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PERSPECTIVE

## MINDSET: I CAN AND I WILL.

## ‘If the CM Knows, Why Doesn’t the DFO?’ Himanta Warns of Action Over Illegal Quarries in Hojai

**GUWAHATI**  
Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has questioned the role of forest officials over alleged illegal stone quarrying in Hojai district, warning of disciplinary action against the concerned Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) if the allegations are found to be true.

Sarma said he had received information about two or three illegal stone quarries operating in the district and questioned how the DFO could remain unaware of such activities.

“If the chief minister knows about it, why does the DFO not know?” he asked.

The chief minister said the DFO should be suspended immediately if the allegations were substantiated, arguing that such operations could not continue without the knowledge of the responsible officer.

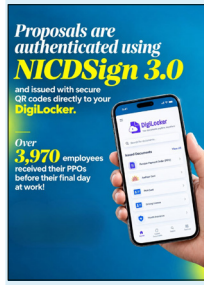
“This work is not happening without the DFO knowing about it,” Sarma said.

The remarks signal the Assam government’s tough stance on alleged illegal mining and quarrying, while also raising questions about monitoring and accountability within the forest department.

However, the allegations against the DFO have yet to be independently established, and no specific details regarding an inquiry or disciplinary action were immediately available.

The next steps by the authorities, including whether an investigation will be initiated and action taken against the concerned officials, remain to be seen.

### WHO SAID WHAT



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# Face-offs continue along Arunachal border, ITBP chief flags Chinese troop deployments



**NEW DELHI**  
Face-offs between Indian security personnel and Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) troops continue at multiple locations along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Arunachal Pradesh, with some confrontations reportedly persisting since July, Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) Director General Shatrughjeet Kapur has confirmed.Speaking

at the Himveer Samman Samaroh on Thursday, Kapur said Indian and Chinese troops had come face-to-face at several points along the disputed border in recent days, indicating that tensions in the region remain unresolved.“In the past few days, a situation arose where face-offs happened at several locations... and it still continues,” the ITBP chief said. Kapur also referred to Chinese

military deployments in forward areas near the LAC, stating that PLA personnel had pitched tents around six to seven kilometres from India’s perception of the Line of Actual Control, according to reports. The reported deployments include areas around Asaphila and locations near Taksing in Arunachal Pradesh, where the two countries have differing perceptions of the

boundary.Indian forces have also undertaken counter-deployments to safeguard their positions and prevent further encroachment, Kapur indicated.The latest remarks come amid continuing efforts by India and China to address border-related concerns through military-level engagement. On September 6, Corps Commander-level talks were held at the Wacha-Damai border meeting point on the Indian side to discuss outstanding issues along the LAC in the Taksing sector.Despite such engagements, the reported face-offs underscore the continuing challenges faced by security forces along the sensitive frontier.Kapur also highlighted the ITBP’s efforts to strengthen its specialised high-altitude combat capabilities, emphasising that the force must retain its mountain warfare expertise while carrying out its border-guarding responsibilities. Referring to the newly raised Shaurya commandos, he credited the specialised unit with playing an important role in responding to situations along the frontier.

“Our newly raised Shaurya com-

mandos played an exemplary role in this. ITBP was raised as a mountain guerrilla force and we were given border guarding duty along China in 2004,” Kapur said.“We need not leave our original function, and a specialised high-altitude mountain fighting force is being set up, distinct from the Army. We will soon have one full battalion of Shaurya commandos; high-altitude deployment is our strength,” he added.The ITBP, which guards India’s frontier with China across some of the country’s most challenging mountainous terrain, has been strengthening its operational preparedness in response to evolving security requirements along the border.The ITBP chief also underlined the growing importance of drones in contemporary warfare, pointing to China’s substantial investments in military modernisation.He said drone technology could enable smaller countries to challenge militarily stronger adversaries, citing conflicts involving Russia and Ukraine, as well as Iran and the United States, as examples of the changing character of warfare.

## COCOMI Threatens Statewide Campaign from October 31, Sets October 30 Deadline for Peace

**IMPHAL**  
The Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), along with like-minded Naga civil society organisations, has threatened to launch a large-scale campaign across Manipur from October 31 if the state government fails to take concrete steps to end the ongoing conflict by October 30.

The announcement was made during a sit-in protest organised by COCOMI, the Foothills Naga Coordinating Committee (FNCC) and the Naga Humanitarian Aid Committee Manipur (NHACM) at Lamphel on Thursday. The protesters demanded an end to what they described as “India’s proxy war” in the state.

Addressing the media after the protest, COCOMI convenor YK Dhiren accused the state government of making misleading claims about the restoration of peace, particularly during visits to hill districts.

He alleged that assurances about improving security had encouraged civilians to travel to areas that remained unsafe, potentially exposing them to further danger.

Dhiren also demanded that the government take responsibility for the killing of three Meitei woodcutters in an attack at Khongban Sunurok on October 19. He claimed that the victims had relied on government assurances that normalcy was gradually returning before venturing into the area.

