KRC TIMES
STAY ENRICHED

VOLUME:1, ISSUE 875 | SILCHAR WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2026. EAST AND NE INDIA EDITION | e-mail: krctimes@gmail.com ,www.krctimes.com

Village under attack: Six-hour gunfight leaves two houses torched

IMPHAL

Suspected militants attacked Chawangkining Naga village in Manipur's Kangpokpi district late Tuesday night, triggering a nearly six-hour gunfight with CRPF personnel and leaving two wooden houses on the village outskirts burnt, officials said.

The firing began around 10.30 pm and continued intermittently until about 4.30 am on Wednesday. Security personnel prevented the armed group from entering the hill settlement, officials said.

According to officials, CRPF personnel deployed in the area retaliated after the attackers opened fire and stopped them from advancing into the village.Villager Daniel Charenamai said the exchange of fire continued for several hours."Our village was attacked around 10.30 pm. The CRPF personnel deployed here returned fire and prevented the village from being overrun," he said.

The attack came hours after two Kuki women were shot dead at Leisangphai in neighbouring Tamenglong district, further heightening tensions in the violence-hit state.

Naga Peoples' Front legislator and senior Naga leader Awangbou Newmai condemned both the killings in Tamenglong and the burning of houses in Chawangkining. He said such violence would not serve the interests of any community.

A Kuki MLA from Saikul constituency in Kangpokpi also condemned the killing of the two women, saying one of the victims had recently completed her nursing course.The MLA alleged that cadres of the NSCN-IM and ZUF-K were involved in the killings. She said the deaths could not be justified by any political cause, ideology or grievance.Security forces remained deployed in and around the village following the overnight gunfight, while authorities assessed the damage caused by the attack.

Meghalaya reports 58.74% rise in new HIV infections since 2010: Sangma

SHILLONG

Meghalaya has recorded a 58.74 per cent increase in new HIV infections since 2010, while AIDS-related deaths have declined by 61.18 per cent during the same period, Chief Minister Conrad Sangma said on Wednesday.Sangma said the state currently has 618 people living with HIV, including 60 pregnant women. He was speaking while chairing the first meeting of the Meghalaya State Council on AIDS in Shillong.According to the Chief Minister, HIV prevalence in Meghalaya stands at 0.40 per cent, twice the national average of 0.20 per cent.

He said the state's efforts to address HIV/AIDS required coordinated action involving government agencies and society."Only 77.2 per cent of people living with HIV are on treatment. Our biggest gap today is not diagnosis but treatment and retention," Sangma said.

He identified financial constraints and social stigma as major barriers to continued treatment. As many as 2,381 people who have been diagnosed with HIV are yet to begin treatment, he said.Sangma outlined a five-pronged strategy to tackle the disease, focusing on early detection, improved treatment and retention, prevention of new infections, protection of mothers and children, and reduction of stigma.

The Chief Minister said the government would work with communities and other stakeholders to strengthen the state's response to HIV/AIDS.

PERSPECTIVE

A wise person knows that there is something to be learned from everyone.

Manipur CM reviews fuel transport issues, stresses smooth supply

IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Tuesday chaired a meeting with the Core Committee on Petroleum Products at the Secretariat in Mantripukhri to review issues related to the transportation and supply of fuel in the state.

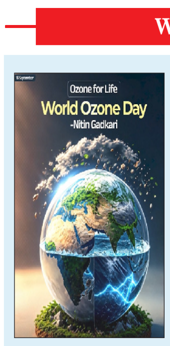
The meeting focused on concerns raised by petroleum product transporters and challenges affecting the movement of fuel across Manipur. Discussions centred on measures to address the issues and ensure an uninterrupted supply of petroleum products.

Khemchand reviewed the concerns raised during the meeting and stressed the need for better coordination among government authorities and other stakeholders to resolve transportation-related challenges.

The meeting was attended by ADGP I.K. Muivah, Special Secretary (Home) Ahanthem Subash, Director of CAF & PD Yumnam Nelson, and Core Committee on Petroleum Products president Ahongshangbam Tamphayai, besides other officials.

The review comes amid the importance of maintaining smooth fuel transportation and supply across the state, particularly in areas dependent on road-based movement of petroleum products.

WHO SAID WHAT



On #WorldOzoneDay, let us celebrate the remarkable progress the world has made in protecting our ozone layer. It is a powerful reminder that when nations, communities and individuals come together, meaningful change is possible. Let us keep that spirit alive and work towards a healthier, greener planet for generations to come. ~ Nitin Gadkari, Minister of Road Transport & Highways, GoI

Tripura BJP chief warns of action over anti-party activities

AGARTALA

Tripura BJP president Abhishek Debroy on September 15 said the party would address organisational differences among its workers but warned that those involved in activities against the party's interests could face disciplinary action.

Speaking to reporters at the state BJP headquarters, Debroy responded to reports of groupism and differences between party workers and mandal-level leadership. He said the party has an organisational mechanism to address such issues.

Debroy said organisational committees are reconstituted every three years and clarified that workers whose names are not included in newly formed committees should not be considered removed from the party.

He said such workers remain associated with the BJP in various capacities, while the formation of mandal-level committees follows the party's organisational process under the supervision of the central leadership.

"If there are any problems regarding the functioning of mandal committees, the party will look into them," Debroy said.

At the same time, he warned that disciplinary action would be taken against workers found engaging in activities that go against the interests of the party.

BJP announces month-long programmes

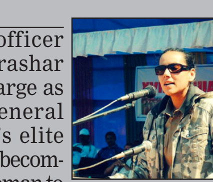
Debroy also announced a series of programmes in Tripura to mark Prime Minister Narendra Modi's birthday from September 17 to October 17.

The month-long programme will include drawing competitions, Namo Seva initiatives, activities involving Anganwadi centres, service-oriented programmes and a march carrying the "Seva Mashaal", among other events.

Debroy highlighted Modi's political career, including his tenure as Gujarat chief minister before becoming prime minister, and said the programmes were intended to promote public participation in community-oriented activities.

Sanjukta Parashar becomes first woman to lead CRPF's CoBRA

NEW DELHI



Senior IPS officer Sanjukta Parashar has taken charge as Inspector General of the CRPF's elite CoBRA force, becoming the first woman to head the specialised jungle-warfare unit. A 2006-batch IPS officer of the Assam-Meghalaya cadre, Parashar has experience in counter-insurgency operations, field policing and national security investigations. The CRPF headquarters issued the appointment order last week, with Parashar succeeding 1996-batch IPS officer Danesh Rana.

The Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) is the CRPF's specialised force for guerrilla and jungle warfare. The force comprises 10 battalions, with personnel trained for long-range patrols, intelligence-based operations, ambushes and counter-ambushes in difficult terrain. The CRPF describes CoBRA as a formation raised to combat extremist and insurgent groups in jungle and guerrilla warfare environments.CoBRA units have been deployed extensively in anti-Maoist operations in central and eastern India. Two units were also recently deployed in Manipur amid continuing security concerns.

Parashar began her career with a field posting in Assam and subsequently served in Udalguri during a period marked by violent clashes involving Bodo groups and migrants. Her work in counter-insurgency operations in Assam and the Northeast later earned her the popular description "Iron Lady of Assam".She has also served with the National Investigation Agency as a Deputy Inspector General, where she handled cases linked to terrorism, extremism and national security.

Her operational experience in the Northeast and subsequent work in national security investigations have been among the key aspects of her career ahead of the CoBRA assignment.

NSF seeks replacement of NHIDCL on Dimapur-Kohima NH-29 project

KOHIMA

The Naga Students' Federation (NSF) has urged the Centre and Nagaland government to replace the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL) as the implementing agency for the Dimapur-Kohima stretch of NH-29, alleging poor workmanship, prolonged delays and inadequate maintenance.In a statement issued on September 13, the federation called for the project to be handed over to either the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) or the state Public Works Department (National Highways).

The NSF said commuters face serious safety risks on the highway, particularly during the monsoon and at night. It alleged that rockfalls and other road-related incidents linked to inadequate safety measures and slope stabilisation had resulted in deaths and serious injuries.

The federation highlighted the Medziphema-Pedducha stretch, citing damaged road surfaces, inadequate drainage, deteriorating roadside structures, poor slope protection and delays in restoration work.

It also called for an immediate inquiry by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways into the execution and maintenance of the project.

