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FAST-TRACKING
PAPER LEAK
CASES

One hundred and fifty-eight. That is the number of paper-leak and recruitment-fraud cases in which the CBI has completed its work, filed its chargesheets, and then watched the matter vanish into the maw of India's court system. Some of these cases were registered more than two decades ago. A student who sat an entrance examination in 2003 could, by the time such a case finally comes to trial, be looking at retirement rather than recruitment. Scroll through the state-wise tally and the pattern repeats with grim monotony. Twenty-five cases in Delhi, including the AIIMS PG examination irregularities of 2010-11 and the CAT scandal of 2004. Fourteen in Tamil Nadu. Ten apiece in West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. Eight in Rajasthan. Five each in Bihar, Jharkhand and Karnataka. Investigations conclude, chargesheets are filed, and then cases sit - waiting for a court date that never seems to arrive.

The human cost of this institutional inertia is not abstract. It was on full display at Jantar Mantar, where students and job aspirants gathered to vent an anger that had been building for years, not months. Their fury was not simply about a leaked paper or a rigged exam; it was about a system that appeared to shrug at their stolen futures. The accused often walk free on bail - some have even retired from service and now draw a pension funded by the very taxpayers they defrauded - while the future of youth is mortgaged to a corrupted examination system. Some cross the upper age limit for the jobs they once qualified for. Others watch the businesses behind these scams quietly rebrand, change partners, and carry on as before, apparently untouched by the machinery of justice.

This is not merely inconvenient; it is corrosive. Delay is the great solvent of criminal prosecution. Witnesses grow old, move away, or simply lose the will to testify. Memories become hazy after years. Identification of the accused, never straightforward at the best of times, becomes close to impossible. Investigating officers are transferred, prosecutors change, even the presiding judge in a case may be replaced more than once before a matter is finally heard. Each such change resets momentum and invites the very real possibility that painstakingly built cases will collapse - not because the evidence was weak, but because the system took too long to use it.

The Government deserves recognition for finally taking action. The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Act, 2026, is a serious legislative response to what had become a chronic failure. It requires the establishment of a Special Fast-Track Court in every state and Union Territory, which will hear cases daily without the customary adjournments that have prolonged many cases. Trials arising from fresh chargesheets are to conclude within three months; pending cases transferred to these courts are to be wound up within the same window. Where an accused faces other charges under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, those too will be tried together rather than scattered across multiple courtrooms. It is, on paper, a comprehensive fix - and one born directly of sustained public pressure. One agitation, sustained and unignorable, has changed the course of policy. That is worth acknowledging.

But legislation alone convicts no one. The Centre has shown intent; now the burden shifts to the state Governments and the judiciary to convert that intent into an outcome. High Courts must move swiftly to designate the fast-track benches. State Governments must appoint the special public prosecutors the law envisages and do so without the bureaucratic delay that has plagued this issue from the start. And crucially, the reform must not stop at CBI cases alone. Paper-leak investigations conducted by state police, crime branches and anti-corruption bureaus deserve the same urgency and the same fast-track treatment. Justice cannot be rationed by which agency happens to be investigating.

The coming months will be a genuine test. If chargesheets translate into daily hearings and daily hearings translate into verdicts within the promised three months, India's exam aspirants will finally see what has long been denied them: not just an investigation completed, but a case concluded, and a perpetrator held to account. That, and nothing less, is the promise that must now be kept.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

You can't blame gravity for falling in love -

Albert Einstein

DHAKA'S POLITICAL
CROSSROADS AND A
NEW TEST FOR INDIA-
BANGLADESH RELATIONS



LALIT GARGG

Former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's announcement that she intends to return to her homeland in December 2026 is far more than a political declaration. It has emerged as a significant development that could shape South Asia's evolving geopolitical landscape, the future of democratic values, and the trajectory of India-Bangladesh relations. At a time when Bangladesh is grappling with political transition, deep ideological polarization, and institutional uncertainty, Hasina's statement has shifted the national political discourse onto a new axis. Her assertion that "neither arrest, imprisonment, nor even the threat of death can prevent me from returning to my country" serves as an emotional rallying call for her supporters while presenting a formidable political challenge to her opponents.

Since the change of government last year, Bangladesh has witnessed growing concerns over the impartiality of democratic institutions and the shrinking space for political tolerance. The verdict delivered by the International Crimes Tribunal against Sheikh Hasina, followed by intensified action against her supporters, has reinforced the perception that political competition is increasingly giving way to political retribution. The recent attack on the residence of former national cricket captain Shakib Al Hasan, who attended Hasina's press conference, further indicates that political disagreement is gradually spilling over into social unrest. At the same time, a close associate of Prime Minister Tarique Rahman publicly challenging Sheikh Hasina to "return immediately and face the consequences" reflects the fact that Bangladesh's political climate remains far from normal. In any democracy, disagreement with a political leader or party is natural. However, such differences must be resolved through fair political competition and independent democratic institutions. When restrictions, intimidation, or fear are used to counter a leader's popularity, the very spirit of democracy is weakened. Sheikh Hasina's proposed return should therefore be viewed not merely as the comeback of an individual politician, but as a critical test of Bangladesh's democratic maturity. Any attempt to exclude the Awami League from the political process would inevitably raise serious questions about the credibility of Bangladesh's democratic system.

