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PERSPECTIVE

Strangers can become best friends just as easy as best friends can become strangers.

Manipur govt reviews preparations for Assam Rifles Convention

IMPHAL

The Manipur government reviewed preparations and coordination for the upcoming Assam Rifles Convention at Manipur University during a meeting with senior Assam Rifles officials.

The meeting was held with Inspector General, Assam Rifles (South), Maj Gen Gaurav Sharma, SC, SM, and Commander, 9th Sector Assam Rifles, Brig Pratyush Kumar.

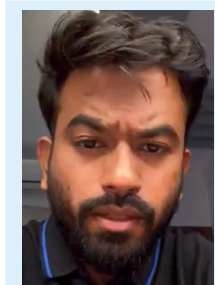
The discussions focused on preparations for the convention and ensuring effective coordination among the stakeholders involved in the event.

The Manipur government also acknowledged the continued support and cooperation extended by the Assam Rifles towards the state.

The upcoming convention at Manipur University is expected to bring together Assam Rifles personnel and other stakeholders for discussions and engagement related to the force's role and activities in the region.



WHO SAID WHAT



Use PM Cares Fund for schools! ~ Abhijeet Dipke, Founding President, Cockroach Janata Party

Dialogue, not confrontation, must resolve Northeast boundary disputes: Rijiju



NEW DELHI

Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju has called for greater unity among the Northeastern states, saying boundary and community disputes must be resolved through dialogue and mutual understanding rather than confrontation.

In an interview in New Delhi, Rijiju said the Northeast, comprising eight states including Sikkim, had the potential to emerge as a prosperous, peaceful and developed region if differences between states, communities and ethnic groups were addressed constructively.

"The entire Northeastern region, including Sikkim, we are eight states. We are very emotional people. We want to be a region which is prosperous, developed and where people are happy," he said. Rijiju, who represents Arunachal Pradesh, said the region had suffered from inadequate attention from the Centre during previous governments, but claimed that the situation had changed since 2014 with the Narendra Modi government placing the Northeast higher

on its development agenda.

"Prime Minister Modi has made the Northeast a priority area," he said.

At the same time, Rijiju expressed concern over continuing disputes between Northeastern states, particularly those involving Assam and Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, and Nagaland and Manipur.

He said local land and boundary disputes should not be allowed to develop into larger State-versus-State confrontations. "We have to understand that we all are part of the same region and same country," Rijiju said. He noted that disputes over land and resources were not unique to the Northeast and could arise between families, villages and communities. The challenge, he said, was to prevent such differences from escalating into violence.

"Even there are problems within families, problems within the same states. There are differences between village to village also. So, it's not that land disputes are not there. It is everywhere. Then to make it state versus state, that is unfortunate," he said.

Referring to recent tensions along the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh boundary, Rijiju said elected representatives from both states had appealed to people to prevent local differences from turning violent.

He said such disputes could be re-

solved amicably if all sides were willing to engage in dialogue and find common ground.

"There may be differences in perception but there has to be some solution. One point of view of one group may be different from the other group or the other state. In that case, we have to come to the middle ground," he said.

Rijiju also cautioned against the role of social media and sections of the local media in amplifying sensitive disputes. According to him, narratives portraying one state or community as being "anti" another can quickly inflame public sentiment, particularly when the complexities of the underlying dispute are not adequately explained.

He said young people could be particularly vulnerable to such narratives and warned that exaggerated or one-sided portrayals could encourage them to resort to violence. Rijiju described Assam and Arunachal Pradesh as sharing deep historical and social links and said their relationship should not be defined solely by boundary disagreements.

He recalled that Arunachal Pradesh was administered as part of Assam before becoming a separate Union Territory in 1972 and said Assamese people had played an important role in the early development of the frontier region.

"Arunachal Pradesh in the initial stage was supported and built by the

Assamese people. Our first language was also Assamese. When I was born, I was born as an Assamese," he said.

Rijiju credited Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu with helping maintain peace during periods of tension along the inter-state boundary.

He also praised student organisations and civil society groups in both states for playing a role in preventing disputes from escalating into clashes. On China's repeated claims over Arunachal Pradesh and its efforts to assign Chinese names to places and geographical features in the state, Rijiju said such moves would have no bearing on India's position.

He described the recent standardisation of the names of 27 places and geographical features in Arunachal Pradesh on official maps as essentially a correction of nomenclature. Rijiju said some local names had historically been recorded incorrectly because officials unfamiliar with local languages and pronunciations had documented them inaccurately.

"Chinese naming of Arunachal Pradesh does not make any kind of difference to us. We have nothing to do with China," he said. He claimed that China's assertions over Arunachal Pradesh had intensified after the 1980s, initially focusing on

Tawang before expanding to the entire state.

Rijiju said the people of Arunachal Pradesh were clear about their historical and cultural identity and had no connection with China.

"Arunachal people are very clear. There is nothing to do with China with regards to our historical background or cultural identity. We have no connection with China," he said.

Rijiju also launched a political attack on the Congress, describing the party as "leaderless and directionless".

He alleged that the Congress had moved away from the political centre and was increasingly adopting what he described as "extreme leftist" positions while also pursuing what he termed Muslim appeasement.

"Congress is today turning into two distinct characters. On the one side, Congress is becoming Muslim League and on the other side, Congress is becoming a Maoist party - extreme left," he alleged.

Rijiju also defended police action during a recent student protest, denying that police had used force against a peaceful demonstration.

He said students had been permitted to protest for more than 30 days but were stopped when they attempted to march towards Parliament.

"There was no lathi-charge on the peaceful protest. Only when they tried

to march towards Parliament, they were stopped," he said, adding that the police action was necessary to maintain law and order.

The minister also defended Prime Minister Narendra Modi's reference to "dimagix naxals" in his Independence Day address from the Red Fort.

Rijiju said armed Left Wing Extremism had been substantially weakened, but claimed that the ideology associated with it continued to influence sections of intellectuals in urban areas.

"Left Wing Extremism, those who took up arms, are almost wiped out. But the same thinking is still there in the cities amongst the intellectuals," he said.

Rijiju described the ideological influence as a national security concern and recalled that former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had earlier described Naxalism as one of the biggest threats to India's internal security.

The Union minister's remarks come amid continuing efforts by Northeastern states to manage long-standing boundary disputes and prevent local disagreements from triggering wider tensions.

Rijiju said sustained dialogue, responsible public discourse and cooperation among state governments and communities would be essential to ensuring peace and unlocking the region's broader development potential.

KRC TIMES

STAY ENRICHED

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Manipur govt reshuffles nine IAS officers

IMPHAL

The Manipur government has reshuffled nine IAS officers, with the transfers and new postings taking immediate effect, according to orders issued by the Chief Secretary.

The changes, made in the public interest, will remain in force until further orders. Mohan Lal Meena, Secretary of the Commission of Inquiry into the Manipur Violence and Manipur Lok Ayukta, has been given additional charge as Commissioner (Works).

N Ashok Kumar, who was serving as Commissioner-cum-Secretary for Home, Relief and Disaster Management and Works, Special Secretary for Vigilance and Anti-Corruption and Resident Commissioner at Manipur Bhawan in New Delhi, has been posted as Commissioner-cum-Secretary for Finance and Home. He will continue as Resident Commissioner and will also take charge as Commissioner to the Chief Minister.

Hungyo Worshang, Secretary for



Tourism and Commissioner (Excise), has been posted as Secretary for Public Health Engineering while retaining the Excise portfolio.

Neeta Arambam, Secretary of the Manipur Public Service Commission, has

been appointed Secretary for Information and Public Relations and Director (Medical Education). W Malemnganba Chenglei, Secretary for Cooperation and Special Secretary for Finance, has been posted as Secretary for Water Resources while retaining his charge as Special Secretary (Finance). Somorjit Salam, who was Secretary for Water Resources and Information Technology and Director (Medical Education), has been posted as Secretary for Information Technology and Relief and Disaster Management.