The NSF questioned the issuance of a completion certificate for Package-II despite what it described as incomplete works and continuing deficiencies on the highway.

The federation further alleged that NHIDCL had failed to adequately repair defects during the project's five-year defect liability period. It cited collapsing side walls, inadequate drainage, poor slope protection, damaged road surfaces and gaps in road-safety infrastructure.

The NSF also criticised what it termed inadequate monsoon preparedness, alleging deficiencies in drainage maintenance, slope stabilisation, erosion control, retaining structures and emergency-response mechanisms.

The federation said complaints related to workmanship, delays and maintenance had also emerged in several other NHIDCL projects across Nagaland.

These include the Kohima Bypass, Kohima-Mao Road, Dimapur Bypass, slope protection works along NH-29, Akash Bridge-Jessami Road (NH-202), and the Peren-Dimapur section of NH-129A under Packages II and III.

The NSF urged the authorities to address the alleged deficiencies and ensure greater accountability in the execution and maintenance of national highway projects in the state.

Assam targets Rs 50,000 crore investment plan under Viksit Assam 2047

JORHAT

The Assam government is preparing an investment plan aimed at facilitating projects worth Rs 50,000 crore as part of its Viksit Assam 2047 vision, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said after a two-day District Commissioners' Conference in Jorhat.

The conference, which concluded late on September 14, reviewed district-level development projects, implementation of government schemes and measures to improve public service delivery.

Sarma said the proposed investment plan would cover a range of infrastructure projects, including Anganwadi centres, stadiums and upgrades to educational institutions from schools to universities. District Commissioners were briefed on projects proposed for their respective districts.

Reducing dropout rates among secondary school students also emerged as a key focus during the discussions. Officials reviewed the implementation of government schemes and the delivery of public services at the district level.

The meeting also assessed progress under the TB Mukt Bharat Abhiyan, plans for new medical colleges and the phased conversion of 4,000 health sub-centres into hospitals, a provision announced in the state Budget.

The government also discussed the creation of land banks in every district to facilitate industrial development amid a rise in investment proposals.Sarma said Gujarat and Maharashtra had reserved up to seven lakh bighas of land as land banks, while Assam currently has less than 10,000 bighas available for future industrial development.

The Chief Minister said expanding the state's land bank would be important for making land available for upcoming industrial projects.

The conference also reviewed preparations for the Khel Maharan and plans to reconstruct embankments damaged by recent floods. Officials discussed the implementation of programmes outlined in the state government's Sankalpa Patra.

Month-long Seva Sankalpa Abhiyan

Sarma also announced that the Seva Sankalpa Abhiyan will be held across Assam from September 17 to October 17, with Viksit Bharat 2047 and Viksit Assam 2047 as its central themes.The month-long campaign will include drawing, quiz and speech competitions, besides felicitation programmes for Anganwadi workers, ASHA workers and mid-day meal cooks.

Seva Setu camps will be organised at the block level to enable residents to submit applications and raise grievances directly with government officials.

The conference was attended by state ministers, Chief Secretary Ravi Kota, senior officials from various departments and autonomous councils, District Commissioners, Co-District Commissioners and other district administration officials.

Tripura deploys 74 CRPF companies ahead of village committee polls

AGARTALA

Security has been stepped up across Tripura ahead of the village committee elections under the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council, with 74 companies of the Central Reserve Police Force deployed across the state, the State Election Commission said on Wednesday.The commission reviewed security arrangements, law and order, voter safety, campaign restrictions and election monitoring at two meetings held on Wednesday, as authorities moved to ensure peaceful polling and prevent intimidation of voters.

The CRPF personnel will remain deployed before, during and after polling. Area domination exercises and flag marches are also being conducted in various districts under the supervision of election and police authorities.

District magistrates, district election officers and superintendents of police have been directed to maintain a peaceful environment and build confidence among voters so they can cast their ballots without fear or intimidation.

The administration has also made arrangements for the timely movement of representatives of participating political parties to designated polling stations on polling day.

The State Election Commission said restrictions under relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and the Representation of the People Act will come into force at 4 pm on September 26 and remain in effect until 6 am on September 28.

The mandatory 48-hour silence period before the close of polling will be enforced strictly, with campaigning and solicitation of votes prohibited during the period.

ED-OP

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Social Media Restrictions

The Supreme Court's decision to issue notice to the Union Ministries of Electronics and Information Technology and Law and Justice, on a plea by the NGO Just Rights for Children Alliance, has reopened one of the most difficult questions of our digital age: what, if anything, should the law do about children and social media? A bench led by the Chief Justice of India has acknowledged, in essence, that "some safeguards" are needed. Few would disagree with the sentiment. The harder task, for both the Government and the courts, is working out what those safeguards should actually look like. The petition's legal architecture is elegant. Since Section 11 of the Indian Contract Act renders a minor incapable of contracting, any "terms of service" a thirteen-year-old ticks to open an Instagram account is, in law, void from the outset; it is a clever way of dragging an old statute into a new problem, and it forces the state to confront an uncomfortable truth: platforms such as Facebook and Snapchat admit users from the age of thirteen, while Indian law treats anyone under eighteen as a minor.

But the instinct to fix this gap with a blunt instrument - a strict age bar, backed by mandatory e-KYC or Aadhaar verification - would very likely cause more harm than it prevents. To verify that a user is not a minor, platforms would need Government-grade identity documents from millions of citizens, creating exactly the kind of centralised data honeypot that data-protection advocates have spent a decade warning against. It would also entrench a digital divide: children from families without smartphones, documented guardians, or digitally literate parents would simply be locked out of learning resources that middle-class children take for granted. And it would not even work. Anyone who has watched a teenager reset a birthdate or reach for a VPN knows that determined workarounds are only a search away. A ban doesn't take kids off the internet; it takes away parental and platform oversight.

There is also a generational reality that no ruling can legislate away. A child today navigates a smart TV and a mobile phone with more fluency than many adults manage a spreadsheet. This is, whether we like it or not, a mobile-phone generation, one that often prefers the company of a screen to that of a sibling. During the pandemic, six years ago now, even first-graders were taught over video calls - a reminder that blanket restrictions on devices are neither realistic nor, in a country still building its digital infrastructure, desirable. Yet the same openness that let a first-grader attend school online also leaves a teenager exposed to pornography, grooming and algorithmic manipulation. That's the real double-edged sword of technology, and no rule can dull just one side. Government policy, then, should resist the temptation of a headline-grabbing ban and instead do the less glamorous work of building "safety by design" into the existing legal framework. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, already requires verifiable parental consent before a minor's data is processed and bars behavioural tracking and targeted advertising aimed at children; enforcing it properly would achieve more than any fresh prohibition. Age-assurance technology that estimates an age bracket without extracting a Government ID is preferable to mass identity verification. Platforms could be compelled to switch off infinite scroll, autoplay and addictive algorithmic feeds by default for under-eighteen accounts and to filter content automatically rather than reactively. Family-linked, co-managed accounts, on the model of parental-control tools already in use elsewhere, would give guardians real oversight without shutting children out of the internet altogether. None of this removes the need for digital literacy to be taught in schools as seriously as arithmetic; awareness of online risk is now simply part of growing up.