Bangladesh's political contest today extends well beyond the traditional rivalry between the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). It has evolved into a struggle over the nation's historical identity, the legacy of the 1971 Liberation War, and the ideological direction of its future. While the Awami League continues to present itself as the authentic guardian of the Liberation War's ideals, the BNP has increasingly sought to stake its own claim to that legacy. This competing interpretation of his-

tory has further deepened political polarization. In this context, Sheikh Hasina's return has the potential not only to alter political equations but also to reshape the national narrative itself.

Against this backdrop, India's role assumes exceptional importance. India and Bangladesh share far more than geographical proximity; their relationship is rooted in common history, culture, language, economic cooperation, and strategic interests. Over the past decade and a half, bilateral ties reached unprecedented levels of trust and cooperation, largely facilitated by the strong understanding between Sheikh Hasina's government and New Delhi. Landmark achievements included the resolution of longstanding boundary disputes, enhanced energy cooperation, improved connectivity, joint counterterrorism efforts, and expanded links with India's northeastern states. The recent political transition, however, has placed this hard-earned trust under fresh strain. While India has extended security and refuge to Sheikh Hasina, it has simultaneously maintained constructive engagement with Bangladesh's new government—a reflection of diplomatic maturity. India's challenge is not to appear aligned with any particular political party but to preserve a stable, balanced, and enduring relationship with Bangladesh as a nation.

In this context, the Twelfth BRICS Summit, to be hosted in New Delhi, could provide an important diplomatic opportunity. If Bangladesh's Prime Minister Tarique Rahman participates and holds meaningful discussions with India's leadership, it could pave the way for easing recent tensions and rebuilding mutual confidence. The summit should not remain confined to economic cooperation alone; it should also serve as a platform for dialogue on

such as the renewal of the Ganges Water Treaty, the long-pending Teesta water-sharing agreement, cross-border trade, illegal migration, border security, and the question of Sheikh Hasina's extradition will significantly influence the future direction of bilateral relations. These sensitive matters demand legal prudence, diplomatic restraint, and practical wisdom rather than emotional or politically driven responses. In particular, the extradition issue is not merely a legal matter; it is intertwined with international law, bilateral agreements, and broader strategic considerations. India will have to strike a careful balance between its treaty obligations, judicial processes, and long-term national interests.

Another significant concern for New Delhi is China's expanding influence in Bangladesh. The new government's growing engagement with Beijing and its willingness to pursue strategically important infrastructure and investment projects suggest that Dhaka is attempting to diversify and balance its foreign policy. Rather than viewing this solely through the lens of strategic rivalry, India would be better served by strengthening a partnership based on trust, development, and mutual benefit. Greater cooperation in infrastructure, investment, education, healthcare, technology, and people-to-people exchanges would reinforce the long-term resilience of India-Bangladesh relations. Ultimately, Sheikh Hasina's proposed return is a test of Bangladesh's democratic character. If she is afforded a fair opportunity to participate in the political process, the people of Bangladesh will decide who should lead their nation. However, if political vengeance, repression, and violence continue to dominate the landscape, Bangladesh's democratic credibility will suffer, with wider

ments with restraint, strategic balance, and long-term vision. It should neither become a participant in Bangladesh's internal political contest nor compromise its commitment to democratic principles. The central objective of India's foreign policy should remain the creation of a stable, peaceful, democratic, and prosperous neighbourhood. Such an

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

In velvet robes and tailored suits,
They trade in promises and boots.
With golden tongues and practiced smiles,
They walk the long, deceitful miles.
They do not pick a pocket clean
Or break a lock where they are seen;
They steal in light, with pen and law,
The grandest thefts you ever saw.
They steal the tax, they steal the land,
With one polite, outstretched hand.
They rob the young of future dreams,
And stitch their pockets at the seams.
They trade your trust for polished coins,
Where greed and quiet power joins.
They sign a bill, they shift a line,
And take what's yours to call it "mine."
Yet history keeps a heavy toll
For those who sold their public soul.
The statues fall, the pages turn,
And even gilded thrones must burn.

~ Anonymous

environment is indispensable for India's own security, economic growth, and regional leadership. Today, what the region requires is not political triumph but political maturity. Bangladesh must demonstrate that democracy is not merely about conducting elections; it is equally about respecting the opposition, safeguarding judicial independence, protecting freedom of expression, and fostering political tolerance. Likewise, India must demonstrate that its engagement with neighbouring countries rests not on individuals but on institutional trust, mutual respect, and shared strategic interests.

If Sheikh Hasina indeed returns to Bangladesh in December 2026, it will represent far more than the return of a former prime minister. It will simultaneously test Bangladesh's democratic resilience, India's diplomatic statesmanship, and the political stability of South Asia. If this challenge is managed through dialogue, democratic restraint, and prudent diplomacy, the present crisis could ultimately become the foundation for renewed trust and a new chapter in India-Bangladesh relations.

A crucial question, however, remains unanswered: Will Sheikh Hasina's return to her homeland inject fresh vitality into Bangladesh's democratic political com-



regional stability, democratic values, and strategic security cooperation. India also faces several complex bilateral challenges. Issues

implications for peace and stability across South Asia. India, for its part, must continue to approach these develop-

petition, or will it deepen the nation's existing political divisions even further?

Manipur CM appeals for end to blockades, says disruptions hurting economy and workers



IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh on Friday appealed to people to refrain from bandhs, blockades and other disruptive agitations, saying such protests were adversely affecting the state's economy, hampering the supply of essential commodities and causing severe hardship to daily wage earners.