Rangitabali Walkhom, Secretary of the Manipur Staff Selection Commission and Special Secretary for Education (School), has been posted as Secretary for Tourism and Cooperation.

L Bilgram, Director (Tourism) and Special Secretary (DP), will now serve as Special Secretary (DP).

Khumanthem Diana, Director (Transport) and Additional Secretary for Veterinary and Animal Husbandry, will continue as Director (Transport) and take additional charge as Director (Tourism).

Manipur MLAs to visit Delhi, press Centre for early NRC update

IMPHAL

A delegation of Manipur legislators will visit New Delhi to seek the Centre's intervention and press for an early update of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in the state, government spokesperson Sapam Ranjan Singh said on Tuesday. Addressing a press conference at the DIPR conference hall, Ranjan Singh said the NRC issue should be pursued collectively, irrespective of political affiliations, community differences or other considerations, as it concerns the future of Manipur and its people. "The government remains serious about the issues concerning the NRC and Census and stands with the people of Manipur in addressing their concerns," he said. Ranjan Singh, who represents the Konhoijam Assembly constituency, said the Manipur Legislative Assembly had passed a resolution on August 5, 2022, urging the Centre to undertake an NRC exercise in the state.

The Assembly subsequently reaffirmed its position through another resolution on March 1, 2024, he said.

The government spokesperson said the NRC issue has remained a long-standing concern for the state government and that efforts have been made continuously through correspondence with the Union Ministry of Home

Affairs. He said the proposed visit to Delhi would provide an opportunity for legislators to seek guidance from central leaders and urge them to take up the NRC update at the earliest. On the ongoing protests and shutdown, Ranjan Singh acknowledged that peaceful protest was a democratic right but appealed to protesters to express their grievances peacefully without resorting to violence or causing inconvenience to the public. Former education minister and government spokesperson Th Radheshyam, who represents Heirok, reiterated the government's position that an NRC update should be undertaken in Manipur. He cited concerns over demographic changes, alleged demographic imbalance and illegal migration as reasons for seeking the exercise. The issue has gained renewed prominence amid protests against the ongoing Census process, with civil society groups and indigenous organisations demanding that the NRC be updated before the Census exercise proceeds in the state.

MLAs Th Shyamkumar (Andro), P Brojen (Wanging-Tentha), T Robindro (Thanga), S Premchandra (Kumbi), Sapam Kunjakeshwar Singh (Patsoi), Thongam Shanti (Moirang) and Ashab Uddin (Jiribam) were also present at the press conference.

Manipur protest over Census training turns violent, woman cop and protester injured



IMPHAL

A protest by women against Census training at the Imphal East District Commissioner's office turned violent on Tuesday amid heavy rain, leaving a woman police personnel and a protester injured, officials said.

The protesters marched towards the Imphal East DC office, seeking to disrupt the Census training being conducted on the premises. Despite the heavy downpour, they remained outside the district administration complex and raised slogans including "No NRC, No Census" and "No IDP Settlement, No Census".

The situation escalated when some protesters allegedly attempted to enter the DC complex. Security personnel deployed to control the situation used smoke or riot grenades to disperse the protesters, following which clashes broke out.

A woman police personnel and a protester sustained injuries during the confrontation.

One of the protesters told reporters that the Campaign for Just and Fair Delimitation had called a 48-hour general strike from midnight on August 18, demanding updation

of the National Register of Citizens (NRC). She questioned the decision to conduct Census training at the Imphal East DC office during the strike, calling it unfortunate.

According to the protester, government employees involved in the Census exercise and senior authorities were also aware of the concerns being raised by the protesters.

The protesters continued their agitation despite the heavy rain, saying the issue was linked to the future of Manipur. They also raised concerns over alleged illegal immigration and urged the government to address what they described as its potential long-term impact on the state. The demonstration continued amid adverse weather conditions, with protesters questioning the government's response to their demands and maintaining that they would not have been forced to take to the streets in heavy rain and heat if their concerns had been adequately addressed.

The authorities have yet to issue a detailed statement on the incident or the injuries reported during the confrontation.



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A FUTURE FULL OF YOUTHFUL POSSIBILITIES

India's August is a month when the weight of history becomes almost unavoidable. Independence Day invites reflection on the nation's past, the freedom movement and the making of the Republic. Yet history is never made only by monumental events. It is also shaped by ordinary experiences, conversations, anxieties and aspirations. The personal and the public are not separate worlds; they constantly intersect.

A few years ago, I often spent time in cafés frequented by journalists. Those conversations were an education in journalism as much as in public life. Reportage, I was told, is often presented as a linear account of events, even though events themselves are rarely linear. They unfold across several layers of time, space and experience. What appears to be a single incident is often the visible surface of a much deeper social process.

That observation has stayed with me while watching recent youth protests across the country. Protest is frequently reduced to a simple confrontation between protesters and the state, between disorder and governance. But such a reading misses the complexity beneath the surface. A protest may begin with one demand and gradually become an expression of a much wider anxiety about dignity, opportunity, justice and the future.

Language matters here. Governments often attempt to organise public realities through official vocabulary. Words such as "history", "nation", "youth" and "development" can acquire meanings shaped by political power. History can be reduced to a single authorised narrative, while the plurality of the national movement disappears. Similarly, the idea of the nation can be presented as homogeneous when the Indian experience has always been marked by diversity, disagreement and competing visions.

The same danger now surrounds the words "youth" and "future".

Recent political and social developments offer important clues. The emergence of actor-turned-politician Vijay in Tamil Nadu politics, for instance, cannot be understood merely through conventional electoral arithmetic. His appeal appears to reflect something larger: the dreams and aspirations of a generation that does not necessarily identify with traditional party structures.

Youth is not simply a political cadre. It is a network of friendships, peer groups, digital communities and informal associations. It is fluid rather than hierarchical. Vijay's political persona, including the confidence and theatricality associated with his films and public performances, speaks to this culture of individuality and collective energy. The metaphor of dance is useful here. Dance is at once individual and social. It gives the individual a distinctive presence while placing that individual within a shared choreography. In a similar way, contemporary youth politics seeks both individuality and belonging. It resists the rigid structures of conventional political organisation while searching for a larger community of shared aspirations. This is why youth protest should not automatically be interpreted as an act of negation. To say "no" is often only the beginning. Beneath rejection lies a demand for an alternative. The protester is not necessarily rejecting society; he or she may be asking what kind of society is possible.

The protests associated with Sonam Wangchuk and the broader student mobilisation around examinations and educational concerns reveal another dimension of this phenomenon. At one level, these protests were about the integrity of competitive examinations and allegations of irregularities. But their significance went beyond the immediate issue.

Students came together not only out of anger but also out of curiosity and uncertainty. Protest became a space for conversation. People who had never met encountered one another, exchanged experiences and attempted to understand each other's concerns. The language of dialogue was often more prominent than the language of confrontation.

This conviviality of protest deserves greater attention.

Youth movements are frequently described through statistics—numbers of participants, arrests, injuries, examinations cancelled, vacancies advertised or jobs created. Such indicators are useful, but they cannot capture the social imagination that makes a movement possible. Protest is also a form of communication. It creates temporary public spaces in which strangers become interlocutors. The concerns surrounding education also reveal how apparently separate anxieties are connected. Students worry about examination integrity. Parents worry about employment. Young people worry about years of preparation being wasted. Families worry about economic security. What begins as a question about an examination can therefore become a much larger conversation about the social contract. The protests by students and job aspirants in Jharkhand offer another important lesson. Repeated cancellation or disruption of recruitment examinations does more than inconvenience candidates. It damages faith in the rules of the game. There is a revealing analogy between an examination and an election. Both depend upon rules, procedures and trust. In an examination, candidates accept the result because they believe that everyone has competed under the same conditions. In an election, citizens accept the outcome because they believe that the rules have been fairly applied. When that integrity is compromised, institutions lose legitimacy. Committees and inquiries may be necessary, but they cannot by themselves restore public trust. Institutions require credibility, and credibility is built through transparent procedures and accountability. There is, however, another recurring problem. Governments often interpret protest primarily through the prism of law and order. Once a gathering becomes disruptive, the administrative response tends to become predictable: restrictions, barricades, arrests or, in extreme cases, force. Such responses may restore immediate order, but they do not necessarily address the anxiety that produced the protest.

