towards establishing the auction centre and said the proposal submitted to NITI Aayog had received approval.

With buyers from Assam and West Bengal already showing interest, the Agartala auction centre is expected to provide a new marketing avenue for Tripura's tea producers while helping the state gain a stronger foothold in India's organised tea trade.

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# Imphal-Guwahati bus service resumes after three-year hiatus, boosting Manipur connectivity

### IMPHAL

Inter-State public transport between Imphal, Dimapur and Guwahati resumed on Friday after a gap of nearly three years, marking a significant step towards restoring connectivity and normalcy in Manipur following the ethnic conflict that erupted in 2023.

A total of 125 passengers travelled on the inaugural services, comprising two buses and five Winger vehicles, which left Imphal for Guwahati via Nagaland.

The vehicles crossed the sensitive Kangpokpi and Senapati districts without incident and proceeded towards Nagaland before entering Assam on their way to Guwahati.

Passengers welcomed the restoration of the long-suspended service, saying the resumption of regular public transport would make inter-State travel easier and could contribute to rebuilding trust and peace among communities.

Kiyam Kumarjit Singh, a passenger from Thoubal district, thanked the state government for restarting



the service and described the journey as a new beginning.

"Let us all forgive and forget the past. I hope this initiative will bring love, peace and harmony among all communities," he said.

Nivedita, a resident of Khundrakpam village in Imphal East district, also expressed hope that the re-

stored connectivity would support the government's efforts to bring back normalcy.

"I hope this journey contributes to peace in the State. I wish the government success in its efforts to restore normalcy," she said.

The reopening of the Imphal-Dimapur-Guwahati route is being seen

as an important development in reconnecting Manipur with neighbouring Nagaland and Assam. The service had remained suspended amid security concerns and disruptions following the outbreak of ethnic violence in May 2023.

The resumption comes less than two weeks after Chief Min-

ister Yumnam Khemchand Singh announced during his visit to Kangpokpi district on August 8 that national highways in Manipur would be reopened for the free movement of people from all communities.

Deputy Chief Minister Nemcha Kipgen and Saitu MLA Haokholet Kipgen were present during the Chief Minister's visit, when he also announced that the Imphal-Dimapur-Guwahati bus service would be restored shortly.

The restart of the inter-State transport link is expected to ease passenger movement, improve access to Assam and Nagaland and strengthen road connectivity at a time when the Manipur government is seeking to restore normalcy across the conflict-affected state. The service also carries significance beyond transportation, with passengers and officials viewing the reopening of a key route as a symbol of renewed efforts to reconnect communities and revive everyday movement between Manipur and its neighbouring states.

## Himanta Biswa Sarma meets Sitharaman, Joshi in Delhi to discuss Assam's key priorities

### GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday met Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Union Minister Prahlad Joshi in New Delhi, holding discussions on the state's flood recovery efforts and key development priorities.

During his meeting with Sitharaman, Sarma briefed the Union Finance Minister on the state government's response to the recent floods and ongoing plans to rehabilitate affected people and restore damaged infrastructure.

"It is always a pleasure to meet Hon'ble Finance Minister Smt @nsitharaman Ji, who has consistently been a strong champion of Assam's interests and aspirations," Sarma said in a post on X. The Chief Minister said Sitharaman heard Assam's concerns "with great attention and sensitivity" and assured him of the Centre's support in helping flood-affected families rebuild their lives. The meeting assumes significance as Assam continues to undertake relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction measures following severe flooding that affected several parts of the state. Sarma also held a meeting with Joshi, who handles the portfolios of Education, Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, and New and Renewable Energy at the Centre. According to Sarma, the discussions with Joshi focused on Assam's priorities in education, food and civil supplies, and renewable energy. Describing the meeting as "very productive", the Chief Minister thanked Joshi for his support and positive approach towards Assam. The meetings in New Delhi come at a time when the Assam government is focusing on flood recovery while simultaneously pursuing development initiatives across key sectors. The state is expected to seek continued central assistance for rehabilitation and reconstruction as it assesses the impact of the floods.

## Bimol Akoijam urges Centre to defer Census, cites displacement and ongoing violence



### NEW DELHI

Congress MP from Inner Manipur Angomcha Bimol Akoijam has urged the Centre to defer the ongoing Census exercise in Manipur, arguing that continuing displacement, violence and the absence of a credible citizenship verification mechanism could undermine the accuracy and inclusiveness of the enumeration. In a letter to Union Home Minister Amit Shah dated August 19, Akoijam reiterated his earlier demand that both the Census and any subsequent delimitation exercise in the state be postponed until conditions are conducive to a credible count. The MP had first raised the issue in the Lok Sabha under Rule 377 on March 30, highlighting concerns over conducting the Census amid the continuing crisis in Manipur. He later wrote to the Centre seeking the establishment of institutional mechanisms for citizenship verification, including an NRC and a Foreigners Tribunal for the state, before the exercise is undertaken. Akoijam said nearly 60,000 people remain displaced as a result of the prolonged crisis, while violence has also spread to areas that had previously remained relatively unaffected. He pointed to reported clashes among Scheduled Tribe communities in Ukhrul, Kamjong and Noney districts as another indication of the fragile security

situation. Disruptions along the National Highways and difficulties in accessing essential services have further complicated normal life, he said.

According to Akoijam, a Census conducted under such circumstances could fail to accurately capture the population because a large number of displaced people may not be in their usual places of residence. He has therefore called for the exercise to be deferred until normalcy is restored, displaced people are rehabilitated and an institutional framework for verifying citizenship is put in place. The MP clarified that his demand should not be interpreted as opposition to the Census itself. Instead, he argued that the exercise must be conducted under conditions that ensure its figures are accurate, credible and acceptable to the people of Manipur. The issue also assumes significance because the Census is expected to have implications for any future delimitation exercise. Akoijam has warned that conducting the enumeration amid displacement and an unsettled security situation could have wider consequences for political representation in the state.