The Chief Minister made the appeal while inaugurating a two-day Consultative Meeting-cum-Seminar on the Demographic Profile of Manipur at Classic Grande, Imphal.

Referring to the recurring highway protests witnessed in recent months, Khemchand Singh said prolonged blockades had strand-

ed truck drivers carrying essential goods into the state, leading to disruptions in the movement of supplies and affecting ordinary citizens.

He said repeated interruptions to transport and commercial activities ultimately hurt vulnerable sections of society, particularly daily wage workers who depend on regular economic activity for their livelihood.

The Chief Minister stressed that the government remained committed to supporting initiatives aimed at public welfare and expressed confidence that the recommendations emerging from the seminar would contribute positively to the interests of the people, provided they remained within the framework of the Constitution.

Khemchand Singh urged citizens to avoid protests that interfere with the normal lives of the public and called for constructive dialogue and constitutional means to address important issues facing the state.

Speaking at the seminar, Manipur Home Minister Govindas Konhoujam said the state government had already conveyed to the Centre its willingness to conduct a National Register of Citizens (NRC) exercise in Manipur in accordance with constitutional provisions and existing laws.

He also said that the Ministry of Home Affairs had constituted a High-Level Committee to examine demographic changes in the country and urged people to rise above political and ideological differences

to protect the interests of Manipur's indigenous communities.

The seminar was jointly organised by the Home Department, Government of Manipur, and the Manipur State Population Commission. The event was attended by senior government officials, community leaders, civil society organisations, academicians and intellectuals, who participated in discussions on demographic trends and related policy issues in the state.

The Chief Minister's remarks come amid continuing concerns over disruptions to road connectivity and the movement of essential commodities in Manipur, where blockades and protest actions have periodically affected transportation, trade and everyday life.

Nagaland DGP urges ministerial staff to address root causes of challenges

DIMAPUR

Nagaland DGP Rupin Sharma on Friday urged all ministerial staff of the state to identify and address the root causes of challenges to improve the functioning of the state government.

Addressing the 5th biennial conference-cum-50th general meeting of the Nagaland Directorate Ministerial Service Association (NDM-SA) at the Capital Convention Centre in Kohima as the chief guest, Sharma called upon the ministerial staff to familiarise themselves with the rules and procedures of governing government service, particularly the Nagaland Government Servants Conduct Rules.

Describing knowledge of government rules and regulations as a fundamental responsibility of ministerial staff, he asked them to uphold integrity and make responsible decisions throughout their careers.

The state police chief stressed the importance of maintaining a well-organised and systematic file management system in government offices.

He observed that the younger generation of employees recruited through public service examinations possess the knowledge and capability to make valuable contributions to the ministerial establishment of the directorates.

At the same time, he said, the experience and wisdom of senior staff, combined with the enthusiasm and fresh perspectives of younger employees, would strengthen the functioning of government offices.

Delivering the exhortation, the first administrative officer of the nagaland public works department, Kroneicho Naki, described the ministerial staff as the backbone of the government.

He called upon them to carry out their duties with integrity, discipline and accountability.

He also exhorted them to remain committed to public service and strive to leave behind a legacy of dedication, professionalism and faithful service.

Teachers stage protest in Silchar, demand withdrawal of SND SPARSH salary order

SILCHAR

More than 100 teachers affiliated with the Assam State Primary Teachers' Association (ASPTA) staged a one-hour demonstration outside the office of the District Elementary Education Officer (DEEO) in Silchar on Friday, demanding the withdrawal of an order making the SND SPARSH module mandatory for the disbursal of salaries to VO-SRD teachers. Holding placards and banners, the protesting teachers raised slogans against the Assam government and the state's Education Minister, alleging that the new system would create administrative complications and lead to delays in the release of salaries.

Association members contended that linking salary payments with the SND SPARSH module would impose additional procedural requirements on VO-SRD teachers, many of whom are already grappling with administrative challenges and pending salary-related issues. The protesters said these concerns had been repeatedly brought to the attention of the authorities, but no concrete measures had been taken to address them.

The symbolic sit-in was organised to press for the immediate withdrawal of the order, with association leaders asserting that the directive directly affects the livelihood and financial security of teachers across the state.

They urged the government to reconsider the decision and resolve the long-pending grievances of SRD teachers without further delay.

Warning of a larger agitation if their demands remain unmet, the association said the protest would not end with the one-day demonstration. It announced plans to intensify the movement across Assam if the government fails to withdraw the order and address the issues raised by the teaching community.

The protesters maintained that their agitation would continue until the government responds positively to their demands.

The Assam government on Friday carried out a major reshuffle in the state police administration, transferring and promoting several senior IPS and APS officers across key positions, including Inspectors General (IG), Deputy Inspectors General (DIG), Senior Superintendents of Police (SSP) and other leadership posts.

According to a notification issued by the Home and Political Department, the transfers and promotions have been made in the interest of public service and will take effect from the date the officers assume charge of their new assignments.

Among the senior-level appointments, Ratna Singha, IPS, has been allowed to officiate as Inspector General of Police (Special Branch), while Bijoy Giri Kulligam, IPS, has been allowed to officiate as Inspector General of Police (BTAD), Kokrajhar.