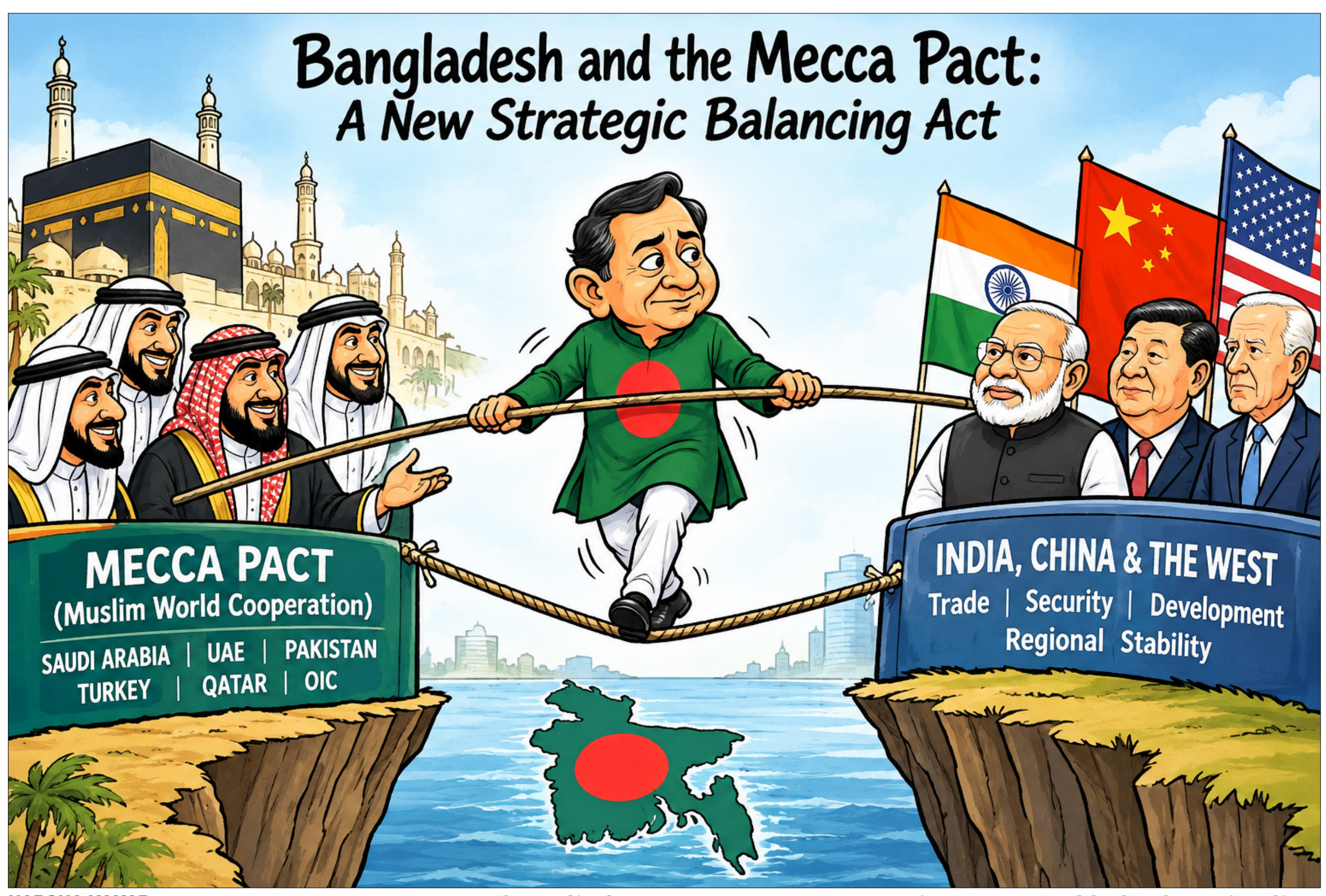
Whatever position the Centre eventually takes, it should recognise that Gen Z and Gen Alpha will not accept being caged, nor should they be treated merely as potential victims rather than as citizens who increasingly use social media to voice grievances long before they turn eighteen. The Court has rightly asked the Government to explain itself. Much depends upon Government's stance. A balanced approach is the need of the hour.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Be a good listener. Your ears will never get you in trouble

- Frank Tyger

BANGLADESH AND THE MECCA PACT: A NEW STRATEGIC BALANCING ACT



HARSHA KAKAR

Bangladesh's growing interest in the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement marks a potentially significant development in South Asian geopolitics. The agreement, signed on August 7 by Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan, provides for collective defence, with an armed attack against one member to be treated as an attack against all three. The three countries have subsequently moved to institutionalise their cooperation through a Strategic Political and Defence Committee.

Dhaka has not yet received a formal invitation to join. However, Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman has said Bangladesh would consider membership positively if invited, while State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shama Obaed Islam has stressed that Bangladesh is assessing the proposal and that national interests will be the primary consideration.

That distinction is important. Bangladesh is considering an option, not announcing a decision.

The possible expansion of the pact nevertheless deserves attention because it comes at a time when Dhaka's foreign and security relationships are undergoing considerable change.

A pact with a different strategic logic

The three founding members have distinct security priorities.

Saudi Arabia has long faced security concerns linked to regional conflicts and attacks originating from the wider Middle East. Türkiye has its own strategic interests across the Mediterranean, Middle East and surrounding regions. Pakistan faces a complex security environment involving India, Afghanistan and internal instability.

The three countries also have longstanding defence relationships. Pakistan has maintained close military links with Saudi Arabia, while Türkiye has emerged as an important defence supplier and partner for Pakistan.

The Mecca agreement brings these relationships into a formal collective-defence framework. Its stated objective is broader than any single bilateral dispute: the three governments have described it as a mechanism for strengthening collective security, defence cooperation and regional stability.

For Bangladesh, however, the strategic calculation is different.

Dhaka does not share the principal security concerns that prompted the existing members to deepen their defence cooperation. Its most immediate security environment is shaped by its borders with India and Myanmar, the Rohingya crisis, maritime interests in the Bay of Bengal and internal security challenges.

That raises a basic question: what specific security requirement would membership address?

The India factor

Any discussion of Bangladesh joining a formal defence arrangement involving Pakistan inevitably has implications for India.

Bangladesh and India share a long land and maritime relationship, extensive trade and connectivity links and cooperation in areas ranging from energy to transport. At the same time, bilateral ties have become more complicated in recent years, particularly following the political change in Dhaka and the presence of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in India.

The possibility of Bangladesh moving closer to Pakistan therefore has a strategic dimension that goes beyond the formal language of the Mecca pact.

India has already said it is monitoring developments that have implications for its security.

But Bangladesh would also have to consider the practical consequences of any major shift.

India remains an important economic and logistical partner. According to Bangladesh government statements cited by The Daily Star, bilateral trade remains substantial, with Bangladesh importing considerably more from India than it exports. India has also continued supplying essential commodities, including diesel through the India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline.

For Dhaka, therefore, strategic diversification has to be balanced against economic and geographic realities.

Pakistan's attraction

Closer defence relations with Pakistan could nevertheless offer Bangladesh opportunities.

The two countries have increased military contacts in recent years, while trade and other bilateral exchanges have also expanded. Defence cooperation could potentially provide Bangladesh with access to training, military technology and a wider network of strategic relationships.

Pakistan itself has strong defence links with Türkiye and Saudi Arabia. For Dhaka, closer engagement with all three could therefore create new channels for military cooperation.

But membership in a collective-defence arrangement is different from bilateral defence cooperation.

A treaty commitment can create obligations that extend beyond the immediate interests of the country joining it. Bangladesh would have to establish clearly what circumstances could trigger collective-defence commitments and what level of military involvement might be expected.

That question becomes especially important when the founding members face security challenges far from Bangladesh's borders.

The Bay of Bengal dimension

A larger role for Türkiye and Pakistan in Bangladesh's security environment could also have implications for the Bay of Bengal.

Bangladesh has traditionally sought to maintain relationships with multiple major powers rather than place itself firmly inside a military bloc. Its geographical position makes this balancing act particularly important.

Closer defence cooperation with Türkiye, Pakistan or Saudi Arabia does not automatically mean the establishment of foreign military bases or the deployment of combat forces in Bangladesh. Nor does the Mecca pact itself contain an economic integration mechanism.

But greater military-to-military contacts, intelligence cooperation, naval engagement and defence procurement could gradually alter the strategic environment around the Bay of Bengal.

For India, developments affecting the eastern seaboard and the approaches to the Northeast would naturally attract attention.

Bangladesh's domestic calculation

There is also a domestic political dimension.

Bangladesh has increasingly sought a foreign policy that emphasises greater strategic autonomy and wider engagement with countries beyond its traditional partners. Senior officials have publicly described the Mecca pact positively, while also stressing that Dhaka will assess the implications before making a decision.

The agreement could also strengthen Bangladesh's engagement with the wider Muslim world.

Saudi Arabia is particularly important to Bangladesh because of the large Bangladeshi workforce in the Gulf and the country's longstanding religious, economic and diplomatic links with the kingdom. Türkiye, meanwhile, has developed increasingly significant political and defence ties across South Asia.

Membership could therefore be viewed by Dhaka as part of a broader effort to diversify its strategic partnerships.

Yet diversification and alignment are not necessarily the same thing.

The non-alignment question

The most consequential issue may be whether joining the Mecca pact would narrow Bangladesh's diplomatic room for manoeuvre.