On Thursday, Akoijam addressed the national media at the AICC headquarters at 24 Akbar Road in New Delhi, where he elaborated on his concerns over the Census, the continuing crisis in Manipur, citizenship verification and the possible implications for delimitation. His latest appeal comes amid continued efforts to restore normalcy in the violence-hit state, where displacement and security concerns remain key challenges to the return of affected communities to their homes.

## 100 days on, Liangmai Naga families seek justice for six abducted men

### IMPHAL

Families of six Liangmai Naga men allegedly abducted on May 13 and later found dead have renewed their demand for justice as the incident completed 100 days on Friday.

A solidarity prayer meeting was held at the Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences (JNIMS) campus in Imphal to mark the 100th day since the six men were allegedly abducted. Their mutilated and beheaded bodies were recovered on June 10. Members of Liangmaipui Naga Ruangdi Imphal, Kongsaram Lun and K. Lungwiram, along with Juna Harup West, attended the prayer meeting. Representatives of various Naga and Meitei organisations have also been taking part in daily solidarity prayers in support of the families. The observance was held under the theme "100 Days of Government Silence, 100 Days Families' Tears", with the message "Justice Cannot Wait Any Longer." The organisers also called for collective efforts towards truth, accountability and justice.

The gatherings draw on the Naga tradition of communal mourning,

under which members of the community come together to grieve and pay respects to the deceased. The mourning continues until the bodies are laid to rest.

The organisers expressed concern that even after 100 days, the bodies remain at the JNIMS mortuary, while the families continue to face grief and uncertainty over the circumstances surrounding the deaths. They said the families were seeking more than statements or assurances from the authorities and demanded clear answers, direct communication with the affected families and concrete action against those responsible.

"100 days of waiting is enough," the organisers said, reiterating their call for truth, accountability and justice. They urged the government to break its silence and act without further delay, stressing that the affected families deserved dignity, justice and closure. The solidarity prayer meetings are expected to continue as a peaceful expression of mourning and a collective demand for justice until the families receive answers and the deceased are accorded a dignified final farewell.



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DIMAGI NAXALS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's reference to "dimagi Naxals" has triggered a political debate, with Congress leader Jairam Ramesh suggesting that the term was aimed at the entire Opposition. Union Minister Kiren Rijiju, however, sought to clarify that the Prime Minister was referring to a broader ideological phenomenon rather than simply targeting political opponents.

The Prime Minister's warning deserves to be examined beyond partisan politics. He said that while armed Naxalism had been pushed back from the forests, those subscribing to a "Naxal mentality" were still seeking opportunities to create violence and unrest, influence public discourse and lead society in what he described as the wrong direction. He argued that such elements needed to be identified and isolated while young people were brought into the mainstream.

There is an important distinction here. Armed Naxalism is visible in its methods; an ideological movement is often far less so. The former relies on weapons and organised violence. The latter operates through ideas, narratives and intellectual arguments. That distinction, however, also makes the phrase "dimagi Naxal" problematic if it is used loosely or indiscriminately. In a democracy, disagreement with the government, criticism of policies or advocacy of radical social change cannot by themselves be equated with extremism. Yet the larger concern behind the Prime Minister's remarks cannot simply be dismissed. Democracies have every right to question whether violence, anarchy and destruction are ever being romanticised in the name of revolution. The first warning sign is the intellectual justification of violence. Naxal violence has historically been defended by invoking class struggle and revolutionary necessity. Violence is sometimes presented not as a tragedy but as an instrument of social transformation. That is where democratic debate begins to cross a dangerous line. A constitutional democracy cannot accept the proposition that violence is legitimate merely because the objective is described as revolutionary. The second danger is the celebration of anarchy. Dr B.R. Ambedkar, while addressing the Constituent Assembly, had emphasised the importance of constitutional methods once democratic institutions had been established. His warning against the "grammar of anarchy" remains relevant. Political and social grievances are legitimate; abandoning constitutional mechanisms in pursuit of them is not. But there is another dimension to the debate that deserves equal attention: selective standards. Those who loudly defend freedom of expression must also defend it when the expression is inconvenient, unpopular or offensive to their own ideological preferences. Democracy is not strengthened when free speech becomes a principle to be invoked selectively. Nor is dissent meaningful if disagreement within one's own camp is treated as betrayal.

The same principle applies to patriotism and nationalism. Criticism of nationalism is perfectly legitimate in a free society. But treating patriotism itself as intellectual suspect is no more democratic than imposing patriotism as a compulsory political creed. A mature democracy must be able to accommodate both national pride and criticism of the nation's policies.

India's civilisational heritage presents another area where the debate has often become unnecessarily polarised. Admiration for the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, classical Indian philosophy, traditional knowledge, indigenous art or Sanskrit literature does not automatically make a person sectarian. At the same time, rejecting Indian traditions merely because they are Indian is equally narrow-minded. A confident civilisation need not choose between Chanakya and Machiavelli, Kalidasa and Shakespeare, or Indian and Western intellectual traditions. It can learn from all of them. The real test should therefore not be whether someone prefers Indian or Western literature, supports cultural nationalism or rejects it, or agrees with the government of the day. The test should be whether that person respects democratic institutions, constitutional methods, pluralism and the peaceful resolution of disagreements. There is also a danger in stretching the concept of "anti-establishment" too far. Every democracy needs an Opposition, a critical media, independent academics, activists and citizens willing to challenge those in power. Criticism of the establishment is not evidence of an anti-national or extremist mentality. Indeed, democracy becomes weaker when every critic is suspected of being an enemy. Equally, those who occupy influential positions in academia, media or civil society cannot claim immunity from scrutiny. Intellectual freedom comes with intellectual responsibility. Ideas have consequences, and arguments that glorify political violence, celebrate destruction or undermine constitutional democracy deserve to be challenged. India's diversity also needs to be understood carefully. The country is unquestionably a union of extraordinary linguistic, ethnic, cultural and regional identities. Recognising that diversity strengthens the republic. Turning diversity into an argument for permanent fragmentation is a different matter. India's unity cannot be sustained through uniformity, but neither can its diversity survive if every difference is converted into a political frontier. The same balanced approach is required while discussing the armed forces. The Army, like every institution in a democracy, can and should be subjected to scrutiny. Allegations of misconduct must be investigated and accountability must be ensured. But portraying the entire institution as inherently oppressive is another matter altogether. Institutions should be criticised for specific actions and policies, not demonised as a class. Ultimately, the phrase "dimagi Naxal" carries the risk of becoming a political label rather than an analytical category. If it becomes a convenient term for anyone who disagrees with the government, it will do more harm than good. The country has seen enough political labelling to know that such language can quickly become an instrument of exclusion.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

You have to know the past to understand the present.