Kangkan Jyoti Saikia, IPS,

Assam reshuffles senior police officers, transfers and promotions across key leadership posts

GUWAHATI



has been transferred as Inspector General of Police (Eastern Range), Jorhat, while Prasama Sagar Changmai, IPS, has been posted as Senior Superintendent of Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Assam.

At the Deputy Inspector General level, Dr Robin Kumar, IPS, has been allowed to officiate as DIG (Modernisation, Planning and Coordination) while continuing as DIG (Armed Police). Gautam Borah, IPS, has been allowed to officiate as DIG (Border), Amrit Bhuyan, IPS, as DIG (Special Branch), Sudhakar Singh, IPS,

as DIG (North Eastern Range), Tinsukia, Ranjan Bhuyan, IPS, as DIG (Security), Pranabjyoti Goswami, IPS, as DIG (Administration), and Rajen Singh, IPS, as DIG (Central Range/Hills Range). Y.T. Gyatso, IPS, has been transferred as DIG (Western Range).

The reshuffle also brought changes in district police leadership. Partha Protim Das, IPS, has been posted as Senior Superintendent of Police, Cachar, while Veera Venkata Rakesh Reddy, IPS, has been appointed SSP, Nagaon.

Among APS officers, Sarmistha Barua has been posted as SSP, Darrang, Ashif Ahmed as SSP, Biswanath, Nirupam Hazarika as SSP, Hojai, Prakash Sonowal as SSP, Dhemajai, while Nishant Saurabh, IPS, has been transferred as SSP, Morigaon.

Other key appointments include Mohan Lal Meena, IPS, as Director, Directorate of Forensic Science, Swapnaneel Deka, APS, as SSP, Golaghat, Sanjib Kumar

Saikia, APS, as Commandant, 20th Assam Police Battalion, Panbari, and Jyoti Ranjan Nath, APS, as Commandant, 10th Assam Police Battalion, Kahilipara.

The government has also assigned charge postings to several officers of the 2021 batch of the Indian Police Service. Nitisha Sanjay Jagtap, IPS, has been posted as SSP, State Crime Records Bureau (CID), Rajat Kumar Pal, IPS, as AIGP (Armed Police), Dergaon, Atul Kumar, IPS, as AIGP (Welfare) and Staff Officer to the Director General of Police, Mahato Amitkumar Sidhiprasad, IPS, as DCP (Border), Guwahati, Aman Prakash Meena, IPS, as SSP, Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Cell-C, and Desai Tushar Uttam, IPS, as SSP (Cyber Crime-II), CID.

The Home and Political Department said all transfers, promotions and officiating arrangements will come into effect from the date the officers formally assume charge of their respective postings.

Tripura to launch special electoral roll revision from September 5, final list on December 23

AGARTALA

Tripura will commence a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of its electoral rolls from September 5, with the revised voters' list scheduled to be published on December 23, Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Brijesh Pandey announced on Friday.

Addressing a press conference, Pandey said the exercise is aimed at ensuring that the state's electoral rolls remain accurate, inclusive, updated and free of duplicate, shifted, deceased or otherwise ineligible entries. "The objective of the SIR is to include every eligible elector and ensure that no ineligible person is included in the electoral roll," he said, adding that October 1, 2026, has been fixed as the qualifying date for the revision.

Tripura has 60 Assembly constituencies, 3,356 polling stations and nearly 28.97 lakh registered electors,

including 14.52 lakh men and 14.45 lakh women. To carry out the exercise, the Election Commission will deploy 3,356 Booth Level Officers (BLOs) and 375 BLO Supervisors across the state. As part of the revision process, BLOs will undertake door-to-door visits from September 15 to October 14, distributing pre-filled Enumeration Forms to existing voters. Officials said each BLO will visit every household three times to assist electors in verifying and completing their forms before collecting the signed documents.

Electors will be required to check the pre-filled details, make necessary corrections or additions, sign the forms and submit them within the prescribed period. The forms can also be filed online through the designated portal or the ECINET application.

Pandey clarified that no docu-

ments will be collected during the house-to-house enumeration phase. If additional verification becomes necessary, the concerned Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) will issue a notice after the publication of the draft electoral roll, allowing the elector to submit the required documents. He also clarified that while Aadhaar may be accepted as proof of identity, it will not be treated as proof of citizenship.

The draft electoral roll will be published on October 21 at designated locations and on the CEO's official website. Copies will also be supplied to recognised political parties. The period for filing claims and objections will run from October 21 to November 20 through the prescribed Forms 6, 7 and 8. Lists of all claims and objections received will be displayed on notice boards and shared with recognised political parties through the respective Electoral Registration Officers.

The final electoral roll will be published on December 23. Pandey said that under Section 24 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, any elector aggrieved by an order of an Electoral Registration Officer may file a first appeal before the District Magistrate and Collector, who functions as the District Election Officer, followed by a second appeal before the Chief Electoral Officer. He further informed that BLOs are currently mapping electors and their progeny by linking records with the 2005 electoral rolls, noting that the last Special Intensive Revision in Tripura was conducted in 2005. Those records have now been uploaded to the CEO's website, enabling voters to verify their earlier entries.

Amit Shah likely to chair BJP-Tipra Motha talks ahead of Tripura Village Council polls

AGARTALA

Union Home Minister Amit Shah is expected to chair a meeting with leaders of the BJP and Tipra Motha Party in New Delhi on August 8 or 9 to discuss a possible electoral alliance and strategy for the upcoming Village Council elections in Tripura.