Bangladesh has historically maintained relationships with competing powers while seeking to avoid becoming part of a major-power or military confrontation. A formal collective-defence arrangement could make that balancing act more complicated.

Consider a hypothetical Indo-Pakistani military crisis. Bangladesh would have to determine how its treaty obligations interact with its geographical dependence on India and its relations with Pakistan.

Similarly, a conflict involving Saudi Arabia or Türkiye could raise questions about the extent to which Bangladesh would be expected to participate.

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

MANIPUR IS TURNING INTO A POPPY HUB. WE CAN NO LONGER DENY THAT THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE HAS ALREADY REACHED OUR DOORSTEP

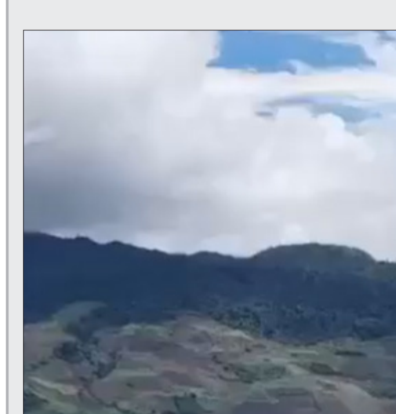
It fills me with deep sorrow to see my beloved Manipur being turned into a poppy hub. Our once-lush forest areas are being devastated beyond recognition, while more locations with large-scale cultivation continue to be uncovered.

What is even more disturbing is the lack of visible action in recent times. Earlier, massive drives were carried out across the State to destroy poppy plantations. Today, despite fresh reports of large-scale cultivation, that same urgency is no longer visible.

At this alarming rate, we are not just losing our green cover; we are destroying the future of generations to come. The spread of poppy cultivation also raises serious concerns about Manipur's proximity to the Golden Triangle and the danger of our State becoming deeply entangled in the narcotics economy.

I earnestly appeal to the
@narcoticsbureau
and the
@moefcc
, to take serious, urgent and decisive action before it is too late.

~ N. Biren Singh, Former CM, Manipur



The experience of the existing members is instructive. Following recent attacks on Saudi Arabia, Pakistan reaffirmed its commitment to the Mecca agreement but said no military response had been discussed under the pact at that point.

That episode illustrates the difference between a collective-defence commitment on paper and the political decisions governments must make when a real crisis occurs.

A decision that requires careful calculation

For Bangladesh, the Mecca pact offers possible diplomatic and defence benefits, but it also introduces questions about strategic autonomy, relations with India, military obligations and involvement in conflicts outside South Asia.

Dhaka has therefore been right to emphasise assessment rather than haste.

The country can deepen relations with Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan without necessarily making every relationship part of a formal military alliance. At the same time, if a formal invitation eventually arrives, Bangladesh will have to examine the precise treaty obligations, decision-making mechanisms and military commitments involved.

The central issue is not whether the Mecca pact is desirable or undesirable in the abstract. It is whether its obligations and benefits correspond with Bangladesh's own security requirements.

Geography remains a powerful factor in foreign policy. Bangladesh shares its longest and most consequential border with India, faces Myanmar across another frontier and sits astride the Bay of Bengal. Its economic relationships are similarly regional as well as global.

Dhaka therefore has several strategic interests to balance simultaneously.

The Mecca pact may become an important part of that calculation. But membership would represent a significant foreign-policy commitment, and the details of that commitment-not merely the symbolism of joining a Muslim-majority defence grouping-will ultimately determine its consequences.

For Bangladesh, the prudent course is to assess those consequences in full before making a decision that could shape its security and diplomatic choices for years to come.

Manipur CM calls for preservation of ancient manuscripts, indigenous script

IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh called for greater efforts to preserve the state's ancient manuscripts, archival records and indigenous script, saying they are vital to understanding its history and civilisational heritage.

Khemchand was speaking at the 44th Archives Week Celebration and Records Exhibition 2026 at the Manipur State Archives Complex in Keishampat, Imphal. The event was organised by the Department of Art & Culture.

The Chief Minister praised members of the public who had preserved ancient documents and manuscripts in their homes and later contributed them to the archives. He said their efforts reflected a commitment to safeguarding Manipur's cultural heritage.

Khemchand said the state's traditional texts, known as Puyas, contain valuable information on its society and history, including archaeological remains, traditional architecture, lifestyles, royal chronicles, stories and medicinal knowledge.

He said the records also reflected the scientific character of Manipur's traditional knowledge systems and provided important insights into the state's historical identity.

"These historical traits form the foundation of Manipuri society," Khemchand said, stressing the importance of preserving archival material for future generations.

The Chief Minister also highlighted the significance of Manipur's indigenous script and called its preservation a matter of pride for the state.

Government considers incentives for manuscript custodians

Khemchand said the government was considering incentives for individuals who had preserved and protected ancient manuscripts and other historical records over the years.He said he had discussed the proposal with the Art & Culture Minister and Commissioner and directed the department to prepare a proposal for consideration by the state Cabinet.The government, he added, would extend necessary support to take the initiative forward.

Referring to Manipur's political history, Khemchand said the state's archival records documented significant milestones, including what he described as Asia's first democratic form of government in 1948.During the programme, the Chief Minister inaugurated a new stack room building at the Manipur State Archives and launched a Reading and Teaching Programme on old scripts.He also released the 2026 archival publication Colonial Tour Records of Manipur and inaugurated an exhibition featuring documents and other materials related to the state's history and heritage.Manuscripts displayed at the exhibition included contributions from Nongmaithem Phulendro Meitei, Thoudam Bimolchandra Singh, Laisom Hemjit, Yengkhom Amuthoi Meitei and Chingakham Dorendro.Art & Culture and Tourism Minister Kh Loken Singh, Art & Culture Secretary N Praveen Singh, department officials, archival custodians, manuscript donors and other invitees attended the event.

Ticket row triggers Congress defections to BJP in Silchar

SILCHAR

The Congress suffered another setback ahead of the Silchar Municipal Corporation elections after several workers and supporters from Wards 40 and 41 joined the BJP, citing dissatisfaction over the distribution of party tickets.

The group joined the BJP at the party's Silchar office by accepting the party flag from district president Rupam Saha.

Speaking at a subsequent press conference, the new BJP members alleged that despite their long association with the Congress, their wards had not witnessed the development they expected.

They also claimed that several eligible and well-known local aspirants were overlooked during ticket distribution, with the Congress instead selecting candidates who were relatively unfamiliar in the two wards.

The former Congress workers said the decision to switch parties was driven by their dissatisfaction with the ticket allocation.

They expressed confidence that the BJP would win both wards in the municipal election and said they expected development work in the areas to accelerate under the party's leadership.

Violence leaves trucks stranded on Silchar-Manipur highway

SILCHAR

A large number of trucks have remained stranded along the Silchar-Manipur National Highway for days amid continuing unrest in Manipur, with drivers seeking government intervention over security concerns, inadequate basic facilities and mounting losses.Truckers said vehicles carrying goods from different parts of the country have been stuck on the route for several days. While some drivers reported being stranded for around eight days, others said they had been waiting for 10 to 15 days.The prolonged disruption has also raised concerns over perishable consignments. Drivers said food and other time-sensitive goods were beginning to deteriorate after remaining on the highway for extended periods.

The truckers also complained of inadequate access to drinking water, food and bathing facilities. Many said they had been forced to spend nights by the roadside in the hilly terrain.The drivers questioned the decision to allow loaded vehicles to proceed towards Manipur despite the uncertain security situation."If the government cannot resolve the situation in Manipur, why are we being sent there with our goods?" some drivers said, urging authorities to take a clear decision on the movement of commercial vehicles.

They said travelling through areas affected by unrest posed a security risk, while prolonged delays were causing financial losses to truck owners, transporters and drivers.

The stranded truckers have appealed to the government to intervene, ensure their safe passage and consider temporarily restricting the movement of loaded trucks towards Manipur until the security situation improves.

They also sought immediate arrangements for food, drinking water and other essential facilities for drivers stranded along the highway.

Nagaon bypoll will signal BJP's 2031 prospects, says Himanta

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday described the upcoming Nagaon Lok Sabha bypoll as a crucial contest for the BJP, saying a victory could signal the party's potential to win all 126 Assembly seats in the 2031 election.

Addressing a press conference at Cinamora Sammilan Kendra in Jorhat, Sarma said the Nagaon result would provide an indication of the BJP's political position ahead of the next Assembly polls.