- Carl Sagan

THE DECLINE OF EDUCATION: FALLING FUNDING AND ENROLMENT



DHURJATI MUKHERJEE

The "Fix the Schools" campaign launched by the Cockroach Janata Party to improve the condition of government schools in rural areas across the country is a welcome initiative. Just imagine where the state of education has reached today: over the past decade, education's share in the Union Budget has fallen from 4.6 per cent to around 2.5 per cent. During the same period, the number of government primary schools across the country has declined by around 10,000, with Meghalaya, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh recording the sharpest falls.

The government has repeatedly claimed progress, but recent data suggest that school enrolment figures are far from encouraging despite population growth. Even after the much-publicised Right to Education Act came into force, there has been no significant change in containing the number of children dropping out of school. The impact is greatest on the poor, as a large section of them cannot afford the cost of higher education in private institutions.

According to the recently released Unified District Information System Plus (UDISE+) 2025-26 report, the number of students enrolled in government schools fell from 12.16 crore in 2024-25 to 11.89 crore in the last financial year. This came even as total enrolment in private and government-aided schools registered a marginal increase. During the same period, the number of government schools declined from 10.13 lakh to 10.05 lakh, a faster decline than the overall fall in the number of schools. While rationalisation of schools may be justified in certain circumstances, there is an urgent need to modernise schools and appoint an adequate number of teachers.

It is worrying that, according to government data presented in the Rajya Sabha, more than one lakh government, government-aided and private schools are being run with just one teacher each. This exposes serious shortcomings in teacher deployment, even though the overall pupil-teacher ratio in the country remains within national norms. Moreover, the involvement of teachers in Special Intensive Revision (SIR) and census-related duties has also affected classroom teaching. Academics have criticised the deployment of teachers for non-academic work, arguing that it compromises their primary educational responsibilities. It is well known that most children studying in government schools come from poor families, and the majority of them cannot afford private tuition. It has been argued, quite rightly, that the existing system is increasingly depriving the poor of access to quality

education.

Some facts need closer attention. According to the NITI Aayog report, The School Education System in India: Analysis and Policy Framework for Quality Improvement, nearly one lakh government schools were closed between 2014 and 2024, contributing significantly to a decline of 2.26 crore in school enrolment during the decade. The report states that 26.95 crore children were enrolled in schools in 2014-15, but the figure fell to 24.69 crore in 2024-25. During the same period, the number of government schools declined from 11.07 lakh to 10.13 lakh, while government-aided schools also recorded a similar decline. In contrast, the number of private schools increased from 2.88 lakh to 3.39 lakh during the decade.

The report points out that the decline in school enrolment is partly linked to demographic changes, particularly the declining fertility rate, which has reduced the number of school-age children. School mergers and the challenge of retaining students in higher classes are other contributing factors. School mergers have another dimension as well: they can themselves lead to lower enrolment. Nearly 40,000 schools were merged in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. In addition, the dropout rate has been highest at the secondary level, particularly in Classes 9 and 10, where it has reached 11.5 per cent, although unofficial estimates suggest that the actual figure may not be less than 20 per cent.

Reports also indicate that difficul-

ties in mathematics, particularly algebra and geometry, may be one reason why students leave school. Some activists argue that school mergers undermine the very objective of universal education, even as the government remains committed to universalising education under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030. The policy of school mergers may be justified in some cases, but it can also become an obstacle to achieving the goal of expanding access to education.

Significantly, the report also highlights the shortage of laboratory facilities required for quality science education. In 2025-26, the proportion of schools equipped with such facilities fell to 54.6 per cent from 57.4 per cent in the previous financial year. According to the report, unless corrective measures are taken in time, this could increase the number of students dropping out at the secondary level. On the positive side, however, government schools have recorded the fastest improvement in internet connectivity in recent years. Connectivity increased from 46.2 per cent in 2023-24 to 63.1 per cent in 2025-26, narrowing the gap between government schools and aided and private schools. Overall, 67.4 per cent of schools had internet facilities, up from 63.5 per cent in 2024-25.

Many experts regard Class 8 as a crucial turning point in a child's academic life, after which the dropout rate tends to rise. This is particularly surprising because students are being provided with mid-day meals. However, it is possible that the economic compul-

sions of students' families are a much stronger factor, particularly in the case of girls.

The question is: what will be the future of students from poor and disadvantaged sections, some of whom have immense potential to develop their talents if given adequate guidance? Education is on the Concurrent List, and it is the Centre's responsibility to assist states in expanding educational opportunities, particularly in remote and backward districts.

Unfortunately, the Centre's PM SHRI scheme has also failed to achieve its objective of opening schools in all districts of the country. At the very least, there should be an immediate effort to introduce Classes 9 to 12 in schools in backward districts. Higher education also needs attention, and

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

I also conveyed to Shri @SangmaConrad Assam's concern over the recent incidents in Shillong, particularly those involving Assam-registered vehicles.

Hon'ble Minister for Border Protection Shri @ATULBORA2 has been asked to coordinate closely with the authorities in Meghalaya and work towards ensuring that peace and normalcy prevail between our two States.

Assam and Meghalaya are sister States, bound by deep historical, cultural and people-to-people ties. Mutual respect, restraint and sensitivity must guide us at all times. We must do everything within our power to preserve the harmony, friendship and goodwill that have long defined the relationship between our people. ~ Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM, Assam

curricula should be designed in such a way that students who do not wish to pursue further studies are still able to earn a dignified livelihood. It is imperative that an expert committee, after consulting educationists, prepare a policy paper on the issue at the earliest.