The Village Council elections, held under the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAAD), are scheduled for September after a gap of nearly nine years following prolonged legal proceedings in the Supreme Court.

With the polls approaching, the BJP has intensified its preparations by holding a high-level core committee meeting at the party's central headquarters in New Delhi on Thursday. According to party sources, it was the first meeting exclusively focused on the forthcoming Village Council elections.

A senior BJP leader said preliminary discussions centred on the party's electoral strategy, organisational preparedness and efforts to strengthen its presence in the tribal-dominated regions of the state.

The meeting, which lasted around 90 minutes, was attended by senior BJP leaders, including B. L. Santhosh, Sambit Patra, Rajdeep Roy, Manik Saha, Ratan Lal Nath,

Bikash Debbarma, Abhishek Deb Roy, Biplab Kumar Deb, Rajib Bhattacharjee, Rebati Tripura, Pratima Bhoumik, along with the party's general secretaries and vice-presidents.

According to party sources, discussions focused on strengthening booth-level organisation, finalising campaign plans, expanding outreach in tribal areas and mobilising party workers. Leaders also reviewed the prevailing political situation and assessed possible electoral scenarios ahead of the polls.

Although the BJP and Tipra Motha have been allies in the Tripura Assembly since 2023, a final decision on whether the two parties will contest the Village Council elections together is yet to be announced.

Meanwhile, senior Tipra Motha leaders have begun assembling in New Delhi for consultations. MLA Ranjit Debbarma reached the national capital on Wednesday, while party founder Pradyot Bikram Kishore Manikya Debbarma and Minister of State Brishaketu Debbarma are expected to join the discussions.

A party insider said the BJP is also expected to hold another round of talks with Tipra Motha leaders in the presence of Chief Minister Manik Saha and state BJP president Ab-

Imphal Peace Museum Observes Hiroshima Day with Painting Competition on Peace and Reconciliation



BISWADEEP GUPTA

IMPHAL: The Imphal Peace Museum, in collaboration with the Manipur Tourism Forum, observed Hiroshima Day with a painting competition on the theme "Peace and Reconciliation" at the museum in Red Hills on Thursday.

Nearly 80 students from different schools took part in the competition, using art to express their ideas about peace, harmony, friendship and a world free from conflict.

During the programme, Haobam Joyremba, Director of the Imphal Peace Museum, interacted with the students

and spoke about the historical significance of the Battle of Imphal during the Second World War and its connection with Japan. He said the museum stands as a symbol of reconciliation between India and Japan and plays an important role in promoting peace education among young people.

Joyremba also shared the moving story of Sadako Sasaki, the Japanese girl who survived the atomic bombing of Hiroshima but later developed leukaemia due to radiation exposure. He

explained how Sadako folded paper cranes while praying for peace and recovery. The paper crane has since become a global symbol of hope, resilience and peace.

The students were also taught the traditional Japanese art of making Origami Cranes. The activity helped them learn about Japanese culture while understanding the wider message of peace and compassion.

The painting competition was held in two categories. Group A included students from Classes III to VI, while Group B was for students from Classes VII to X. The young participants created colourful artworks highlighting friendship, unity, harmony, environmental protection and the need for a world without war.

Cash prizes and certificates were presented to the winners and participants. The organisers appreciated the students for using their creativity to convey strong messages of peace.

The programme was attended by Dr. L. Surjit, President of the Manipur Tourism Forum; Paonam Surjit, Secretary; Kh. Krishnan Singh, Treasurer; and Haobam Joyremba, Director of the Imphal Peace Museum.

The organisers said Hiroshima Day should not be seen only as a day to remember the tragedy of the atomic bombing. It should also remind people of the need to reject violence and build a future based on dialogue, empathy and mutual respect.

The programme concluded with the distribution of prizes and certificates, followed by a collective pledge by the students to promote peace, friendship and harmony in their schools and communities.

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India opts for France-led FCAS to enter sixth-generation fighter race



NEW DELHI
India has begun efforts to join France's sixth-generation fighter programme, choosing the French-led Future Combat Air System (FCAS) over the rival British-Italian-Japanese Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP) as it seeks a foothold in next-generation combat aviation.

In its Action Taken submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence, the Defence Ministry said it had "initiated efforts in a concerted manner to co-join" FCAS, a programme spearheaded by the French government.

The disclosure, contained in the committee's Twenty-Fifth Report for 2025-26 tabled in the Lok Sabha on Friday, provides clarity on a choice the ministry had left open in March. It had then told the committee that the Indian Air Force was looking to join one of the two competing sixth-generation fighter programmes.

The other option was GCAP, under which Britain, Italy and Japan are developing a next-generation combat aircraft, known as Tempest.

The move comes as major military powers race to develop combat aircraft designed around stealth, artificial intelligence (AI), advanced sensors, electronic warfare and manned-unmanned teaming.

Unlike conventional fighter programmes, sixth-generation systems are being developed

as a "system of systems", with the crewed fighter expected to operate alongside unmanned aircraft, remote carriers and other networked assets while receiving and sharing data across the battlespace.

The technology has growing relevance for India as China expands its air-combat capabilities. The People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) operates the J-20 and J-35 stealth fighter and is developing a wider ecosystem involving unmanned systems, long-range weapons, airborne sensors and electronic warfare capabilities. The country has also flown two prototypes of its sixth gen fighters.