"The present Nagaon constituency comprises Morigaon, Jagiroad, Raha and Nagaon. If we consider the panchayat-level results of the last Assembly election, we won all these constituencies," Sarma said.

He, however, acknowledged that the constituency was not traditionally a BJP stronghold, pointing out that the party had suffered significant losses in Samaguri, Dhing, Rupohihat and Lahorighat.

According to Sarma, the BJP has seen a shift in voter sentiment in Nagaon since campaigning for the bypoll began. He claimed that support for the party had increased even in areas where it does not have MLAs and that several people had joined the BJP.

"An atmosphere is being created in favour of people voting for the BJP, and the situation is improving every day," he said.

Sarma said ministers Keshab Mahanta and Pijush Hazarika, along with MLA Jitu Goswami, were working for the BJP in the constituency. Although he has not yet visited Nagaon himself, he said party leaders campaigning there had reported a favourable political atmosphere.

"Let the election results come; only then will we know. But the atmosphere has been improving over the past month," he said.

The Chief Minister said a BJP victory in Nagaon would strengthen his assessment that the party could aim for all 126 Assembly seats in the 2031 election.

'Our target is BJP, AGP and UPPL'

Asked about political attacks involving opposition leaders, including AIUDF chief Badruddin Ajmal and Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi, Sarma said he was not interested in personal or social media-driven controversies.

"I neither think about Ajmal nor do I think about Gaurav Gogoi. Our target is the BJP, AGP and UPPL. Therefore, we will continue to focus on doing good work," he said.

Sarma also said he would stay away from political arguments and social media controversies, including the practice of making reels.

The Nagaon bypoll is scheduled for October 6, with the BJP, Congress and AIUDF emerging as the principal contenders.

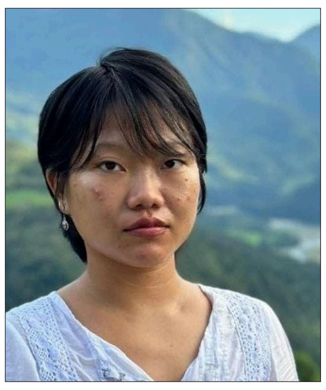
CBI books Arunachal activist Bhanu Tatak over alleged FCRA violations

ITANAGAR

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has registered a case against Arunachal Pradesh-based lawyer and environmental activist Bhanu Tatak for allegedly receiving foreign funds in violation of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA).

Tatak is a legal adviser to the Siang Indigenous Farmers' Forum (SIFF) and coordinator of the civil society group Dibang Resistance. Both organisations have been involved in protests against major hydropower projects proposed in Arunachal Pradesh.

SIFF has opposed the proposed 12,500-MW Siang Upper Multipurpose Project on the Siang river, while Dibang Resistance has campaigned against a proposed



2,880-MW hydropower project on the Dibang river.

According to the CBI's FIR, Tatak allegedly received more than Rs 17.6 lakh from "different foreign organisations and individuals" directly into her personal savings bank account without obtaining mandatory FCRA registration.

The agency alleged that the funds were received from foreign organisations, including the Philippines-based Asia Indigenous Peoples Network on Extractive Industries and Energy and Indigenous Peoples Rights International, Ireland-based Front Line and the UK-based Human Rights Resource Centre.

The CBI has also alleged that Tatak had not filed income tax returns and that the foreign funds were not reflected in official records.

The agency further alleged that the funds were used to "organise and sustain anti-dam protests" in Arunachal Pradesh and claimed that such activities were adversely affecting the country's economic and strategic interests.

SIFF has maintained that the proposed Siang Upper Multipurpose Project poses a serious threat to the indigenous Adi community.

Earlier travel restriction

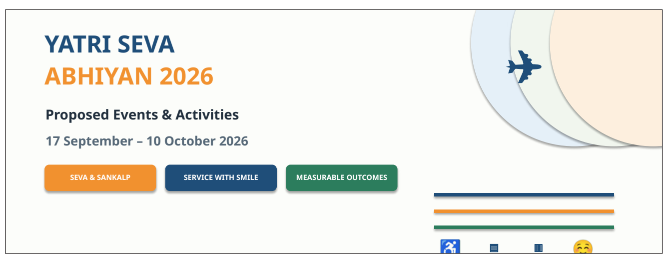
The case comes a year after Tatak was stopped by immigration authorities at Delhi airport from boarding a flight to Ireland based on a lookout circular issued by the Arunachal Pradesh Police.

She was scheduled to attend a three-month academic programme at Dublin City University.

At the time, Tatak described the travel restriction as an "arbitrary abuse of administrative power" and alleged that such actions were increasingly being used against dissenting voices.

The latest CBI action is based on allegations contained in the FIR. The allegations are yet to be established in court.

Yatri Seva Abhiyan Underway at Imphal International Airport



BISWADEEP GUPTA

IMPHAL: The Airports Authority of India (AAI), Imphal International Airport, is observing a 24-day Yatri Seva Abhiyan aimed at improving passenger services and promoting a culture of service, cleanliness, cooperation and courtesy at the airport.

The campaign focuses on passenger facilitation, service quality, safety, cleanliness, hygiene and hospitality. AAI officials, airlines, security agencies, concessionaires and other stakeholders are taking part in various activities during the campaign.Special attention is being given to senior citizens, persons with disabilities, families, first-time travellers and passengers requiring assistance. The airport is also conducting cleanliness and hygiene drives across the terminal and passenger areas.

As part of the initiative, awareness programmes and passenger engagement activities are being organised to improve coordination and address passenger concerns in a timely manner. Safety awareness and safe practices among passengers, staff and stakeholders are also being promoted.The campaign also seeks to showcase Manipur's rich cultural heritage. Opportunities are being provided for local artisans to display and sell handloom, handicrafts and traditional products. Local food items are also being promoted at the airport.The Airport Director, Imphal International Airport, said the campaign was not merely a 24-day activity but an effort to develop a lasting culture of passenger care."Every passenger interaction is an opportunity to serve with professionalism, empathy and courtesy, while upholding the highest standards of safety and security," the Airport Director said.

The AAI said the initiative reflects its continued commitment to keeping passengers at the centre of airport operations and making service quality, cleanliness, safety and courtesy an integral part of everyday airport functioning.

DMU students' hunger strike enters seventh day over PhD stipends

IMPHAL

The indefinite hunger strike by research scholars of Dhanamanjuri University (DMU) entered its seventh day on Tuesday, with students demanding the release of long-pending stipends and accusing the Manipur government of failing to address the issue.

The protest, organised by the Dhanamanjuri University Students' Union (DMU-SU) and supported by the 2005-06 cohort, was launched by PhD scholars who said they had not received stipends since the research programme began.

Konsam Premjit, president of the Democratic Youth Front (DYF), a constituent of the Manipur Democratic People's Front (MDPF), urged the state government to intervene and resolve the issue.

Premjit said no government representative had met the protesting scholars or held discussions with them since the hunger strike began.

According to a fact-finding exercise by the DYF, a Manipur Gazette notification dated October 30, 2017, provides for stipends for PhD research scholars. Premjit alleged that despite the provision, scholars have not received the assistance, including those from the 2022 batch.

The students had earlier submitted

representations and letters to the government seeking intervention. DMU authorities also met Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on July 30 and were reportedly assured that the pending stipends would be released in the first week of September.

Premjit said the assurance had not been fulfilled.

The issue was also raised by the Opposition through a starred question during the recent Assembly session. The government reportedly cited a shortage of funds for the delay in releasing the stipends.

Premjit questioned the explanation, saying financial assistance for research scholars should be treated as a priority.

He said PhD research, particularly in Science and Arts disciplines, involves significant expenses, including laboratory materials, technology, fieldwork, report preparation and publication of research papers.

The proposed stipend of Rs 8,000 a month, he said, was not intended to cover the full cost of research but to provide some financial relief to scholars.

Quest!

The word "lethologica" describes the state of not being able to remember the word you want.

NATIONAL

India issues nationwide alert against Pakistan-made fairness creams over heavy metals presence

NEW DELHI

India's drug regulator has issued a public health alert against sale and distribution of two unauthorised cosmetics products with excessive heavy metals labelled as "Made in Pakistan."

The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) issued the warning against 'Goree Beauty Cream' and 'Chandni Whitening Cream,' - both 'Made in Pakistan' - after the drug regulator through test and analysis confirmed that these cosmetics products are unauthorized.