As far as higher education is concerned, undergraduate enrolment in educational institutions has declined for the first time. Experts attribute the decline to the government's increasing emphasis on vocational education, growing disillusionment among young people regarding the value of higher education, and limited employment opportunities. According to the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) reports for 2022-23 and 2023-24, undergraduate enrolment in 2023-24 declined by one lakh students compared with the previous year.

Former UGC chairman Prof. S. Thorat and other experts have attributed the decline to the increasing emphasis on skill education at the school level, the availability of multiple exit options at the undergraduate level, declining public funding for higher education institutions, and the discontinuation of several scholarship schemes at both school and college levels.

The above figures, together with the ground realities of rural schools, make it clear that the present situation offers little reason for optimism. Beyond the factors mentioned above, education is not receiving the priority it deserves as one of the fundamental foundations of life. The government must therefore urgently take note of the serious state of education and undertake concrete and corrective measures.



# Centre clears 5 central force companies for Meghalaya after Shillong violence

**SHILLONG**

The Centre has approved the deployment of five companies of central armed forces in Meghalaya following violent protests in Shillong that left several people injured and caused extensive damage to public and government property, officials said on Thursday.

The Union Home Ministry has sanctioned four companies of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and one company of the Rapid Action Force (RAF) for deployment in Meghalaya until August 25. The forces will assist the state police in maintaining law and order, a senior Home Department official said.

The deployment was sought by the state Home (Police) Department following what officials described as a "sudden deterioration" in the law-and-order situation in Shillong.

Violence erupted across several parts of the city on Wednesday during a black-flag rally organised by the Khasi Students' Union (KSU). Stone-pelting and vandalism were reported from areas including the Fire Brigade, Nongmensong, Polo, Barik and Mawlai.

At least 31 vehicles, mostly government SUVs, were damaged, while a government vehicle was set ablaze. Several pedestrians were also reportedly assaulted during the unrest.

East Khasi Hills Superintendent of Police Vivek Syiem confirmed the damage and said busts of Swami Vivekananda and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose at the Relief and Rehabilitation Colony were vandalised.

Following the violence, police arrested KSU president Raymond Kharjana, vice-president Pynkmenlang Samnite and general secretary Reuben Najiar late



on Wednesday night.

The three were detained from a Shillong hotel where they were holding a meeting and taken to Sadar Police Station, sources said. Police booked them under various provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, in connection with alleged damage to public property, assault and other offences.

The arrests came hours after KSU leaders addressed a press conference expressing regret over the violence while denying that members of the organisation were involved in vandalism or arson.

The student body alleged that vested-interest groups had infiltrated the rally with the intention of derailing its agitation and tarnishing the KSU's image.

The rally was organised to press the union's five-point charter of demands. These include implementation of the Meghalaya Residents Safety and Security Act, legislation to regulate migrant workers, reforms in government recruitment and resolution of recruitment-related concerns at the North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences (NEIGRIHMS).

The KSU has also demanded cancellation of the July 31 public hearing for the proposed Shree Cement project in East Jaintia Hills and action against officials over what it described as excessive use of force during the hearing.

The union has renewed its demand

for implementation of the Inner Line Permit (ILP) in Meghalaya.

Tensions remained high after police conducted a late-night raid at the KSU office in Shillong's densely populated Jaiaw area on Wednesday.

A local elder alleged that residents resisted the police operation, following which tear gas and stun grenades were used. The elder further claimed that property in and around the KSU office was damaged during the operation.

Several former KSU leaders have condemned the midnight raid, alleging that excessive force was used during the police action.

The deployment of additional central forces comes amid heightened security concerns in Shillong as authorities seek to prevent further escalation and restore normalcy following Wednesday's violence.

## AHPI Manipur Urges Unhindered Healthcare Access Amid Strike Disruptions

**BISWADEEP GUPTA**

**IMPHAL:** The Association of Healthcare Providers (India), Manipur Chapter, has expressed serious concern over the disruption and obstruction of medical services during the recent 48-hour general strike that began at midnight on August 17.

In a press release issued on Thursday, AHPI Manipur highlighted that several member hospitals reported instances where healthcare delivery was hindered.

The association emphasised that while peaceful protest is a recognised democratic right, emergency medical access must remain entirely uninhibited to prevent life-threatening delays.

AHPI Manipur has earnestly appealed to all groups and individuals to permit free, uninterrupted passage for patients, accompanying attendants, and ambulances; Healthcare professionals and support staff carrying valid identity cards, along with vehicles transporting essential medical supplies, must be allowed to travel safely.

The association underscored that civic responsibility and the right to protest must go hand in hand, calling on the public to ensure compassion prevails so that critical care is neither denied nor delayed.

The appeal was jointly issued in the public interest by AHPI Manipur Chapter's President Dr. Kh. Ratankumar Singh and Secretary Dr. Asit Kumar Debnath.

## Court awards life term to two brothers for Sonai youth's murder

**SILCHAR**

A Cachar court has sentenced two brothers to life imprisonment for the 2022 murder of a 26-year-old youth in South Mohanpur under the Sonai Assembly constituency.

Additional Sessions Judge and Fast Track Court of Cachar Kiran Lal Baishnav convicted Hussain Ahmed Laskar and Hassan Ahmed Laskar, both residents of South Mohanpur Part-I, in the murder of Abdul Alim Laskar.

The incident took place on October 28, 2022, when Abdul Alim was allegedly attacked following an argument involving Hassan Ahmed.

According to the prosecution, Hassan and his brother Hussain later went to Abdul Alim's house and attacked him with a machete and a wooden stick.

Abdul Alim reportedly attempted to escape through a nearby paddy field, but the accused allegedly chased him and assaulted him again.

The victim sustained critical injuries and was taken to Silchar Medical College and Hospital, where he died on October 30, two days after the attack.

Following the incident, Abdul Alim's elder brother, Abdul Khalique Laskar, lodged an FIR at Sonai Police Station.

After a prolonged trial, the court convicted both accused based on evidence and witness testimonies presented by the prosecution.