The state also has a tendency to appropriate the very idea of youth. Political speeches frequently describe young people as the nation's "future", its "demographic dividend" or its pool of potential citizens. These descriptions are not necessarily wrong. But they can become sterile when youth is reduced to a collection of indicators—employment rates, enrolment figures, skill levels, migration statistics and voting patterns. The young person then disappears behind the questionnaire. W.H. Auden's warning against reducing human experience to social-science categories remains relevant. A society cannot understand its youth merely by counting them, classifying them and recording their grievances. The vitality of youth lies precisely in its uncertainty, experimentation and refusal to accept predetermined answers.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Be there for others, but never leave yourself behind.

- Dodinsky

THE NEXT PHASE OF REFORMS TO STRENGTHEN MSMEs

Empowering Enterprises. Enabling Growth. Building Bharat.



MS. SHOBHA KARANDLAJE

1. The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) Development Amendment Bill, 2026, recently passed by both Houses of Parliament, is a very significant reform and an important step in strengthening the MSME ecosystem. MSMEs make a significant contribution to the development of the nation. Over the past few years, the MSME sector has established new dimensions of growth and development. Today, more than 9 crore MSMEs are registered on the 'Udyam Registration Portal', providing employment to 40 crore people. MSMEs contribute 31% to our economy and 50% to exports. The MSME sector has a major role to play in realising the vision of 'Viksit Bharat' envisioned by Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, particularly by contributing to economic growth, employment and exports. MSMEs are the driving force of India's development and are central to the country's economic progress. The remarkable progress made by the MSME sector in recent years is clearly reflected in the steady rise in the number of enterprises registered on 'Udyam', which has increased from 1 crore 65 lakh on April 1, 2023, to more than 9 crore, marking a substantial expansion in the formal registration of MSMEs.

2. In 2020, the classification of micro, small and medium enterprises was made more comprehensive and inclusive by eliminating the distinction between the manufacturing and services sectors. Under this framework, a composite criterion based on both turnover and investment was developed. Subsequently, in 2025, the investment limits for micro, small and medium enterprises were increased two-and-a-half times to ₹2.5 crore, ₹25 crore and ₹125 crore, respectively, while the turnover limits were doubled to ₹10 crore, ₹100 crore and ₹500 crore, respectively. These changes have encouraged these enterprises to increase capital investment, expand their businesses, strengthen their operations and adopt technology, thereby supporting their growth.

3. Availability of finance is the most important component of the growth of the MSME sector. The Ministry has continuously worked to increase the availability of bank credit to the MSME sector and to strengthen the flow of institutional finance, and significant and encouraging results are now visible. Outstanding credit extended to MSMEs, which stood at ₹10 lakh crore in 2014-15, has now increased to more than ₹38 lakh 35 thousand crore. The Credit Guarantee Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE) provides guarantees on loans extended to micro and small enterprises. Through this mechanism, credit guarantees provided to micro and small enterprises amounted to ₹3 lakh 14 thousand crore between 2000 and 2022, which increased to more than ₹10 lakh 43 thousand crore during the last four years, from 2022-23 to 2025-26, demonstrating the substantial expansion of credit support available to these enterprises. Under the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP), margin money subsidy amounting to ₹24,903 crore has been provided to approximately 8 lakh 34 thousand micro enterprises from financial year 2014-15 till now, creating estimated employment opportunities for 75 lakh people and providing further support to employment generation at the grassroots level.

4. Under the MSME Ministry's Public Procurement Policy for Micro and Small Enterprises, 2012, it is mandatory for Central Ministries/Departments and Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) to procure 25% annually from micro and small enterprises. This includes 3% procurement from micro and small enterprises

owned by women entrepreneurs and 4% from those owned by SC/ST entrepreneurs, thereby ensuring dedicated opportunities for these categories within public procurement. Public procurement from micro and small enterprises has increased consistently over the years, reflecting their growing participation in government procurement. The value of public procurement from micro and small enterprises, which stood at ₹40,717 crore in financial year 2020-21, increased substantially to ₹1,15,801 crore in financial year 2025-26, which is more than 49% against the 25% procurement target set for CPSEs. Of this, procurement worth ₹3,984 crore was made from enterprises owned by SC/ST entrepreneurs, while procurement worth ₹9,059 crore was made from enterprises owned by women entrepreneurs.

5. To ensure timely payments to MSMEs, the Ministry has undertaken several meaningful initiatives to address this issue, one of which is TReDS (Trade Receivables Discounting System). It is a digital platform regulated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), launched in 2017 with the objective of addressing the liquidity challenges and working capital requirements of MSMEs in India. Through the TReDS platform, the MSME sector has received timely payments through invoice discounting worth ₹8,71,000 crore as of March 2026. The number of MSMEs connected to the TReDS platform, indicating wider participation in the mechanism, increased from 34,430 in April 2022 to more than 2,55,000 by March 2026. At the same time, the value of invoice discounting by MSMEs increased

from ₹40,000 crore in 2021-22 to more than ₹3,47,000 crore in the financial year 2025-26. The growing trend of invoice discounting on TReDS reflects the Government of India's commitment to timely payments to MSMEs and to addressing their liquidity and working capital needs.

6. In the same direction, 161 Micro and Small Enterprises Facilitation Councils (MSEFCs) have been established across the country for the settlement of delayed payments and related disputes. The amendment introduces provisions to enable states to determine the composition of MSEFCs, so that such councils can be constituted as required and the institutional mechanism for resolving disputes can be strengthened. Adequate mechanisms for dispute resolution have also been provided through mutual agreement among the concerned parties. The Amendment Bill also enables and strengthens Online Dispute Resolution (ODR), so that disputes between the concerned parties can be resolved in a timely and cost-effective manner.

7. The Ministry of MSME is fully committed to promoting the development of women entrepreneurs. Several schemes of the Ministry contain special provisions for women. Today, more than 39% of MSMEs on the Udyam Portal are owned by women, which means that nearly 3.38 crore MSMEs are under women's ownership, and their number continues to grow steadily, reflecting the increasing participation of women in entrepreneurship. Under the Credit Guarantee Scheme, guarantee coverage of up to 90% is available for women, while a concession of up to 10% is pro-

THE NEXT PHASE OF REFORMS TO STRENGTHEN MSMEs

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vided in the annual guarantee fee. Under the Procurement and Marketing Support Scheme, 100% subsidy is provided for the participation of women entrepreneurs in trade fairs, compared with 80% for other entrepreneurs. Under PMEGP, there is a provision for providing a subsidy of 35% to women in rural areas and 25% to women in urban areas.

The development of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities is a priority for the Ministry. Today, more than 1.24 crore MSMEs on Udyam are owned by entrepreneurs belonging to the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities. The National SC-ST Hub Scheme is a

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Coaching centres should help students succeed, not become centres of pressure.

#AssamCabinet has approved legal safeguards to ensure they operate with students' well being at the forefront.
~ Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM, Assam



Central Sector Scheme of the Ministry of MSME, which was launched by the Hon'ble Prime Minister in 2016. The objective of this scheme is to enhance the capabilities of SC/ST entrepreneurs and promote an 'entrepreneurship culture' among them and enable greater participation of SC/ST entrepreneurs in the MSME sector.