Sharing the pictures of the two cosmetic products, the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) said that these "are unauthorised and contain excessive heavy metals beyond the specified limits which may pose health risk to the consumers including toxic effects."

It also said that these two cosmetic products were not issued a registration certificate for import by the competent authority for sale in India.

"Cosmetic products used by consumers must be safe for the public. Their manufacturing and import are regulated under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, and the Cosmetics Rules, 2020," the public notice, dated September 8, said.

The standards for cosmetic products are published by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS).

To manufacture cosmetics for sale and distribution, a license must be obtained from the State Licensing Authority.

For the import of cosmetics, the products must be registered with the Central Licensing Authority in accordance with the prescribed rules, said the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI), Dr Rajeev Singh Raghuvanshi.

"The CDSCO through test and analysis has verified that following cosmetic products are unauthorised and not been issued registration certificate for import by the competent authority for sale in India," the notice said.

The DCGI said in view of the public alert consumers should not purchase these cosmetics products and not use such and similarly named cosmetic products if purchased.

Further, the public was also advised to purchase and use authorised cosmetics products containing details of manufacturing license number, manufacturer's details, batch number, date of manufacturing and expiry and Registration number (in case of imported cosmetics).

Consumers were also told that in case of violations observed in label, they should report it to the respective State Drugs Controller for the products manufactured in India and the DCGI for the imported cosmetics products.

It also warned concerned establishments/individuals not to sell, distribute or advertise these products. Regulatory Enforcements Units were also urged to ensure that such unauthorized cosmetics products are not sold in their jurisdiction.

INDIA, UAE DISCUSS STRENGTHENING PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION

NEW DELHI

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, on Tuesday, received Abdulla Saif Al Nuaimi, Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to India, at his residence in New Delhi and discussed strengthening parliamentary cooperation between India and the UAE.

"Pleased to receive Mr Abdulla Saif Al Nuaimi, Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to India, at my residence in New Delhi. The UAE is an important member of BRICS, and I conveyed my deep appreciation for its active participation and constructive contribution during India's BRICS Presidency," Speaker Birla stated on X.

"We had a warm and substantive discussion on the multifaceted and ever-growing India-UAE partnership, which is rooted in mutual trust, shared interests and strong people-to-people ties. We also discussed strengthening parliamentary cooperation between India and the UAE. Both the countries share a relationship of exceptional depth and dynamism," he added.

He called the 4.5 million-strong Indian diaspora in the UAE 'an invaluable bridge' between the two nations. "I am confident that our parliamentary engagement and broader bilateral cooperation will continue to reach new milestones in the years ahead," the Speaker highlighted. India and the UAE on Saturday reiterated the significance of their Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and discussed opportunities to enhance cooperation in emerging areas, including defence, space, nuclear energy, technology, and innovation.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan met on the sidelines of the 18th BRICS Summit here and agreed that the two countries would continue to work closely through the BRICS platform to advance shared interests and priorities and further strengthen cooperation.

The two leaders acknowledged the progress achieved in bilateral relations in a wide range of sectors.

According to an official statement, they noted the announcement by UAE's International Holding Company to invest in the development of a USD 11.5 billion integrated greenfield aluminium project in Odisha, India's largest integrated aluminium investment.

The project is expected to position Odisha as a global aluminium manufacturing hub.

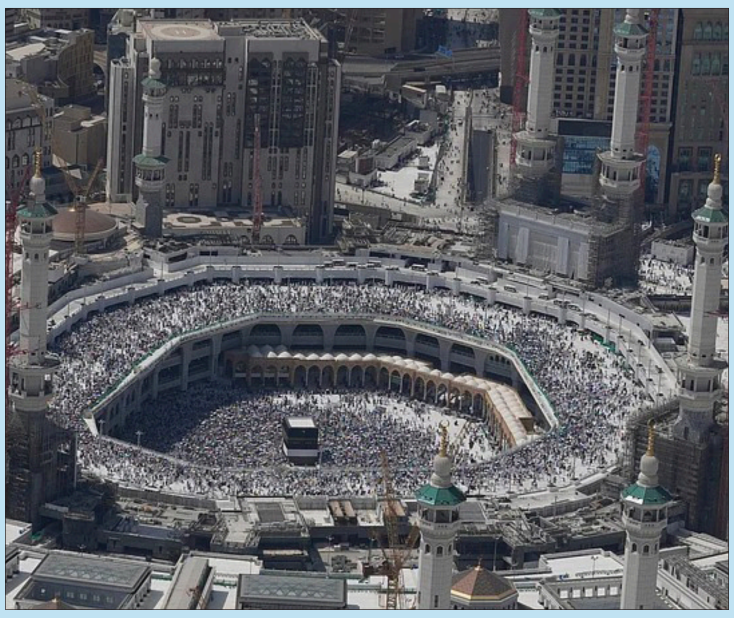
The two leaders also acknowledged the important role that sovereign investment platform L'Imad could play in further deepening the India-UAE partnership for mutual benefit.

"The visit reaffirmed the tradition of regular leadership-level engagement and the generational continuity that underpins the enduring relationship between India and the UAE," the statement said.

INTERNATIONAL

Saudi says Houthis target Mecca, warn of 'red line'

RIYADH



The Saudi-led coalition battling Yemen's Houthis accused the rebels on Wednesday of targeting Islam's holy city Mecca, sparking outrage across the Muslim world and deepening the conflict roiling the region.

Fresh fighting between the Iran-backed Houthis and Saudi-backed Yemeni government has dragged in Riyadh, with the Houthis declaring a maritime blockade on the kingdom and targeting its ships in the Red Sea.

Last week's lightning offensive saw the group seize control of the entirety of Yemen's Red Sea coast and the Bab al-Mandab Strait, a vital artery for Saudi oil exports as the wider Middle East war chokes off the Strait of Hormuz strategic shipping route.

The Houthis swiftly rejected as a "lie" Riyadh's report that it shot down a drone from the rebels heading towards the Saudi city of Mecca, which attracts millions of pilgrims each year.

"The claims about targeting Mecca are a worn-out lie that has been used before and no longer fools anyone," Hazem al-Assad from the Houthis' politburo wrote on X.

The Saudi coalition vowed retaliation, warning that the security of holy sites was a "red line".

"The security of the Two Holy Mosques and the pilgrims is a red line, and the Joint Forces Command of the Coalition will not hesitate to take the necessary and deterrent measures against the Terrorist Houthi Militia," the coalition said in a statement shared by spokesman Turki al-Maliki on X.

Muslim pilgrims pray at the Grand Mosque, ahead of the annual Hajj pilgrimage in the Muslim holy city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

Yemen at risk of getting dragged back into war as Saudis and Houthis exchange airstrikes

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation -- a bloc of 57 Muslim countries -- condemned the "heinous" attack.

Saudi Arabia had issued brief alerts on Tuesday over possible attacks in Mecca and across swathes of the kingdom's south, which borders Yemen.

The alerts, including the first one issued in Mecca since the Middle East war erupted in February, came a day after a wave of ballistic missile and drone attacks launched from Yemen wounded 13 people in the kingdom's south.

Fighting flared in July when the Houthis, who have for years controlled swathes of northern Yemen, launched a large-scale offensive against Yemeni government forces.

The conflict in the Arabian Peninsula's poorest country has forced 82,000 people to flee their homes since the start of September, according to the United Nations.

Yemen's permanent representative at the UN, Abdullah al-Saadi, said Yemenis were fighting to restore "national institutions across every inch of their land", and called on the international community to take action against the Houthis.

Muslim pilgrims pray at the Grand Mosque, ahead of the annual Hajj pilgrimage in the Muslim holy city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

Yemen's plea came as Saudi Arabia and Egypt called for free navigation in the Red Sea following the Houthi's offensive in the vital waterway.

De facto Saudi leader Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi called on Tuesday for "ensuring the freedom and security of maritime navigation" through the Hormuz and Bab al-Mandab -- which links the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden, the Egyptian presidency said.

The revival of Yemen's civil war, dormant since 2022, has left Riyadh rushing to respond.

US media reported last week that the Saudi crown prince made a personal request to President Donald Trump for US intervention, but was turned down.

The Houthis have insisted that there is no threat to navigation in the Bab al-Mandab except for Saudi vessels.