On Wednesday, the court sentenced the brothers to life imprisonment under Sections 302/34 of the Indian Penal Code and imposed a fine of Rs 5,000 on each.

The court further ordered that in case of default in payment of the fine, each convict would undergo an additional six months of imprisonment.

Public prosecutor Pradip Kumar Patowary represented the prosecution in the case.

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Public prosecutor Pradip Kumar Patowary represented the prosecution in the case.

## ED summons Assam ACS officer Paragmani Mahanta in alleged Rs 100-crore irregularities case

**GUWAHATI**

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has summoned Assam Civil Service (ACS) officer Paragmani Mahanta, currently serving as Director of the state Geology and Mining Department, for questioning in connection with alleged financial irregularities and corruption involving nearly Rs 100 crore, sources said.

The ED is expected to question Mahanta about financial transactions and alleged irregularities linked to his tenure in several senior government positions, including his association with the Assam Mineral Development Corporation (AMDC).

According to allegations being examined by the agency, Mahanta received around Rs 50,000 per month as remuneration from the corporation. The case also involves an alleged loss of approximately Rs 5.60 crore to the AMDC arising from financial irregularities.

Investigators are also looking into alleged transactions related to recruitment and other financial dealings during his tenure.

Another allegation under



which was subsequently gifted to Mahanta's child.

The agency is also examining an allegation involving the diversion of around Rs 15,000 per month purportedly in the name of a cleaning worker. The scope of the inquiry extends to Mahanta's tenure as Director of the Assam Rural Infrastructure and Technology (ARTFED) and in the Handloom and Textiles Department, where allegations of financial irregularities have also been raised.

The ED's questioning is expected to focus on the nature of the alleged transactions, the financial records associated with them and the circumstances surrounding the different official assignments held by Mahanta.

The allegations against the officer have not been established and the investigation remains ongoing. The ED has yet to publicly disclose the full details of the case.

## Tripura Congress to contest Village Council polls, takes aim at BJP-Tipra Motha

**AGARTALA**

The Tripura Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) has announced that it will contest the upcoming Village Council elections, with party president Asish Kumar Saha accusing the BJP and its ally, the Tipra Motha Party, of failing to safeguard the interests of the state's indigenous and tribal communities.

Saha said on Thursday that the Congress has intensified its organisational preparations in tribal areas and will field candidates in the upcoming polls.

He said the Adivasi Congress and the Pradesh Congress have been working jointly to strengthen the party's organisational base and rebuild support in the hilly areas of the state.

Highlighting the Congress's past initiatives, Saha claimed that the



party had taken several measures for tribal empowerment when it was in power at the Centre and in Tripura. These included the creation of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council, implementation of forest rights, expansion of reservation benefits and various development programmes for tribal communities.

Saha alleged that the BJP governments at the Centre and in Tripura, along with Tipra Motha, had failed to fulfil their commitments to indigenous people.

He also questioned the proposed electoral understanding between the BJP and Tipra Motha, pointing out that the two parties had previously been political opponents in the

Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council.

"Those who promised to fight for the rights of the tribal people have failed to fulfil their commitments and have disappointed them," Saha said. The Congress leader alleged that the BJP-Tipra Motha understanding was driven primarily by electoral calculations rather than a genuine commitment to tribal welfare and development.

Saha said the Congress would continue to raise issues concerning indigenous communities and strengthen its presence in tribal areas ahead of the Village Council elections.

He urged tribal voters to support the Congress and said the party would field candidates with the aim of securing a mandate to represent the interests of indigenous communities at the grassroots level.

## Tripura Cabinet clears 305 new posts, approves recruitment of 1,177 personnel

**AGARTALA**

The Tripura Cabinet, chaired by Chief Minister Manik Saha, on Thursday approved the creation of 305 new government posts and recruitment of 1,177 personnel across several departments, including police, health, railway policing and higher education.

Cabinet spokesperson and Transport Minister Sushanta Chowdhury announced the decisions at a press conference at the state Secretariat following the Cabinet meeting.

Among the key decisions, the Cabinet approved direct recruitment of 916 police constables, including men and women, under the Home Department. The recruitment process will include physical fitness tests, a written examination and an oral test. The recruitment board will be headed by the Director General of Police, Chowdhury said. The Cabinet also cleared the recruitment of 219 Lower Division Clerks (LDCs) under the Health and Family Welfare Department through the Tripura Joint Recruitment Board.

In another decision, 27 technical Group-C posts were approved under the General Administration (Printing and Stationery) Department. The posts include Chargeman, Chargeman Retouching, Chargeman Offset Machine, Copy Holder, Kokborok Copy Holder, Machine Man and Binder.

The Cabinet also approved 105 posts for four proposed Government Railway Police (GRP) stations at

Bishramganj, Udaipur, Belonia and Sabroom.

The sanctioned positions include Sub-Inspectors, Women Sub-Inspectors, Assistant Sub-Inspectors, Women Head Constables, Women Constables and Constable Drivers.

The Tribal Welfare Department will fill 15 fixed-pay posts through the Graduate Recruitment Board of Tripura (GRBT), including Lower Division Clerk and Multi-Tasking Staff positions.

Meanwhile, the Cabinet approved the creation of 200 Assistant Professor posts for government general degree colleges under the Higher Education Department.

Chowdhury clarified that the decision relates to the creation of the posts and does not mean all 200 positions will be filled immediately.

The Cabinet also approved the Shri Shri University, Tripura Bill, 2026, paving the way for the proposed university to offer a wide range of academic programmes.

These will include certificate, diploma, postgraduate diploma, undergraduate, postgraduate, MPhil, PhD and post-doctoral programmes, besides honorary degrees such as D.Litt and D.Sc.

The proposed university will offer courses in fields including science, engineering and technology, architecture and planning, social sciences and humanities, commerce and management, AYUSH, yoga and naturopathy, and medical sciences.

# Cachar to open legal services clinic for senior citizens on August 22

**SILCHAR**

The District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), Cachar, will inaugurate a dedicated Legal Services Clinic for senior citizens on August 22 to provide easier access to legal aid, information on rights and assistance in seeking redressal of grievances. The clinic will be established at the Appellate Tribunal constituted under the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, where the District Commissioner of Cachar serves as the Presiding Officer.