8. To further strengthen these continuous initiatives and efforts of the Ministry, the MSME Development Amendment Bill, 2026, has been passed. Its objective is to address the existing challenges faced by the MSME sector, improve the administrative framework, promote ease of doing business and encourage compliance with regulations while reducing unnecessary difficulties for enterprises. Its main components are:

i. Provision for notifying a national digital platform for free and voluntary registration of micro, small and medium enterprises. It also gives statutory recognition to the classification of MSMEs based on turnover and investment.

ii. Addressing liquidity-related problems faced by MSMEs. It has been made mandatory for all Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) to settle invoices for purchases from MSMEs through TReDS. State governments have also been empowered to adopt similar provisions for their public sector undertakings.

iii. Enabling state governments to rationalise the composition of Micro and Small Enterprises Facilitation Councils (MSEFCs) and facilitate the establishment of additional MSEFCs.

iv. Prescribing a time limit for the speedy resolution of disputes related to delayed payments to micro and small enterprises.

v. Providing for the recovery of settlements arrived at through mediation or arbitral awards as arrears of land revenue.

vi. Empowering courts to order payment of at least 50% of the amount awarded to micro and small enterprise suppliers if an application seeking to set aside a decree, award or order has remained pending for more than six months.

vii. Decriminalising certain violations of provisions and replacing conviction-based penalties with graded penalties, including a warning for a first-time violation. The amendment has been made after extensive consultations with stakeholders and careful examination of the issues concerned. A strong MSME sector is essential for achieving inclusive, sustainable and employment-oriented economic growth. These amendments are in line with the Government's commitment to the vision of 'Viksit Bharat 2047' and its objective of building a stronger, more inclusive and sustainable economy. They will promote the formalisation of enterprises, pave the way for their expansion and enable them to emerge as 'champions' of growth.

(The author is the Minister of State in the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and the Ministry of Labour and Employment.)

Assam CM defends Kaziranga hotel projects, says critics misread eco-sensitive zone rules



GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday defended the proposed five-star hotel projects in and around Kaziranga National Park, accusing opponents of the projects of practising “double-standard politics” and misrepresenting the provisions governing Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs).

Sarma said the controversy over tourism infrastructure around Kaziranga should be viewed through the framework of existing environmental regulations rather than political allegations. Reacting to protests against the proposed hotel projects, the chief minister claimed that some of those leading the opposition to luxury hotels in Kaziranga themselves stay in such properties when they visit the area. “Those opposing five-star hotels in Kaziranga stay in them themselves,” Sarma said, questioning the consistency of the campaign against tourism infrastructure in the region. He said the presence of an ESZ around a protected area does not mean that all development is prohibited. According to him, the regulations primarily restrict activities that can cause serious environmental damage, including

mining, chemical industries and highly polluting industries, while other activities may be permitted subject to applicable rules and safeguards. Sarma said it was therefore necessary to examine the specific nature of a proposed project instead of treating every form of development as incompatible with conservation. The chief minister also cited Jim Corbett and Gir as examples of wildlife destinations where tourism infrastructure has developed around protected areas. “Kaziranga is a major tourism destination. We have to understand the provisions of the Eco-Sensitive Zone and not create controversy without reading them,” he said. Sarma accused the opposition of deliberately fuelling apprehensions over the hotel projects and suggested that the issue was being used for political

purposes. He argued that tourism has an important role to play in generating employment and supporting the local economy around Kaziranga, while stressing that development must remain within the environmental framework applicable to the area. Taking a political swipe at the Congress, Sarma alleged that the opposition had failed to protect Kaziranga adequately during its tenure and referred to issues of rhino poaching and encroachment. He said his government had taken several steps to strengthen wildlife protection and claimed that its measures had helped curb rhino poaching in the state. The chief minister also referred to the development of an animal corridor connecting the Kaziranga landscape

towards Nagaon, saying such measures were part of the government’s broader approach to balancing conservation with infrastructure and tourism development. Sarma further claimed that the opposition’s campaign against the hotel projects could ultimately strengthen the ruling party politically, saying that people in the Kaziranga area were not supporting the protests in the manner claimed by his critics. “If I had actually done something wrong, the people of Kohora would have come out against me,” he said. Referring to recent protests in the area, Sarma claimed that effigies of opposition leaders, rather than his own, were being burnt, which he said demonstrated the public mood in the region. The chief minister maintained that the government was not opposed to

environmental safeguards and that development proposals would have to comply with the relevant laws and regulations. The controversy over the proposed hotel projects has nevertheless brought renewed attention to the longstanding challenge of balancing tourism promotion with ecological protection around Kaziranga, one of Assam’s most important wildlife and tourism destinations. Sarma said the debate should focus on the actual provisions of environmental regulations and the safeguards attached to individual projects rather than being driven by political accusations. He maintained that conservation and responsible tourism could go hand in hand if development was undertaken within the prescribed legal and environmental framework.

Meghalaya built over 3,200 km of roads in eight years: CM Conrad Sangma

SHILLONG

Meghalaya has constructed more than 3,200 km of roads across the state over the past eight years, averaging nearly one kilometre a day, Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma said on Monday. Sangma made the statement while laying the foundation stone for the Rs 140-crore Wei-loi-Mawkyrwat-Rangthong road upgrade project in South West Khasi Hills. He described the pace of road construction as an unprecedented push to improve connectivity across the state. The chief minister said development projects worth more than Rs 850 crore had been implemented in South West Khasi Hills since 2018, with the cumulative financial commitment now approaching Rs 990 crore. He said the government was giving greater attention to remote and relatively underdeveloped districts, including South West Khasi Hills, South Garo Hills and East Jaintia Hills, to bridge infrastructure gaps and promote balanced development. “No area, no district should be left behind. Development must begin from the most remote corners and reach every village,” Sangma said.

He said investment in road infrastructure was not limited to construction projects but helped connect villages with economic centres, reduce travel time and transportation costs and improve access to essential services. The chief minister said the state government had increased its capital outlay for the current fiscal by 6 per cent over the revised estimates for 2025-26. Nearly Rs 2,000 crore has been earmarked for road development, while another Rs 500 crore has been allocated for road maintenance, he said. Sangma said improved connectivity would create new opportunities in tourism, agriculture, trade and education.

Assam clears Hydrocarbon Policy 2026 to spur oil and gas exploration in untapped areas

GUWAHATI

The Assam Cabinet has approved the Assam Hydrocarbon Exploration, Production and Upstream Ecosystem Development Policy, 2026, aimed at encouraging oil and natural gas exploration in untapped and high-risk areas of the state, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Tuesday. The policy seeks to address the lack of major new hydrocarbon discoveries in Assam in recent years and encourage companies to venture beyond established oil-producing areas, where exploration activity has largely remained concentrated. Sarma said companies have generally been reluctant to undertake exploration in new areas because of the substantial financial risks involved, particularly the possibility of drilling without finding commercially viable reserves. “The primary reason is the high degree of uncertainty involved in exploration. If a company drills in a new area and does not discover oil or gas, it can suffer substantial

financial losses,” the chief minister said. He said several areas, particularly in Upper Assam, are believed to have significant hydrocarbon potential but have remained relatively underexplored because of the risks associated with exploratory drilling. The new policy is intended to reduce some of those risks and create a more favourable environment for companies willing to undertake exploration in areas where commercial hydrocarbon reserves have not yet been established. Sarma expressed hope that the policy would help Assam discover new oil and natural gas reserves and prevent a decline in the state’s hydrocarbon production over the coming decade. Assam currently produces around four million metric tonnes of crude oil annually, according to the chief minister. He said that without fresh discoveries, sustaining and increasing production would become increasingly difficult, raising the possibility of a decline in output in the coming years.