Any attacks in the waterway are likely to make it less attractive to shippers.

Disruption in the strait could cause Egypt to feel the pinch too, as the Red Sea serves as the gateway to the Suez Canal, upon which Cairo relies for crucial foreign revenue.

Canal revenues are currently around half of what they were before the Houthis first started attacking Red Sea shipping in 2023, a campaign they said was in solidarity with Palestinians during Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza.

On Tuesday, Qatar warned of dire consequences if Bab al-Mandab was closed, saying it would be "catastrophic for the entire world".

The Houthis have also targeted oil infrastructure in Saudi Arabia, the world's leading crude exporter, helping push global prices above the $100-a-barrel threshold.

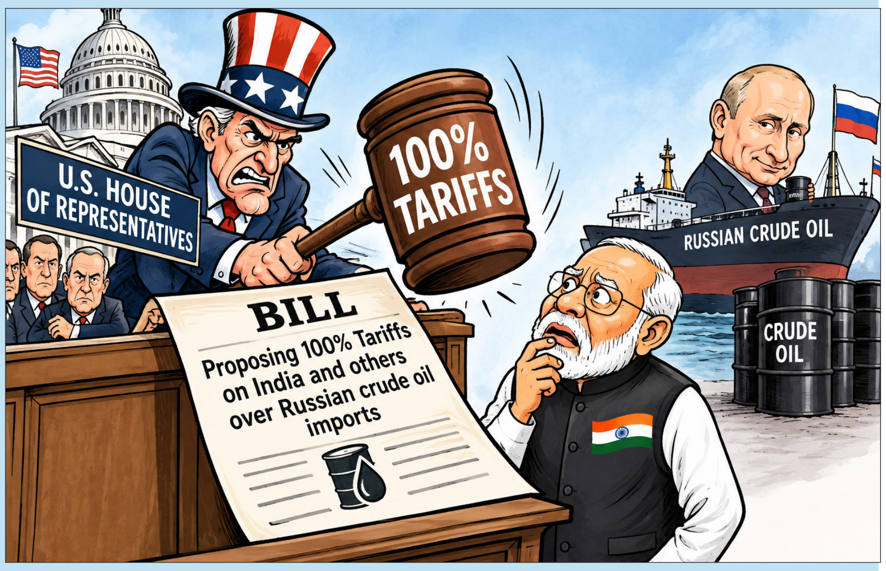
The Saudi-led coalition said it would deal with the attacks "firmly to protect the sovereignty of the Kingdom", and would take "all necessary operational measures to deter this... hostile and extremist approach".

Houthi military spokesman Yahya Saree said Tuesday that Saudi Arabia launched 52 airstrikes on Yemen over the past 24 hours, accusing it of targeting civilian sites, including schools and bridges.

But Riyadh's strikes have failed to reverse the group's gains.

A US military task force is working to enhance intelligence-sharing and planning assistance for Saudi forces as they face attacks, a US official told AFP on Tuesday.

US House moves bill proposing 100 per cent tariffs on India, others over Russian crude oil imports



WASHINGTON

The US House of Representatives voted to advance a bill that would authorise President Donald Trump to impose 100 per cent tariffs on India and other countries for buying oil and gas from Russia and extend existing sanctions on Iran.

The Lindsey O Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026 cleared a procedural hurdle in the House of Representatives on Tuesday evening after two Democratic lawmakers broke ranks with the party and voted in favour with the Republicans.

The resolution to advance the Russia sanctions bill and a slew of other legislations was approved by a 214-211 vote, shocking the House Democratic leadership.

The bill is expected to come up for a final vote in the House on Wednesday.

Democratic Congressman Gregory Meeks, the ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, on Monday opposed the Russia sanctions bill contending that it would grant President Trump unchecked authority to impose tariffs without any guardrails.

Last month, the US Senate passed the bill with an overwhelming 86-11 majority.

The bill seeks to impose sanctions not only on Russia's leadership and energy sector, but also on the "shadow fleet" of vessels that enable Moscow to evade sanctions on oil deliveries.

The vote on the bill is taking place at a time when pro-Ukraine groups have stepped up efforts to lobby support for their cause.

The Ukraine Action Summit, organised by the American Coalition for Ukraine, is underway here to lobby with US lawmakers for continued support of Kyiv.

The US believes that Russia's crude oil trade is funding the war against Ukraine.

The Bill also seeks to authorise President Donald Trump to impose 100 per cent tariffs on Russia's top oil trading partners including China and India.

The bill passed by the US Senate on August 7 does not name Russia's trading partners, but mentions five largest importers of oil and gas by volume.

The bill has to be passed by the House of Representatives before it is sent to the President for signature.

The House breaks into early recess on Thursday and is expected to reconvene on November 9 after the mid-term elections.

UPI MDR from October 15: What merchants and consumers need to know

S. BHATTACHARJEE

India's digital payments landscape is set for a significant change from October 15, 2026, with the introduction of a Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) on certain high-value Unified Payments Interface (UPI) transactions.

Under the revised framework, merchants will pay an MDR of 0.4 per cent on person-to-merchant (P2M) UPI transactions above Rs 2,000. The move marks the end of the zero-MDR regime for a segment of UPI merchant payments that has been in place since January 2020.

For consumers, however, the government has made it clear that UPI payments will remain free. There will be no customer-facing transaction fee, monthly quota or volume-based limit on free UPI usage.

The new framework is designed to introduce a revenue stream for the payments ecosystem while keeping small-value transactions and small merchants largely outside the levy.

What changes from October 15?

The most important change concerns P2M payments above Rs 2,000 made directly from a user's bank account to a merchant's bank account.

Such transactions will attract an MDR of 0.4 per cent, subject to a maximum charge of Rs 300.

For example, a Rs 3,000 purchase would generate an MDR of Rs 12. A Rs 50,000 transaction would attract Rs 200. On a Rs 1 lakh transaction, the 0.4 per cent calculation would amount to Rs 400, but the applicable MDR would be restricted to the Rs 300 cap.

The charge is levied within the merchant payment ecosystem rather than on the person making the payment.

The Finance Ministry has specifically clarified that customers will not have to pay a charge for using UPI.

The MDR collected will be distributed among participants in the payments ecosystem, including banks and payment application providers. The government and the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) have said the revenue will help support infrastructure resilience, cybersecurity, innovation and customer service.

What remains free for consumers?

For ordinary UPI users, there is no change in the basic experience of making payments.

Person-to-person (P2P) transactions will continue to be free, regardless of the amount involved. P2P payments account for about 37 per cent of UPI transaction volume and around 70 per cent of its value, according to the revised framework.

Consumers will also continue to make merchant payments of up to Rs 2,000 without MDR.

The government has ruled out monthly quotas, volume restrictions or tiered limits on free UPI transactions.

Existing daily transaction limits, which generally range from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 5 lakh depending on the category, will continue. These limits are risk-management measures imposed by banks and NPCI and are not fees for using UPI.

Which merchant payments will be affected?

The government estimates that only around 4 per cent of merchant transactions will be affected by the new MDR framework.

More than 95 per cent of P2M transactions are valued at Rs 2,000 or less and will therefore remain outside the standard MDR regime.

This means the bulk of everyday UPI purchases — including low-value payments at shops, restaurants and other businesses — will continue without MDR.

The new charge is primarily aimed at larger merchant transactions.

However, not every transaction above Rs 2,000 will attract the standard 0.4 per cent rate.

Small merchants get an exemption

Small vendors operating under the Person-to-Person-Merchant (P2PM) framework will continue to enjoy zero MDR on their UPI transactions if their monthly QR-code receipts remain within Rs 1 lakh.

The P2PM framework is intended for small merchants and informal vendors. It does not require them to register for GST or replace their existing QR infrastructure.

A merchant that crosses the Rs 1 lakh monthly threshold for three consecutive months will move into the standard P2M category.

The provision is intended to protect small businesses that rely heavily on QR-code payments while introducing charges primarily for larger merchant transactions.

Special rates for key sectors

The revised framework also recognises that a uniform MDR could have a greater impact on sectors with high transaction volumes or relatively thin margins.

Railways, telecom, insurance, fuel and agricultural-input payments above Rs 2,000 will therefore attract a flat Rs 5 MDR, rather than the standard 0.4 per cent rate.

These sectors account for nearly 17 per cent of P2M transaction volume but about 46 per cent of its value.