Meanwhile, India's own fighter fleet remains below its authorised strength, while the indigenous Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA), the country's flagship fifth-gen fighter programme, is still under development. The government has targeted around 2029 for the first flight of AMCA, with the aircraft expected to form the backbone of India's future fighter fleet.

The parliamentary committee has separately sought a roadmap and timeline for India's sixth-generation fighter capability.

The choice of France also comes against the backdrop of a rapidly expanding India-France defence relationship. India is now working towards closing the French proposal for 114 additional Rafales worth Rs.

3.25 lakh crore for the IAF, where the offer envisages substantial production and manufacturing in India.

French aerospace major Safran is also working to finalise the deal with DRDO's Gas Turbine Research Establishment (GTRE) for the development of a 120kN high-thrust fighter engine which will power the second tranche of the AMCA fighter or the AMCA Mk2.

FCAS was originally conceived by France, Germany and Spain as a broader combat system comprising a new-generation fighter, unmanned remote carriers, advanced sensors and a combat cloud. The fighter was intended to eventually replace France's Rafale and the Eurofighter operated by Germany and Spain.

The programme, however, was hit by disagreements between French company Dassault Aviation and Airbus over the division of work, development leadership and intellectual property.

France and Germany subsequently abandoned their plan to jointly develop the crewed fighter in early June. France is expected to pursue the fighter component under Dassault, while Germany continues work with Spain on its own future combat-aircraft effort.

The change is significant for India because the FCAS programme it had been evaluating earlier this year has since been reshaped. The government has not disclosed the precise form of India's proposed participation, including whether it is seeking an observer role, a development partnership, production workshare or access to specific technologies.

The SCOD has now asked the defence ministry to provide a "status report, roadmap and timeline" on the sixth-generation fighter programme in its next submission.

Keep curiosity, learning instinct 'alive' in life: PM Modi to students at IIT Delhi convocation ceremony



NEW DELHI

Addressing the 57th convocation ceremony at IIT Delhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged students to question things that are accepted without a thought.

He insisted that they should not only question but also show courage to find solutions, adding that challenges will turn into opportunities for those who dare to find new solutions to challenges.

PM Modi also advised the students to keep their curiosity alive in life and keep their learning instinct alive.

He said the more empowered the youth of the country are, the more empowered the entire country will be. Modi said India is now working towards becoming self-reliant in every sector; whether it is economic self-reliance, technological self-reliance, or industrial self-reliance; this forms the strong foundation of 'Viksit Bharat'.

Highlighting the profound emotional resonance of the ceremony, he reflected on the vibrant, dream-filled atmosphere of the campus.

Congratulating the students and their families on their academic achievements, Modi emphasised that their degrees represent much more than academic success, serving as a mandate to contribute to the nation.

He extended special praise to the medal recipients and celebrated the launch of new AI initiatives at the institute.

"You are stepping out from here with a dream of doing a lot for the country," he said.

Reflecting on the whirlwind journey of the students, Modi vividly recalled their transition from orientation day to convocation, acknowledging the diverse aspirations, from landing first salaries and building startups to pursuing further competitive exams, that fill their minds.

"You must absolutely have a lot of satisfaction from this remarkable journey and the enthusiasm of starting a completely new chapter in life," he said.

Referring to the rapidly shifting geopolitical and strategic global landscape, the prime minister identified

the relentless speed of technological advancement as the primary catalyst for these massive global transformations.

He framed this era of rapid change as a dual landscape of unprecedented challenges and vast new opportunities.

"Amidst all this rapid change, remember my words: the one who continuously learns is the one who will win," he said.

Redefining the true value of an IIT degree, Modi emphasised that the qualification goes far beyond a high CGPA (cumulative grade point average) or a lucrative placement offer, acting instead as a definitive global certification of advanced problem-solving capabilities.

"Your degree tells the entire world that you know exactly how to solve highly difficult problems," he said.

Drawing a parallel between academic perseverance and lifelong resilience, Modi advised the youths to tackle massive life challenges by breaking them down into manageable components, much like solving complex laboratory simulations.

"If difficulties inevitably come in life, entirely new opportunities will also emerge; you just have to remain completely alert," he said.

Contrasting structured academic environments with unpredictable real-world scenarios, Modi told the graduates that unlike their university exams, life's most critical challenges operate entirely 'out of syllabus'. He stressed that true success lies not merely in answering pre-defined questions, but in identifying and solving the problems that society has complacently accepted.

"The fundamental reason for the success of many alumni was that they boldly identified those crucial questions which the world had stopped considering as questions," he said.

Reflecting on the historical burdens carried by past generations, Modi recalled how the singular goal of achieving independence defined an entire era marked by immense sacrifice and penance.

He urged the current generation to define their own legacy by aligning

their career trajectories directly with the nation's developmental goals over the next three decades.

"The basis of every decision of yours should absolutely be what the benefit to the country will be and which national need will be fulfilled," he said.

Detailing the government's aggressive push toward comprehensive self-reliance across economic, technological, and industrial sectors, Modi underscored that youth empowerment is the foundational bedrock of a developed India.

He celebrated the administration's strategic policy decisions to democratise and open traditionally restricted sectors to young innovators.

Referring to the "explosive growth" of the space sector and "rapid domestic advancement in semiconductor manufacturing" in India, the prime minister said, "somewhere a youth is proudly saying with full self-confidence: 'First in my bloodline to make a chip in India'".