Shortage of super-speciality doctors, reluctance to join govt facilities a challenge: Health Minister

GUWAHATI,

Assam Health Minister Ashok Singhal on Tuesday attributed the shortage of super-speciality doctors in the state to a limited pool of specialists and reluctance among some doctors to join government healthcare facilities. Speaking to reporters after the “Swasthya Chintan Shivir 2026”, a brainstorming session on public healthcare, medical education and research, Singhal said the government had funds to fill specialist vacancies but was facing difficulty in finding doctors willing to work in government establishments. “Often we come across complaints that there are no cardiology or neurology specialists in districts. It’s not that the government doesn’t have money to employ them, but first we have to find such super-speciality doctors. We don’t have many to fill these vacancies. The ones there are, they don’t want to take up work in government establishments,” he said. Singhal said doctors in the



health sector were not being burdened with additional responsibilities that government employees in other departments may be assigned, including Census-related duties. “We have invested all the available doctors into our medical sector and not a single doctor is being given any additional responsibility, be it census exercises or others. In the medical and health department, there are always vacant posts,” he said. The minister, however, expressed optimism that the situation

would improve with the expansion of medical education in Assam. He said eight medical colleges had been established in the state over the past decade and another medical college was coming up in Bongaigaon. “So, we will soon see a welcome change,” Singhal said. The minister had earlier acknowledged the shortage of specialist doctors in Assam’s public healthcare system during a visit to Mangaldai Civil Hospital in June. At the time, he attributed the shortage partly to the limited num-

ber of postgraduate seats in the state’s medical colleges and said government efforts to recruit specialist doctors from outside Assam had not yielded the desired results. He had, however, ruled out any shortage of doctors with general MBBS degrees. Singhal also highlighted the scale of public healthcare utilisation in Assam, saying government medical facilities collectively receive around 4.5 crore outpatients. The figure, he said, reflected the trust people place in the state’s public healthcare institutions and services. The comments came during the “Swasthya Chintan Shivir 2026” at Khanapara, which brought together stakeholders to discuss challenges facing public healthcare, medical education and research in Assam. The objective of the brainstorming session was to translate discussions into decisions and measurable outcomes to improve efficient and patient-centric healthcare delivery, Singhal said in a social media post.

Assam orders Bangladeshi national’s expulsion within 24 hours after jail term

GUWAHATI

Authorities in Assam’s South Salmara-Mankachar district have ordered the expulsion of a convicted Bangladeshi national within 24 hours, citing border security and immigration concerns, officials said. The expulsion order was issued on August 14 by the district magistrate under Section 2(b) of the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950. According to the order, Mohammad Masood alias Mister, around 24, a resident of Ratanpur village under Rowmari police station in Bangladesh’s Kurigram district, was apprehended by BSF personnel near the Jordanga Border Outpost on January 13 for allegedly entering India illegally. He was subsequently handed over to Mankachar Police Station.

Police registered Mankachar Police Station Case No. 07/2026 against Masood under Section 324(3) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Section 21 of the Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025, and Section 3(1) of the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, 1984. The Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate, South Salmara-Mankachar, convicted Masood on July 21 and sentenced him to one month, seven months and three months of simple imprisonment under the respective provisions. The sentences were ordered to run concurrently, with the period already spent in detention set off against the sentence. Masood completed his sentence on August 12 and was subsequently shifted from District Jail, Dhubri, to the Matia Holding Centre in Goalpara for further deportation or repatriation proceedings.

The Senior Superintendent of Police (B), South Salmara-Mankachar, had sought an expulsion order from the district magistrate to facilitate his removal from the state. The district magistrate observed that the offences involved unauthorised entry into India and alleged damage to international border fencing, describing the matter as having a direct bearing on border security and immigration law enforcement. The order said Masood’s continued presence in Assam was detrimental to public interest and the internal security of the state. Masood has been directed to leave Assam within 24 hours of receiving the order and proceed through the South Salmara-Mankachar-Dhubri route for lawful deportation or repatriation to Bangladesh through the competent authorities.

Failure to comply with the order would invite action under the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950, and other applicable laws, it said. The authorities have also been directed to complete several follow-up measures. The Senior Superintendent of Police (B), South Salmara-Mankachar, has been asked to record Masood’s biometric and demographic details on the Foreigner Identification Portal and ensure his removal. The SSP (B), Goalpara, has been directed to take necessary steps for his deportation or repatriation. The order also directs the concerned authorities to verify and take appropriate action regarding any Aadhaar card, electoral roll entry or ration card held by Masood, as well as any movable or immovable property allegedly held by him.

Gujarat CID arrests Assam man over alleged cyber fraud network involving Rs 1,071 crore



GUWAHATI

The Gujarat CID has arrested a 25-year-old man from Assam who allegedly masterminded a cyber-crime network linked to 1,090 cases involving transactions worth around Rs 1,071.5 crore across India, officials said on Tuesday. The accused, identified as Rafiqul Alam, was arrested by the CID’s cyber cell in Barpeta following a technical investigation into an alleged international cyber-crime network. Investigators alleged that Alam played a key role in routing proceeds from cyber fraud, including so-called “digital arrest” scams, through a network of bank accounts.

The funds were allegedly split into smaller transactions to evade financial surveillance before being converted into cryptocurrency and transferred to China, officials said. According to the Gandhinagar-based Cyber Centre of Excellence (CCE), the investigation traced suspected cybercrime proceeds through 1,754 bank accounts across the country. Police, however, separately put the number of accounts identified during the probe at 1,758. Investigators also alleged that Alam maintained contact with China-based cybercriminals through messaging platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram. Financial information and details related to the alleged cybercrime operations were reportedly exchanged through these channels. The CCE said investigators recovered details of 23 cryptocurrency wallets from Alam’s mobile phones. Transactions totalling around Rs 16 crore were allegedly carried out through these wallets. The arrest followed a technical investigation into the movement of funds linked to cyber fraud cases registered in different parts of the country. The CID is continuing its probe to trace the wider network, identify other individuals allegedly involved and establish the full extent of the financial transactions, officials said.

SILCHAR

Assam Government’s Minister for Food, Public Distribution & Consumer Affairs, Housing & Urban Affairs and Cooperation, Kaushik Rai, chaired a detailed review meeting at the office of the District Commissioner, Cachar on Monday to assess the progress of key road infrastructure projects in the district. The review meeting focused on three important connectivity projects the Silchar elevated corridor from Rangirkhari to Trunk Road, the road connecting Birbal Bazar with Silchar Medical College and Hospital, and the Madhuraghat (Gandhi Ghat) bridge connecting Malugram with Dudhpatil. The meeting was attended by Rajya Sabha Members Kanad Purkayastha and Sushmita Dev, Silchar MLA Dr. Rajdeep Roy and Udharbond MLA Rajdeep Goala, Cachar District Commissioner Rahul Kumar Gupta, IAS, Senior Superintendent of Police, Cachar, Partha Pratim Das, IPS, and Commissioner, Silchar Municipal Corporation, Ankur Das, IAS. Senior officials of NHIDCL, Public Works Department, Revenue Department and other concerned departments also participated in the review. During the meeting, the Minister took a detailed account of the present status of the three projects and discussed issues requiring intervention by different departments. Particular attention was given to pending land acquisition matters associated with the Birbal Bazar to Silchar Medical College



road. Minister Kaushik Rai directed the departments concerned to maintain close coordination and complete the pending formalities at the earliest so that the projects can progress without avoidable administrative delays. He also stressed the need for regular follow-up between the executing agencies, district administration and Revenue Department on matters relating to land and other pending requirements. Speaking after the meeting, Minister Kaushik Rai said that the review was held to take stock of the progress of important road projects and to discuss the issues that need to be resolved for their smooth implementation. “Today, I held a review meeting at the Cachar District Commissioner’s office with NHIDCL, the Public Works Department and the Revenue Department regarding the progress of important roads in the district,” Minister Rai said. He said the meeting covered the Sil-

char elevated corridor from Rangirkhari to Trunk Road, the road from Birbal Bazar to Silchar Medical College and the Madhuraghat bridge connecting Malugram and Dudhpatil. “Detailed discussions were held on the necessary issues for the speedy and smooth implementation of these development projects in the district,” the Minister added. Minister Kaushik Rai also instructed the concerned officials to ensure that matters requiring inter departmental coordination are taken up promptly and that pending formalities are completed without unnecessary delay. Notably the Silchar elevated corridor is expected to provide an important alternative route through the city’s congested areas, while the Birbal Bazar to Silchar Medical College road will improve connectivity to the medical institution and surrounding areas. The Madhuraghat bridge will provide a direct connectivity link between Malugram and Dudhpatil and is expected to benefit