The initiative is aimed at helping elderly persons, particularly those who may face difficulties navigating legal and administrative procedures independently, access appropriate legal assistance and support.

The inauguration will be followed by an interaction involving judicial officers, senior citizens, representatives of the district and police administrations, SDO (Civil), ward commissioners and other stakeholders.

The discussion will focus on the welfare and protection of senior citizens, access to justice and the need for better coordination among institutions dealing with issues affecting the elderly.

The programme will be attended by Gauhati High Court Judge and Executive

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tive Chairman of the Assam State Legal Services Authority Justice Michael

Zothankhuma; Gauhati High Court Judge and Portfolio Judge for Cachar District Judiciary Justice Manish Choudhury; Gauhati High Court Judge Justice Kaushik Goswami; and Assam State Legal Services Authority Member Secretary Debasish Bhattacharjee.

The clinic is expected to assist senior citizens with matters related to maintenance, property disputes, family issues and other legal grievances by providing information about their rights, entitlements, legal aid and available avenues for relief.

As part of the programme, wheelchairs and walking sticks will also be distributed among identified senior citizens and other beneficiaries requiring mobility assistance.

The post-inauguration interaction will provide elderly residents an opportunity to directly raise their concerns with judicial and administrative authorities. Discussions are expected to cover everyday challenges faced by senior citizens and ways to strengthen coordination between the judiciary, administration, police and community-level representatives. The DLSA, Cachar said the clinic would seek to ensure that senior citizens can obtain legal assistance and relevant information through a simple and accessible process.

The initiative is aimed at strengthening awareness of legal rights among elderly persons and making it easier for them to approach the appropriate authorities when they require assistance.

The information was issued in a press release by the Regional Office of Information & Public Relations, Barak Valley Zone, Silchar, Assam.

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# Delhi police deny permission to ‘Reservation Hatao Andolan’ protest at Jantar Mantar

NEW DELHI

Delhi Police said no permission had been granted for a protest on reservation reforms at Jantar Mantar on August 21, dismissing social media posts claiming otherwise as “false and misleading”. In a statement, the police said, “Various videos are circulating regarding the alleged grant of permission for a protest, on the issue of reservation reforms, at Jantar Mantar on 21 August, which is false and misleading.” “It is further clari-

fied that no permission has been granted to anyone to hold a protest at Jantar Mantar on August 21,” the police said. The police also said prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the BNSS, the erstwhile Section 144 of the CrPC, are already in force in the New Delhi district. Protest marches, processions, demonstrations and assemblies of five or more people are prohibited. It advised people against amplifying, forwarding or circulating unverified information about the alleged permission and warned that

legal action may be taken against those found creating or disseminating fake news. The clarification came after the Instagram-based “Reservation Hatao Andolan” page, which has 5.6 million followers, shared a poster announcing a “peaceful protest” at Jantar Mantar at 2 pm on August 21. The platform, which has gained traction by adopting protest-mobilisation tactics associated with the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), has called for a physical demonstration against the reservation system.



# PM Modi asks secretaries to break departmental silos, adopt long-term approach to governance



NEW DELHI

A day after chairing a meeting of the Union Cabinet, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday chaired the third high-level meeting with Secretaries to the Government of India, reviewing the future action agenda of concerned ministries and departments dealing with infrastructure and connectivity, security and external affairs, and governance. The Prime Minister noted that deliberations had already been held with two groups of Secretaries and stressed that, besides addressing immediate issues and examining statistics, officials must adopt a long-term perspective on how the country's future should be shaped. During the meeting, he discussed the challenge of overcoming silos,

emphasising that they are not merely an organisational problem but also a problem of mindset. He said silos could be both horizontal and vertical and stressed that officials must take ownership of their responsibilities while working with a strong sense of belongingness. Emphasising the importance of collective effort, Prime Minister Modi cited the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic and the West Asia crisis, when officials across departments worked together effectively. He said such coordination mechanisms should become a natural part of the government's work culture rather than being limited to situations of crisis. The Prime Minister also called for the effective use of Artificial Intelligence while ensuring that human intervention and judgement

remain central. He encouraged officials to explore innovative ways of combining the capabilities of AI with human expertise. He further emphasised that data is a national asset and an important resource for the future. While noting that the government invests considerable resources in collecting, storing and managing data, he said its full potential was not always being realised because of departmental silos and fragmented systems. Pointing to differences in the way data is collected and managed for different purposes, he called for solutions that would facilitate greater interoperability and enable more effective use of data across government departments. The Prime Minister also stressed the need for greater engagement between government departments, universities and young people to bring

fresh perspectives into policymaking. He said wider interaction with universities and the younger generation could help bring new, unconventional ideas into governance. He called for greater focus on research and innovation, including in the defence sector, and emphasised the need to further strengthen India's defence industry and make it more competitive globally. He also stressed the importance of developing innovative defence courses and strengthening human resource development in the sector. The meeting also witnessed a discussion on the need for a comprehensive approach to strengthening India's maritime sector. Recalling that shipbuilding had been accorded infrastructure status, the Prime Minister called for an assessment of whether the intended objectives were being achieved in mission mode. He reiterated the need for India to move from port development to port-led development. According to a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office, the PM also emphasised better connectivity between manufacturing units and export-oriented units so that India's manufacturing and export capabilities could fully benefit from its maritime infrastructure. The Prime Minister reiterated the importance of a whole-of-government approach, greater coordination, innovative thinking and collective ownership in addressing complex challenges and shaping India's future with a long-term perspective. He also underlined the importance of informal interaction and building team spirit among officers. He encouraged senior officers to develop greater personal and informal engagement with junior colleagues and build stronger networks across cadres and departments. During the meeting, the Secretaries shared their experiences regarding sectoral priorities, emerging challenges and implementation-related issues. The meeting was attended by the Cabinet Secretary, Secretaries of key ministries and departments, and senior officials from the Prime Minister's Office.