Crediting the current generation for powering India's Startup Revolution, he hailed the massive economic momentum generated by unicorns, digital payments, and the FinTech boom, which have provided unprecedented entrepreneurial platforms for millions.

"All these revolutions have given millions of youths of the country an incredible opportunity to do something completely new for the first time," he said.

Mapping out the frontiers of future technological dominance, Modi highlighted critical emerging sectors such as artificial intelligence, data centres, critical minerals, deep-sea exploration, quantum computing, and energy security.

"Many such cutting-edge fields are eagerly waiting for your immense talent, your bold innovation, and your strong leadership," he said.

Detailing initiatives to democratise academic resources, he highlighted the 'One Nation One Subscription' programme, which ensures that prestigious global research journals are accessible even in the smallest cities without extra costs.

INTERNATIONAL

UN emphasises need for accountability if people were harmed in peaceful protests in PoK



WASHINGTON

Voicing concern over the volatile security situation in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, a spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has emphasised the need for accountability for actions taken against people involved in peaceful protest.

The Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) region has been witnessing protests for several months over 12 contentious refugee seats, triggering a crackdown by security forces.

The protests intensified with elections to the so-called Assembly in the region starting at the end of last month amid allegations of widespread rigging.

According to the Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC), a collective of activist groups, more than 40 people were killed during the first phase of polls on July 27.

Besides, it claims that some 400 protesters have been killed since the first week of June. Both claims have been dismissed by the Pakistan

government.

The JAAC has alleged that the establishment manoeuvres the 12 refugee seats to install a prime minister of its choosing to lead the so-called government in PoK.

India maintains that the entire Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh are its integral and inalienable parts.

New Delhi also asserts that Pakistan has been in "illegal and forcible occupation" of parts of these Union Territories.

"The Secretary-General supports the work of his High Commissioner, and we certainly hope that the pleas made by Mr Turk will be listened to," Deputy Spokesman for the Secretary-General Farhan Haq said here on Friday in response to a question by PTI.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk had on July 17 expressed concern about the recent developments in PoK, calling for an impartial and thorough investigation into the deaths of protesters, Pakistan's ban on the JAAC

and arrest of its leaders.

Turk had appealed for calm in PoK amid a wave of unrest ahead of regional elections at the end of the month, a statement issued in Geneva last month had said.

On whether there will be calls for accountability from the authorities on the crackdown on protesters in the PoK, Haq said on Friday, "It's important that all authorities everywhere allow for peaceful protest, and certainly that is the case here.

"If there have been people harmed for engaging in peaceful protest, there needs to be accountability for that," Haq added.

Turk's statement had specifically said that dozens of people, mostly protesters but also law enforcement personnel, were reportedly killed since June ahead of the vote for the Legislative Assembly starting July 27.

The High Commissioner had called for prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into all deaths that have occurred due to

the unrest, both amongst protesters and members of security forces.

The JAAC—a movement behind the protests comprising traders, transporters, students, lawyers, activists and others has been banned under anti-terrorism laws for allegedly threatening public order and security.

There are 53 seats in the so-called PoK legislative assembly, 45 are directly elected, while eight are reserved for women, technocrats and clerics.

Elections for the 45 seats are being held in three phases, with the first phase on July 27 and the second phase on August 2 marred by violent protests.

The Shehbaz Sharif government has dismissed the JAAC claim of over 400 deaths since the first week of June, saying the figure is "overly exaggerated.

"The number of people killed in protests is in two digits. Moreover, security personnel have also lost their lives," PM's adviser Rana Sanaullah said in a TV statement recently.

India on August 4 described the so-called local body elections in PoK as a "complete farce," asserting that such "hollow" exercises cannot hide the ground reality in the region. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) strongly criticised Pakistan's crackdown on protesters in PoK and said the international community should see through the "flimsy veneer" of Islamabad's "hypocritical lecturing" on human rights.

"This so-called local election in PoK is a complete farce. The real happening is that of public protests and wanton killings by Pakistani forces. Such hollow exercises cannot hide reality," MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in New Delhi.

Colombia's new president signals energy policy shift, backs oil and gas



BOGOTA

Colombian President Abelardo de la Esparriella on Friday pledged to revive the country's oil and gas sector, restore state-owned energy company Ecopetrol and strengthen the electricity system, arguing that energy security would be a cornerstone of his administration.

Speaking during his inauguration, de la Esparriella said Colombia would pursue an energy transition — a shift away from oil, gas and coal toward cleaner energy sources such as wind and solar power — but insisted it must not come at the expense of the country's oil and gas industry.

"I believe in the energy transition," he said. "But that transition must be built from strength, not from weakness, from self-sufficiency and not from dependence."

The remarks reinforce a sharp shift from former President Gustavo Petro, who stopped awarding new oil and gas exploration contracts while pushing Colombia toward renewable energy and making protection of the Amazon a centerpiece of his environmental

agenda. Just four months ago, Petro's government hosted an international summit in the Caribbean city of Santa Marta aimed at building support for a global transition away from fossil fuels.

Colombia's President Abelardo de la Esparriella salutes after taking the oath of office in Cali, Colombia, Friday, Aug. 7, 2026.

The commitments echo promises de la Esparriella made throughout his presidential campaign, when he repeatedly vowed to expand oil and gas production and reverse key elements of Petro's energy policy.