commuters and residents on both sides. It’s worth mentioning that the review comes as several road and connectivity projects in Silchar are moving through different stages of execution and administrative processing. The district administration and executing agencies have been working on land, road, drainage, utility and other related requirements to facilitate implementation. The Minister called upon the departments concerned to work together closely and ensure that the issues discussed during the meeting are followed up on the ground. The meeting concluded with directions for expediting pending formalities and maintaining regular coordination among all stakeholders for the timely and smooth implementation of the projects. Meanwhile, following the Minister’s review meeting on Monday, on Tuesday, a joint site visits were conducted at the Madhuraghat Bridge site and approaches and at the Silchar Medical College Road site to facilitate further progress of the projects. The Madhuraghat Bridge site visit was led by CDC Raktim Baruah along with representatives from APDCL and PHED, to assess the present site conditions and facilitate commencement of the bridge foundation work. At the Silchar Medical College Road site, a joint team led by CDC Dhrubajyoti Pathak, along with representatives from APDCL, PHED, AMRUT and PBGL, assessed the present site conditions, proposed drain outlets and the readiness of the site for facilitating commencement of the four-laning road work. The field level inspections are aimed at ensuring necessary inter-departmental coordination and addressing site requirements for smooth and timely execution of the projects. This is stated in a press release issued by the Regional Office of Information & Public Relations, Barak Valley Zone, Silchar, Assam.

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Kharge to chair CWC meet as Congress plans roadmap to take on Modi government



NEW DELHI

The Congress Working Committee (CWC) will meet on Wednesday to take stock of the political situation and chart the party's strategy on student and youth issues, Ram temple donation 'theft' as well as the upcoming Assembly elections. The meeting will be held at 3 pm at Indira Bhawan and will be chaired by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge. Former party president Rahul Gandhi and general secretaries Jairam Ramesh and K C Venugopal are among the senior leaders expected to attend. The meeting assumes significance as the Congress believes the agitation by students over examination irregularities, paper leaks and related issues has emerged as a major political issue and needs to be pursued beyond Parliament. The party was at the fore-

front of the Opposition protests during the Monsoon Session over the alleged police action against protesting students and repeatedly demanded accountability from the government. Sources said the CWC is expected to deliberate on how the campaign on youth and student issues should be taken forward, with LoP Rahul Gandhi stepping up his direct outreach to students. Gandhi will hold the next edition of his 'Chhatron Ki Goonj' programme in Pune on August 22, with the focus particularly on women students. The party will also deliberate on the just-concluded Monsoon Session, said the sources. Congress leaders feel the Opposition managed to keep the government under pressure by holding firm on its demand for a statement from Union Home Minister Amit Shah over the alleged

police action against protesting students. Though the government offered a discussion with Shah's intervention towards the fag end of the session, the Opposition did not relent on its other demands. The party feels the Opposition pressure also forced the government to put contentious bills, including the proposed FCRA amendments and delimitation bill, on the back burner. On the possibility of the government bringing the delimitation-linked bill for implementing women's reservation, veteran leader Jairam Ramesh had last week said, "We are in touch with all parties. We continue to be in touch with them, and I am sure that this issue will be discussed on August 19, when the CWC meets. The recent 'Vande Mataram' row could also come up for discussion.

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi wants his Bangladeshi counterpart Tarique Rahman's proposed visit to India to be "memorable", Indian High Commissioner Dinesh Trivedi has said, stressing that closer ties between the two leaders would ultimately benefit people and businesses in both countries. The envoy's remarks on Tuesday came as uncertainty looms over Rahman's proposed visit to New Delhi for the BRICS summit on September 12-13 amid fresh strains in bilateral ties over Dhaka's demand for the extradition of deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina. Speaking at a reception hosted by the Indian High Commission here on Tuesday for leading Bangladeshi business leaders and a visiting delegation of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Trivedi said Modi had conveyed that the two leaders needed to meet and assured that Rahman would receive an appropriate welcome during his visit to India, news portal tbsnews.net reported. "Prime Minister Modi just mentioned one thing. We need to meet. And you can tell them on my behalf that you have the prime minister of India's assurance that when the honourable prime minister of Bangladesh visits India, he will have such an honourable reception as he deserves," he said. Trivedi said Modi wanted Rahman's visit to be "memorable", underlining that stronger engagement between the two leaders would benefit both the neighbours. "Ultimately, the benefit will go to people and businesses. Business people all over the world have a big role to play in bridging this gap," he said. Trivedi said the two countries should address past differences while looking ahead. "I am not telling that you forget the past, but keep the past and sort out the differences of the past. But move on. Don't get stagnant," he said. He said differences are natural between "vibrant democracies" and could be addressed through dialogue and engagement. "We deeply understand the concerns



of brothers and sisters of Bangladesh. Definitely, there are concerns. But this is a partnership of equals," Trivedi said. He stressed that mutual trust would be essential for a durable relationship. "The foundation of any long-lasting relation is mutual and unconditional trust," the envoy said. Highlighting India's "Neighbourhood First" policy, Trivedi said the two countries had gone through "hiccups" but should not allow differences to undermine their broader relationship. "We have shared history, we have shared culture, and this is where we need to foster," he said. Referring to the younger generation in Bangladesh, Trivedi said India wanted to work with the "new Bangladesh" to create greater opportunities for its youth. "This is a new Bangladesh. And this new Bangladesh has the youth. And youth has also gone through a lot of struggles and a lot of sacrifice. So, our objective obviously [is] to have peace and prosperity and the youth must get that opportunity," he said. Trivedi said India and Bangladesh

shared history, culture and aspirations and should build on these commonalities. "We don't only share border, we share dreams, we share aspirations and equality," he said, underlining the importance of people-to-people relations. Trivedi also called for greater involvement of businesses in strengthening bilateral ties, saying the private sector had an important role in creating employment and economic opportunities. He urged Indian and Bangladeshi companies to work together to expand trade and investment and contribute to a new phase in bilateral relations. The CII delegation is visiting Dhaka to explore opportunities for expanding trade, investment and industrial cooperation between the two countries. Trivedi said stronger economic and people-to-people ties could help create greater understanding between the two countries and support efforts to build a more stable and mutually beneficial relationship. The issue of Rahman's proposed India visit has assumed significance

amid the recent deterioration in ties following Hasina's virtual media interaction from New Delhi on August 5. Bangladesh expressed outrage over the media interaction, saying the event had hurt the sentiments of its people and could adversely affect efforts to improve bilateral ties with India. The Ministry of External Affairs maintained that it had no role in the media event concerning Hasina and it does not endorse anything said at the forum about the Bangladesh government. Hasina was ousted in August 2024 following violent student-led protests, and fled to India. In November 2025, she was sentenced to death in absentia by a special tribunal in Bangladesh over alleged "crimes against humanity" during the crackdown on protesters. Dhaka has since been seeking Hasina's extradition from India, while New Delhi maintains that the extradition request is under examination in accordance with applicable law and established legal procedures.