# INTERNATIONAL

## Mirza Fakhrul rises from leftist student activist to Bangladesh president



DHAKA

Bangladesh's parliament Thursday elected longtime BNP secretary-general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir as the country's president, elevating to the highest constitutional office a veteran who entered politics in the late 1960s as a left-leaning student activist. Ahead of his election as president, the 78-year-old political leader was serving as the local government, rural development and cooperatives minister while also discharging his role as secretary general of the centre-right Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) under Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's leadership. During his student life at Dhaka University, Alamgir joined the East Pakistan Students' Union, a left-leaning organisation, and eventually became president of its Dhaka University unit during the 1969 mass uprising against the

then Pakistani military-backed government. The political upheaval of the late 1960s was followed by Bangladesh's independence movement and the 1971 Liberation War. Back then, Alamgir functioned as an organiser for left-leaning freedom fighters, taking refuge in India, helping facilitate their mobilisation. BNP was founded seven years after the Bangladesh Liberation War. Before getting into mainstream politics, Alamgir held a government job. He became a teacher of economics after joining the civil service's education cadre in 1972. Since then, he worked with the government in various capacities. Alamgir quit the government job in 1986 to start a career in politics. Two years later, he was elected chairman of the municipality in his hometown, Thakurgaon, located in northwestern Bangladesh, as an

independent candidate. The son of Muslim League leader and former East Pakistan Provincial Assembly member Mirza Ruhul Amin, Alamgir joined the BNP in the early 1990s, during the mass movement against the autocratic regime of then-President Hussain Muhammad Ershad. 78-year-old political leader was serving as the local government, rural development and cooperatives minister while also discharging his role as secretary general of the centre-right BNP. The anti-Ershad movement brought Khaleda Zia, then leader of the BNP, and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina together in opposition to the military-backed regime, despite their political differences. The two leaders later became bitter political opponents and both went on to serve multiple terms as Bangladesh's prime minister. In BNP, Alamgir climbed the ranks over two decades. In 2011, he

was appointed acting secretary general by Khaleda Zia. He was given permanent charge of the position in 2016. Alamgir is the longest-serving secretary general of the party. It is traditionally considered the second most senior position after the party chairman. The BNP leader retained the position until his election as the South Asian nation's 23rd president on Thursday. During his long political career, Alamgir earned a reputation as a moderate and courteous politician, with his measured style and personal decency earning respect even among political opponents. He was first elected to parliament from his home turf Thakurgaon-1 in 2001, when the BNP returned to power, and served as state minister for agriculture and later state minister for civil aviation and tourism. The veteran politician was elected from two constituencies in the 2018 general election but did not take the oath as an MP in line with a BNP decision. The party allowed five other lawmakers to join the parliament, but they too resigned in 2022, following directions from their top leadership. Alamgir was elected again from Thakurgaon-1 in the February 2026 general election, which was held after the Awami League was barred from contesting. The election -- held after an interim government led by Muhammad Yunus oversaw the transition following the ouster of Hasina after violent student-led protests in 2024 -- brought the BNP to power, with Tarique Rahman as its new chief after the death of his mother Khaleda Zia in December 2025. He is married to Rahat Ara Begum, who studied at Calcutta University and later worked for private insurance companies. They have two daughters - one is a post-doctoral fellow in Australia and the other teaches at a Dhaka school.

## US national debt exceeds \$40 trillion for first time



WASHINGTON

The US gross national debt has surged past \$40 trillion for the first time, government data showed Wednesday, outstripping earlier forecasts at a pace fuelled in part by President Donald Trump's invalidated tariffs. The uptick in borrowing is a blow to Trump, who promised to cut public spending during his 2024 presidential campaign, and sparked a backlash from US representatives across the political field. The new record comes as longer-term US obligations linked to social security and health care have been growing, while interest payments have climbed as well. Total public debt outstanding stood at \$40.05 trillion at the close of business Tuesday, according to data released Wednesday by the Treasury Department. That surpasses an earlier forecast by the Congressional Budget Office that overall borrowing would hit \$39.4 trillion by the end of fiscal year 2026. Rising US debt comes as concerns over inflation and government spending have been driving investor worries, and the cost of borrowing has grown. The war in the Middle East has also piled pressure on Trump, costing the lives of 18 American service members and \$37.5 billion in military spending as the nearly six-month-old con-

flict grinds on with little sign of resolution. Defense spending shows no sign of slowing, with the US House of Representatives narrowly passing an annual defense policy bill in July that would authorize a record \$1.15 trillion in funding for the Pentagon. Savings from Trump's commission to slash the US federal workforce and agencies have also been hard to quantify, with independent observers insisting figures claimed by the US government -- the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) website currently posts cuts of \$215 billion -- fall short of actual savings. Trump's mega-wealthy ally Elon Musk, who led the cost-cutting drive, said in 2025 he believed his stint was "a little bit successful". Republican Senator Rick Scott joined a wave of lawmakers in condemning the debt surge, urging Congress to "get spending under control and BALANCE THE BUDGET". "Americans deserve better," he wrote on X. Democratic Senator Mark Kelly, a retired US Navy combat pilot, accused Trump of enriching himself while running up the national debt. "The President said he'd pay off the debt in his first term. Well we all knew that was a lie," he posted. "Instead he ran it up to \$40 trillion while he and his family made billions." Democratic Congressman Ted Lieu accused Trump of

having "ushered in the Golden Age of Debt." Yields on long-term Treasury bonds rose Tuesday to the highest level since 2007, reflecting growing price pressures due to war on Iran and anxiety over US deficit spending. The increase forces the US government to refinance debt at the highest rates since before the 2008 global financial crisis. But the US Treasury Department moved to steady the long-term bond market early Wednesday, sending yields lower. The federal government operates at a deficit and borrows money to help cover its obligations, including its war spending and tax cuts. "It's been well-known for a while that the United States government was on a pretty unsustainable path with deficits," said Jessica Riedl, a budget and tax fellow at the Brookings Institution. "Over the last few years, the United States has moved into roughly \$2 trillion deficits, even during peace and prosperity," she added. While deficits of three to four percent of GDP used to worry financial markets, she noted that levels are closer to six to seven percent of GDP now. "That has made markets more nervous," she said. As inflation pushed interest rates higher, interest costs on the debt have risen as well, and costs linked to an ageing population are pushing up deficits.