Calling energy security "a matter of national sovereignty," de la Esparriella said Colombia could not expect long-term prosperity by leaving its natural resources undeveloped. He said rebuilding Ecopetrol, Colombia's majority state-owned oil company and one of the country's largest sources of government revenue and export earnings, would be "a definitive and absolute priority" after accusing the previous administration of weakening

the company.

The new president also confirmed his government would authorize fracking — a method of extracting oil and gas by injecting water, sand and chemicals underground to crack rock formations — under what he described as "the strictest technical and environmental standards."

He said his administration would also expand oil and gas exploration to rebuild Colombia's declining reserves, guarantee the country's energy security and attract investment back into the sector.

The president warned Colombia's energy system was in a "critical situation," citing declining oil and gas reserves, delayed energy projects and rising electricity demand.

He said the approaching El Nino weather phenomenon, which typically brings prolonged drought and can reduce hydroelectric power generation, meant there was little time to act.

"The El Nino phenomenon won't wait for us. To overcome it, it is imperative to implement urgent solutions," he said.

Rare 8mm Reels Set for International Preservation: Saving the Lost Visual Memory of Pre-Industry Manipur



Dr. Johnson with Foundation Director Paolo Simoni, inspecting a rare 8mm reel of MK Priyabrata Singh

BISWADEEP GUPTA

Long before feature films defined Manipur's cinematic identity, a small 8mm camera was already quietly chronicling the state's socio-cultural life.

Fifteen fragile 8mm celluloid reels—believed to have been captured by Maharaj Kumar Priyabrata Singh, one of the state's earliest independent visual chroniclers, and Kongbrailatpam Ibohah Sharma—are set to undergo international inspection, cataloguing, and archival preservation. The initiative marks a major milestone in safeguarding the early audiovisual heritage of Northeast India.

The project is an international collaboration between the SN Chand Cine Archive & Museum (SNCCAM)—operated by the Manipur State Film Development Society (MSFDS)—and Italy's Home Movies Foundation – National Family Film Archive in Bologna.

Moving Beyond Digitisation: Archival Preservation

Unlike basic digital scans intended purely for viewing, this initiative will apply internationally recognized preservation standards. According to Paolo Simoni, Director of the Home Movies Foundation, the process encompasses:

Condition Assessment: A comprehensive physical and chemical diagnostic evaluation of the film stock.

Specialized Conservation: Interventions to address chemical decay, shrinkage, and brittleness before scanning.

Archival Cataloguing: Metadata documentation conforming to FIAF (International Federation of Film Archives) benchmarks.

Preservation Masters: Creation of high-resolution digital master files while stabilizing the original celluloid elements.

"Film stock is unforgiving. Unlike memory, it does not remain intact merely because it is precious. It shrinks, fades, and chemically deteriorates. Once lost, what it contains disappears forever."

Global Training Yields Local Results

The collaboration stems directly from growing international ties forged by MSFDS. Dr. Johnson Rajkumar, principal of MSFDS and a voluntary film conservationist, represented India as the sole candidate selected for the prestigious FIAF Film Restoration Summer School 2026 and the 40th Il Cinema Ritrovato Festival in Bologna.

His intensive training under experts from the British Film Institute, Library of Congress, and George Eastman Museum laid the groundwork for this international partnership.

Five Years of Archival Breakthroughs in Manipur

Established in April 2021 during the Golden Jubilee of Manipuri Cinema, SNCCAM has systematically built a conservation ecosystem in Imphal with support from the Film Heritage Foundation (FHF), Mumbai.

Key achievements of Manipur's film restoration drive include:

Brojendragee Luhongba: The first feature directed by a Manipuri filmmaker was rescued from severe physical degradation and premiered in a restored 4K format in May 2022.

Ishanou (1990): Directed by Aribam Syam Sharma and written by M.K. Binodini Devi, the restored film was officially selected for the prestigious Cannes Classics section at the 2023 Cannes Film Festival.

Imagi Ningthem: Currently undergoing digitisation and restoration via ongoing MSFDS–FHF collaboration.

National Film Heritage Mission: In partnership with the National Film Archive of India (NFAI), Pune, eight feature films (including Sambal Wangma and Mayophygee Macha) and four key documentaries have been successfully digitized.

Why Home Movies Matter

While celebrated narrative features form the core of film heritage, archival experts emphasize that amateur reels, family recordings, and non-commercial documentaries provide indispensable historical evidence.

The 8mm reels of Priyabrata Singh captured ordinary life, traditional rituals, changing landscapes, and historical figures long before a formal film industry existed in Manipur. Preserving these 8mm reels ensures that a rare, firsthand visual account of 20th-century Manipur remains accessible for generations to come.



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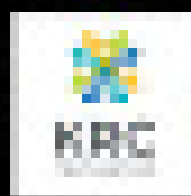


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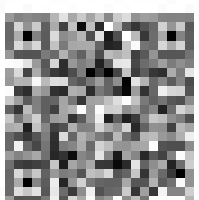


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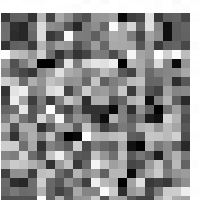


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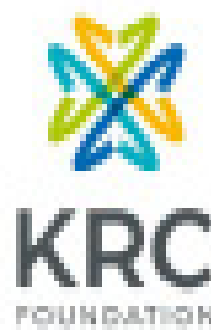
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