INTERNATIONAL

US, Canada race against deadline to avert Trump's 50% tariffs on 20 billion USD in goods

WASHINGTON

The U.S. and Canada are negotiating in an effort to reach a truce on tariffs before a 12:01 a.m. Wednesday deadline set by U.S. President Donald Trump. If no deal is reached, Trump has threatened to impose 50% tariffs on \$20 billion worth of Canadian products, ranging from hockey sticks to tongue depressors. "We are negotiating," Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney told reporters Monday, speaking in French. "The negotiations are very intense and delicate. This is not the time to talk about negotiations in public." The two countries have wrangled for decades over trade, poking each other over sore spots like Canadian softwood lumber imports and U.S. access to Canada's protected dairy market. Somehow they still managed to remain friends, allies, and trading partners. Canadian soldiers fought alongside Americans in Afghanistan after 9/11. The 5,525-mile U.S.-Canada border is undefended, and nearly 330,000 people and \$2 billion dollars' worth of goods cross it every day; 800,000 Canadians live in the United States. Trump's belligerent approach to dealing with Canada marks an extraordinary departure from the traditionally cooperative relationship between the two countries. Trump has hit Canadian goods with tariffs, in a push to bring manufacturing back to the United States, and has repeatedly made inflammatory comments about turning Canada into America's 51st state. The Canadian public is fed up. A petition to expel the U.S. ambassador, a Trump ally, has collected nearly 218,000 signatures since July 21. It accuses Ambassador Pete

Hoekstra of having "normalized" Trump's talk of annexing Canada, among other things. Nearly 72% of Canadian goods exports last year went to the United States. And the Trump administration might be wary of imposing a hefty new tariff, paid by U.S. importers who try to pass along the cost to consumers via higher prices, ahead of November's midterm elections. American voters are already frustrated with the high cost of living. "I don't think either side really wants these tariffs to come into effect," said Ryan Majerus, a partner at King & Spalding and a former U.S. trade official. "There's a pretty strong push on both sides to find an off ramp here." Majerus said the United States is aiming to get Canada to buy more U.S. military equipment, including F-35 fighters; to take part in Trump's "Golden Dome" missile defense; and to give the United States more access to critical minerals, thereby reducing America's reliance on tenuous supplies from geopolitical rival China. The Canadians would like relief from U.S. tariffs on steel and aluminum as well as softwood lumber, which America says receives unfair government subsidies. Trump has made tariffs the centerpiece of his second-term economic agenda. Last year, he imposed double-digit import taxes on almost every country on earth, justifying them by declaring the longstanding U.S. trade deficit a national emergency. The Supreme Court in February ruled that he'd overstepped his authority, striking down those tariffs and setting the stage for the federal government to pay refunds to importers. Trump immediately looked for other ways to rebuild his tariff wall. Last month, he imposed

import taxes of 10% to 12.5% on 59 countries and the European Union, which together account for 99% of U.S. imports, for allegedly failing to have or to enforce restrictions on imports made from forced labor. Then he reached back to the Great Depression to find a cudgel with which to whack Canada, one of his favorite targets. Trump invoked Section 338 of the Tariff Act of 1930 to impose 50% tariffs on products that account for about 5% of Canadian exports to the United States. Nearly a century ago, with the U.S. and world economies in collapse, Congress passed the 1930 tariff law, imposing hefty taxes on imports from around the world. Known as the Smoot-Hawley tariffs, for their congressional sponsors, they are notorious among economists and historians for limiting world commerce and making the Great Depression worse. Section 338 tariffs have never been used before. U.S. trade negotiators traditionally have favored another tool, Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, the provision Trump invoked for last month's forced-labor tariffs. Section 338 authorizes the president to impose tariffs of up to 50% on imports from countries that have discriminated against U.S. businesses. Unlike Section 301 sanctions, no investigation is required. Nor is there any limit on how long the tariffs can stay in place. In announcing the Section 338 tariffs, Trump claimed that Canada discriminates against American exports of autos, alcohol and cheese. Trump is angry because Canada and China were the only countries that punched back with retaliatory tariffs of their own when he slapped levies on their products last year. "If a country retaliates against

us, we're obviously not going to tolerate that," U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer told reporters Friday at the Iowa State Fair. "We'll take action. My sense is the Canadians, they want to have a more conciliatory approach, but we'll see." The U.S. is renegotiating a North American trade pact, the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement, that Trump strong-armed America's neighbors into accepting in his first term. The threat of Section 338 tariffs gives the United States leverage to seek fresh concessions from Ottawa. "From Carney's perspective, you need (USMCA) to be renegotiated," said Christopher Gundermann, fellow in the economics program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "You can't renegotiate it with a massive trade war going on." But the Canadian public's furor over Trump's policies may limit Carney's ability to cut a deal. Canada could retaliate again if the new 50% tariffs take effect, potentially aggravating a trade fight. Canada's government "cannot look like it is simply caving to the Trump administration's demands," said Daniel Beland, a political science professor at McGill University in Montreal. "Making further concessions without getting something meaningful in exchange would probably lead to a strong backlash ... The risk is for the Carney government to make Canada look weak and, therefore, even more vulnerable to future trade and geopolitical bullying on the part of the Trump administration." Dominic LeBlanc, Canada's minister for U.S. trade, met with Greer on Monday. He was tight-lipped afterward. "The work is continuing," he said. "We continue to do our job."

TRUMP IS THREATENING TO BOMB OMAN



WASHINGTON

The world knows that U.S. President Donald Trump is angry with Iran. But he's not happy with Iran. The sultanate into the uncomfortable position of negotiating with Tehran over management of the strait while facing Trump's threats. Trump this week told Fox News reporter Trey Yingst that the U.S. would bomb Oman if it "gets in the way," using an explosive for emphasis. It's not the first such threat he's made. Oman's foreign ministry didn't immediately respond to emailed questions about Trump's threat and when Oman and Iran might issue a joint statement on their deal. Here's a look at the country in the middle of the Washington-Tehran tug-of-war. Trump threatened Oman because he's not happy that it's close to a deal with Iran over the strait, two regional officials said Tuesday. Trump is under pressure. He vowed a quick war and a weakened Iran, along with a better deal on Tehran's nuclear program. Instead, Iran has seized on the Strait of Hormuz as a new weapon in talks, asserting control of what had been seen as an international waterway before the war. U.S.-Iran negotiations have dried up. This week ended the 60-day period that launched when the U.S. and Iran signed an interim agreement. It had been meant to open the way for more detailed

talks. There's no sign of it being extended. Trump now says there are no planned talks with Iran. So the only confirmed discussions happening now are between Iran and Oman about shipping on the strait. These have been going on for weeks. Oman hasn't said much about them publicly. Tehran says they're finalizing a joint statement. There's widespread thinking that Iran is not in much of a hurry. Trump has made plenty of threats against Iran. Now he's venting his frustration at Oman, too. Oman, with a population of just over 5 million, is one of the quieter actors in the Gulf. It has allowed the U.S. military to use its facilities, though Washington has described defense relations as smaller in scale compared with Gulf neighbors like the United Arab Emirates. Unlike other regional states, Oman hasn't been targeted during the war in the way that Tehran has lashed out at other Gulf neighbors. The Washington-based Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft notes that while Omani ports have been targeted by drones, Iran hasn't claimed responsibility and Oman hasn't blamed Iran, and no missiles have struck Omani territory. Oman's leaders have long preferred engagement with Iran. The sultanate has been involved in mediation efforts, but that work is now being driven by Qatar and Pakistan. The world's focus has turned more toward Oman since the interim agreement was signed. Not long after the signing, the relative calm was shattered when Iran started firing at ships trying to transit the Strait of Hormuz

near the Oman coast on a route supported by the U.S. Now Oman is in discussions that appear to be driven by Iran, which has described the talks as aiming to "develop mechanisms to ensure safe navigation through the Strait of Hormuz while respecting the sovereign rights and sovereignty of both coastal states, as well as Iran's security and national interests." The mechanisms might include fees. Regional officials have said the emerging deal calls for ships to enter the Persian Gulf through an Iranian-controlled route and exit through a route controlled by Oman. But any deal appears to rely on the U.S. lifting its blockade of Iranian ports. Oman earlier this month described the talks as "proceeding in a positive and constructive atmosphere," while in the same statement condemning repeated attacks on ships transiting the strait. After a meeting Tuesday between Oman's foreign minister and his Egyptian counterpart, Egypt said the Iranian-Omani deal could pave the way for the U.S. and Tehran to return to negotiations for a "comprehensive and permanent deal that addresses all concerns and enhances regional security and stability." Oman is caught between two heavily armed and stubborn powers. Meanwhile, global supplies of oil, natural gas and related goods are only able to get through the strait at a reduced level, with ships still at risk of attack. Since Trump's latest threat, the government's Oman News Agency has been posting about other things—the Muscat Stock Exchange, sports, imports of coffee and tea. Foreign ministry statements have focused on diplomatic meetings and greetings. It is not clear whether Trump's threat will make any difference in Oman's talks with Iran, including in hurrying the countries to finalize and announce a deal. But it's clear that the U.S. president is passing along the growing heat his administration feels as midterm elections approach, and as the global economy watches events on the Iran-gripped strait for any sign of relief.