The Rs 5 treatment will also apply to government utility bill payments, including electricity, water and piped gas, as well as education-related payments such as school and university fees.

For financial-market transactions, including mutual funds, securities, stockbrokers and dealers, the MDR will be substantially lower at 0.02 per cent, capped at Rs 300.

Recurring UPI payments remain outside MDR

Automated recurring payments made through UPI mandates or AutoPay will not attract MDR.

This includes recurring payments such as utility bills, OTT subscriptions and regular investment contributions.

The distinction means that a consumer using UPI AutoPay for a recurring service will not face an additional MDR-related charge simply because the payment exceeds Rs 2,000.

What about RuPay Credit Card on UPI?

The 0.4 per cent MDR does not apply universally to every type of UPI-linked payment.

The new framework covers direct user-bank-account-to-merchant-bank-account P2M transactions.

Credit-linked payments, including RuPay Credit Card on UPI and pre-sanctioned credit lines, will operate under separate rules.

This distinction is important because the economics and fee structures of credit-linked payments differ from those of account-to-account UPI transfers.

Can merchants pass the MDR on to customers?

The government has sought to prevent the new MDR from becoming a direct charge on consumers.

UPI application providers have been prohibited from imposing platform fees or hidden charges on users for these transactions. Banks have also been advised to ensure that merchants do not pass MDR costs directly to customers.

In other words, although the merchant ecosystem will incur a cost on eligible transactions, the consumer-facing UPI payment is intended to remain free.

The practical impact on merchants will nevertheless depend on how payment providers structure their arrangements and how businesses absorb the cost.

Why is MDR being introduced now?

The decision reverses a policy that played an important role in the rapid expansion of UPI.

The zero-MDR regime was introduced in January 2020 as an incentive to accelerate adoption of digital payments. Since then, UPI has grown from an emerging payment system into the backbone of India's retail digital payments infrastructure.

But maintaining the system has also involved significant costs.

Banks, payment service providers and fintech companies have argued for years that operating a nationwide real-time payments network without a direct revenue stream is difficult to sustain.

Industry estimates cited in reports put the annual cost of running UPI infrastructure — including server capacity, bandwidth, fraud prevention and technical support from banks — at around Rs 20,000 crore.

The government has previously supported the zero-MDR system through budgetary incentives, with around Rs 2,000 crore a year allocated for the scheme.

The Payments Council of India, whose members include Airtel Payments Bank, Amazon Pay, Google Pay, Cashfree and Jio Payments Bank, had also sought a reconsideration of the zero-MDR policy.

RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra recently highlighted the underlying issue by observing that "someone has to pay the cost", while noting that the decision on MDR rests with the government.

Parliament's Standing Committee on Finance has also raised concerns about the sustainability of the zero-MDR model, pointing to the pressure it places on public finances and the need for a viable revenue mechanism to support long-term investment in the payments infrastructure.

UPI's enormous scale

The debate over MDR comes as UPI continues to operate at unprecedented scale.

In August 2026 alone, UPI processed 2,451 crore transactions worth Rs 29.9 lakh crore, according to government data cited in reports.

At such volumes, even a small charge on a limited segment of transactions can generate a substantial revenue stream for the ecosystem.

At the same time, the government has sought to ensure that monetisation does not undermine the widespread adoption of UPI among consumers and small businesses.

Five per cent of total MDR collections will therefore be placed in a dedicated fund aimed at promoting UPI adoption among small merchants, particularly in smaller and underserved markets.

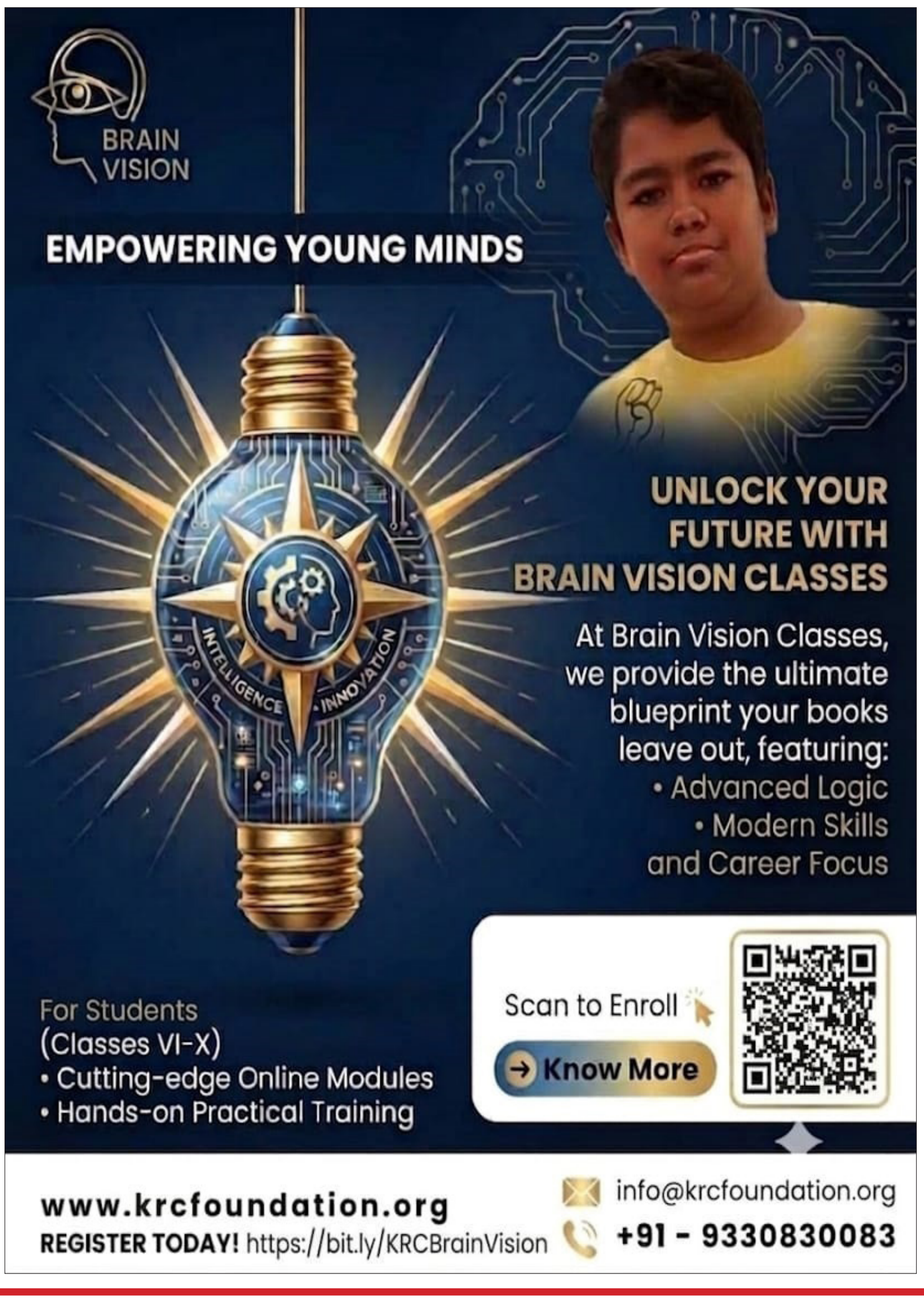
What the new framework means

For consumers, everyday UPI payments remain free. P2P transfers remain free, merchant payments up to Rs 2,000 remain outside MDR, and there will be no monthly quota on free UPI usage.

For small merchants, the P2PM exemption provides continued zero-MDR access for those receiving up to Rs 1 lakh a month through UPI QR codes.

For larger merchants, P2M transactions above Rs 2,000 will generally attract a 0.4 per cent MDR, capped at Rs 300, although several sectors have separate rates.For the payments ecosystem, the framework creates a direct revenue mechanism intended to support the infrastructure required to operate UPI at its current scale.

The revised MDR and threshold structure will take effect on October 15, 2026. The central policy question will now be whether the new revenue model can strengthen the financial sustainability of UPI while preserving the low-cost, widely accessible payment experience that drove its rapid adoption.



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Published by KRC Foundation.H.No. 15, Old Kalibari Road, Malugram, Silchar, Assam 788002. Editor-in-chief: Biswadeep Gupta. Tel: 8721838313, e-mail: krctimes@gmail.com www.krctimes.com

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