# NIKETU IRALU: A Conscience of Humanity



PRAMOD BORO

“He was a man of wisdom in our time. Who taught us the deepest meaning of humanity -to listen with compassion, speak with truth and cherish the value of reconciliation and peace.”

There are people who pass through our lives, and there are rare souls who leave a light behind. They do not merely teach us how to live; they awaken something within us that we did not know existed. They do not simply offer answers; they teach us how to ask the questions that matter most.

Niketu Iralu was such a soul, his departure has left a silence that words cannot adequately embrace. The hills of Nagaland may continue to stand in their timeless prettiness, the winds may still move through the valleys, and the world may continue its restless journey, but for those who knew him, something profoundly precious has gone quiet. For me, Niketu Iralu was far more

than a mentor, guide or philosopher. He was a mirror in which I learned to see myself. He helped me know myself, find myself and understand the many colours of human society: the colours of courage and fear, compassion and cruelty, truth and deception, love and prejudice. He taught me that the most difficult journey is not the journey across mountains or borders, but the journey from the self towards the truth within oneself. Through his wisdom and his example, he encouraged me to examine what is right and what is wrong according to the enduring principles of human dignity and conscience, and not according to convenience, power or circumstance. He taught me that doing the right thing is not always the easiest path, but it is the path that gives meaning to human life.

Above all, he taught me the sacred idea of selfless service. In a world increasingly measured by achievement, possession, influence and recognition, Niketu reminded us that the highest measure of a human being is how much one can give without asking what one will receive in return. Service, for him, was not charity from one person to another. It was an expression of our shared humanity. His life belonged neither to one community nor to one geography. Though deeply rooted in Nagaland and the Northeast of India,

his vision reached far beyond mountains, borders and identities. His work through Initiatives of Change and Asia Plateau reflected a conviction that humanity’s deepest wounds cannot be healed by power alone. They require listening, humility, truth, courage and reconciliation.

He had the extraordinary ability to speak truth without hatred, listen without prejudice, and disagree without diminishing another human being. He listened to people’s pain, their fears, their dreams. And he listened not merely to respond, but to understand and that quality is even more rare in our world. We live in an age of extraordinary scientific and technological progress, yet humanity continues to struggle with conflict, intolerance, loneliness, inequality, mistrust and violence. We can communicate across continents in seconds, yet we often fail to communicate with the human being sitting beside us. He understood this paradox deeply and he believed that reconciliation does not mean forgetting injustice. Peace does not mean surrendering truth. Living together does not require us to obliterate our differences; rather, peace begins when we recognise the dignity of another human being even when we disagree with them. That is why his message belongs not only to Nagaland, not only to India, and not only to Asia. It belongs to the world. His contribution was recognised through several honours, including the 8th Soldier of Humanity Award presented by UNBT, Kokrajhar. But I believe the deepest honour of his life was the invisible one—the trust placed in him by people who found courage, reconciliation and hope through his presence. Today, his passing has created a profound emptiness. The hills of Nagaland mourn. The IofC family and Asia Plateau mourn. The Northeast mourns. Bodoland mourns. All those, across different parts of India and the world, who were fortunate enough to come into his circle of influence feel the weight of this loss.

For a moment, we are speechless and thoughtless and perhaps, in such moments, silence itself becomes a language of grief. Yet I do not wish to remember Niketu only through sorrow. I wish to remember him through the light he left behind. A candle does not become smaller because another candle is lit from its flame. It becomes part of a greater light. In the same way, Niketu’s life will continue wherever someone chooses truth over falsehood,

reconciliation over revenge, dialogue over hatred, service over selfishness and compassion over indifference. His physical journey has ended, but his moral journey continues through all of us who carry something of his wisdom in our hearts. I often think that the greatest teachers do not give us a map of life. They give us a compass. Niketu gave me such a compass. It will remain with me for the rest of my life. Whenever I face difficult choices, I will remember his insistence on truth. Whenever I encounter disagreement, I will remember his patience in listening. Whenever I witness suffering, I will remember his call to serve. Whenever humanity appears divided, I will remember his faith in reconciliation.

And whenever power or position threatens to overshadow the human being within us, I will remember the simple but profound lesson he embodied: to remain human is itself the highest responsibility. I pray to the Almighty to receive his noble soul with infinite grace and eternal peace. I pray that his spirit may continue to guide us from beyond this earthly existence to help us face the immense human crises of our age with compassion rather than anger, courage rather than fear, reconciliation rather than revenge, and love rather than hatred. The world today does not merely need more powerful people. It needs more humane people. It needs more listeners and bridge-builders. More truth-seekers and servants of humanity. More people willing to carry another person’s pain as though it were their own. Niketu Iralu showed us that such a life is possible. I will remain deeply and eternally grateful to him for helping me know myself, find myself and understand my responsibility towards humanity. The ideas he shared with me, and the values I have tried to share with others, will remain with me as a guiding spirit for the rest of my life.

Perhaps this is the most beautiful way a human being can defeat death—not by living forever in the body, but by continuing to live in the conscience of others. Niketu Iralu will live there. In our conscience. In our courage and compassion. In our commitment to peace and in every act of selfless service offered to another human being.

May his soul rest in eternal peace. May his light never fade. And may we, who remain behind, have the courage to carry that light into a world that needs it more than ever. With profound gratitude, reverence and love.

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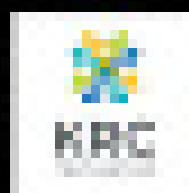


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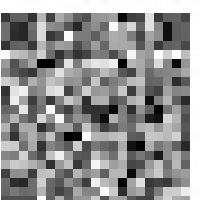


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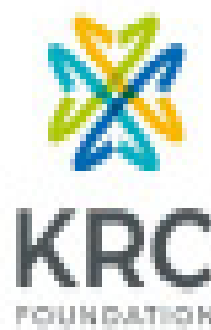
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