Manipur Entrepreneur at United Nations AI Summit in Geneva

Haobam Joyremba Advocates for Inclusive AI Governance and Opportunities for Smaller Communities



BISWADEEP GUPTA

IMPHAL:Bringing global attention to the aspirations and challenges of smaller communities, Haobam Joyremba, Managing Director & CEO of CubeTen Technologies Pvt. Ltd., represented the North East of India at the prestigious AI for Developing Countries Forum (AIFOD) Geneva Summit 2026, held at the United Nations Office at Geneva (Palais des Nations), Switzerland, from 12th to 14th August 2026. The three-day summit brought together policymakers, researchers, entrepreneurs, innovators, diplomats, civil society leaders and technology experts from across the developing world to deliberate on the future of Artificial Intelligence and its role in achieving equitable global development.

The Geneva Summit attracted more than

500 delegates representing over 120 countries, making it one of the most significant international gatherings dedicated to ensuring that Artificial Intelligence benefits developing nations and emerging economies. The summit served as a platform for governments, academia, startups, international organisations and industry leaders to discuss how AI can become an instrument of inclusive growth rather than a driver of inequality.

Haobam Joyremba was the only participant from the North Eastern region of India, highlighting the growing recognition of Manipur's emerging role in digital innovation and AI-driven governance. His participation provided an opportunity to present the experiences and aspirations of smaller states and underrepresented communities before a global audience comprising AI experts, policymakers and development practitioners. His contribution in the previous editions at the UN (Geneva), UN (Vienna), UN (Bangkok) and this is a remarkable achievement.

Throughout the summit, delegates participated in a series of keynote addresses, panel discussions, technical sessions and collaborative working groups covering a wide spectrum of issues surrounding Artificial Intelligence. Among the key themes discussed were AI Governance and Policy Frameworks, Responsible and Ethical AI, AI for Public Services, Small Language Models, AI for Healthcare and Agriculture, Digital

Public Infrastructure, AI and Education, Data Sovereignty, Open-Source AI, AI Safety, Cybersecurity, Climate and Disaster Resilience, Digital Inclusion, and Financing AI Innovation in Developing Countries. Several sessions also examined the growing need for international cooperation to ensure that developing countries are not merely consumers of AI technologies but active contributors to their development and governance.

During the conference, Joyremba actively participated in several working groups and collaborative policy discussions, contributing perspectives on AI governance, digital transformation, startup ecosystems, and the role of Artificial Intelligence in strengthening governance mechanisms in developing regions. These working groups focused on identifying practical recommendations that



can support governments in adopting AI responsibly while ensuring transparency, accountability and equitable access to emerging technologies.

Drawing from the experiences of Manipur and the North East, Joyremba pointed out that while global AI models are largely designed for resource-rich economies, smaller communities often face entirely different challenges.

He highlighted several key concerns, including:

- Limited digital infrastructure and access to high-performance computing.
- Scarcity of AI researchers and skilled technical manpower.
- Lack of datasets in indigenous and regional languages.
- Challenges in preserving cultural identity and local knowledge in the age of AI.
- Limited policy and regulatory capacity within smaller governments.
- Risks of over-dependence on technologies developed outside local ecosystems.

At the same time, he stressed that these very challenges present enormous opportunities.

According to Joyremba, smaller communities possess unique strengths that can make them leaders in responsible AI adoption. These include close-knit communities, faster policy implementation, locally relevant governance models, strong traditional knowledge systems, and the ability to rapidly deploy AI solutions in sectors such as agriculture, healthcare, education, disaster management and tourism.

He called upon international organisations to invest in the development of Small Language Models (SLMs) rather than relying solely on large language models. Such models, he argued, would enable communities speaking languages with limited digital resources to participate meaningfully in the AI revolution while preserving their linguistic and cultural heritage.

Speaking during the discussions, Joyremba also advocated for the creation of regional AI innovation hubs, shared computing infrastructure for smaller states, open datasets in indigenous languages, and policy frameworks that encourage startups from developing regions to build solutions addressing local challenges.

Reflecting on his participation, Joyremba remarked that the summit reinforced the importance of ensuring that developing countries become architects of AI rather than passive consumers.

"Artificial Intelligence should not be measured by the size of the models we build, but by the number of lives we improve. Smaller communities like Manipur possess immense knowledge, culture and resilience. With the right policy support, digital infrastructure and international collaboration, these communities can emerge as global contributors to responsible AI innovation," he said.

Joyremba also highlighted several initiatives being undertaken by CubeTen Technologies Pvt. Ltd. in collaboration with the Government of Manipur, particularly in areas such as digital governance, AI-enabled public service delivery, startup incubation, GIS technologies, education and digital transformation. He noted that the experiences gained from these initiatives could serve as practical examples for other developing regions seeking to leverage AI for governance and public welfare.

For Manipur, Joyremba's representation at the United Nations carries symbolic significance, demonstrating that innovation emerging from smaller states can contribute meaningfully to global policy discussions. His participation also reinforces the message that the future of

Artificial Intelligence must be inclusive, locally relevant and accessible to all communities, irrespective of their size or geographical location.

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500 delegates representing over 120 countries, making it one of the most significant international gatherings dedicated to ensuring that Artificial Intelligence benefits developing nations and emerging economies. The summit served as a platform for governments, academia, startups, international organisations and industry leaders to discuss how AI can become an instrument of inclusive growth rather than a driver of inequality.



The strongest competition you'll ever face is the battle against your own procrastination.

Haobam Joyremba was the only participant from the North Eastern region of India, highlighting the growing recognition of Manipur's emerging role in digital innovation and AI-driven governance. His participation provided an opportunity to present the experiences and aspirations of smaller states and underrepresented communities before a global audience comprising AI experts, policymakers and development practitioners. His contribution in the previous editions at the UN (Geneva), UN (Vienna), UN (Bangkok) and this is a remarkable achievement.

Throughout the summit, delegates participated in a series of keynote addresses, panel discussions, technical sessions and collaborative working groups covering a wide spectrum of issues surrounding Artificial Intelligence. Among the key themes discussed were AI Governance and Policy Frameworks, Responsible and Ethical AI, AI for Public Services, Small Language Models, AI for Healthcare and Agriculture, Digital

Public Infrastructure, AI and Education, Data Sovereignty, Open-Source AI, AI Safety, Cybersecurity, Climate and Disaster Resilience, Digital Inclusion, and Financing AI Innovation in Developing Countries. Several sessions also examined the growing need for international cooperation to ensure that developing countries are not merely consumers of AI technologies but active contributors to their development and governance.

During the conference, Joyremba actively participated in several working groups and collaborative policy discussions, contributing perspectives on AI governance, digital transformation, startup ecosystems, and the role of Artificial Intelligence in strengthening governance mechanisms in developing regions. These working groups focused on identifying practical recommendations that

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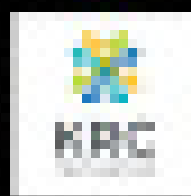


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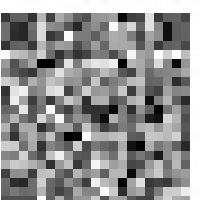


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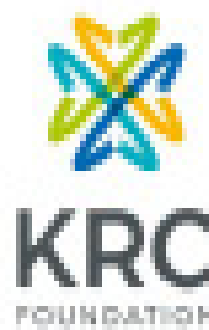
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