COCOMI alleges continued conflict

Dhiren alleged that the continuing violence amounted to a proxy war being orchestrated by the In-

dian government through Kuki militants. He said COCOMI and its supporting organisations would expand their movement across both the hill and valley districts if their demands were not met by the October 30 deadline.

The allegations against the Centre and the claimed involvement of militants reflect the protesters’ position and have not been independently established.

The proposed campaign comes amid continuing concerns over civilian safety and the prolonged ethnic conflict in Manipur, which erupted in May 2023.

Naga organisations call for concrete action

NHACM co-convenor Amana Thaimai said indigenous communities had endured more than three years of conflict and alleged that the situation had continued to worsen rather than improve.

She said people were suffering in their own land and urged the state government to take decisive steps to resolve the crisis within the stipulated timeframe.

Thaimai warned that the organisations would intensify their agitation from October 31 if the government failed to respond to their demands.During the sit-in, demonstrators raised slogans such as “End proxy war”, “Long live Manipur” and “Stop killing innocent people”, calling for an end to civilian killings and a resolution to the prolonged unrest.

With October 30 set as the deadline, attention is now on the state government’s response and whether the organisations proceed with their proposed statewide campaign from the following day.

### Tripura Police Tighten Security for Agartala’s Mayer Gomon Carnival

**AGARTALA**  
Tripura Police have stepped up security and traffic management arrangements for the Mayer Gomon Durga Puja carnival in Agartala, deploying personnel from the state police and central forces to ensure the procession passes off peacefully.

Inspector General of Police (Law and Order) Menchak Ipper said a comprehensive security plan had been drawn up, covering key sections of the procession route and designated points for crowd management and emergency response.

Ipper chaired a preparatory meeting with senior police and traffic officials ahead of the carnival.Those present included West District Superintendent of Police Namit Pathak, Traffic Superintendent of Police Kanta Jangir and other senior officers.

During the meeting, the IGP congratulated the people of Tripura on the successful completion of the Durga Puja celebrations and highlighted the cultural significance of the Mayer Gomon carnival, which attracts visitors from different parts of India and abroad.

He said the event provides an important platform to showcase Tripura’s cultural heritage and urged participants to maintain discipline and cooperate with the authorities throughout the procession. According to Ipper, adequate personnel from Tripura Police, the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), along with officers from various units, have been deployed to oversee security and regulate crowds.The police have also stressed the importance of public cooperation in managing the large gathering. Ipper advised participants to approach police personnel if they encounter any difficulties during the procession and to follow instructions issued by the authorities.Emphasising that discipline is essential at major public events, the IGP said participants should comply with police directives even when they appear inconvenient, as the measures are intended to protect the safety and comfort of everyone attending the carnival.

## Manipur MLA Pushes for ‘Operation Manipur’, Seeks Review of SoO Pact



**IMPHAL**  
Manipur MLA Rajkumar Imo Singh has urged Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla to initiate a comprehensive security drive, provisionally titled “Operation Manipur”, to recover illegal arms, dismantle unlawful armed networks and restore public confidence amid continuing security concerns in the state. The legislator has also called for the government to consider scrapping the Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement with certain armed groups.In a letter to the Governor dated October 22, the Sagolband legislator said the prolonged unrest and recent civilian killings, including reported killings in the Nongshum Hill area, underscored the need for sustained and coordinated security measures to protect lives and restore normalcy.Singh proposed a time-bound initiative involving the state government, Manipur Police, central armed forces and other security agencies. The proposed operation would focus on recovering illegal firearms and ammunition, strengthening security in vulnerable areas and ensuring that those responsible for targeted killings and other serious crimes are brought to justice.Acknowledging recent security operations, including reported arrests linked to the Nongshum killings

and the recovery of firearms, ammunition and explosives, Singh called for such efforts to continue through coordinated action, thorough investigations and appropriate legal proceedings.

The legislator also stressed the need for consistent enforcement of the ground rules governing the Suspension of Operations agreement. He urged the authorities to investigate alleged violations and take appropriate action against armed groups or individuals found to have breached the agreed conditions.Singh called on the government to consider abrogating the SoO arrangement. Pending any decision on its continuation, he said, the existing ground rules should be enforced transparently, with accountability for established violations.The SoO agreement involves the government and certain armed groups in Manipur. Its implementation has remained contentious amid the state’s prolonged ethnic conflict, with questions surrounding compliance and the role of armed groups continuing to figure in the security debate.Singh maintained that a security initiative should not be confined to weapons recovery and law enforcement. He called for parallel measures to rehabilitate displaced families, restore essential civic services and protect critical infrastructure in affected areas.Emphasising constitutional principles and human rights, the MLA said action against unlawful armed activities must follow due process and remain impartial, without discrimination based on community, identity or affiliation.

# 31,000-Crore India-Myanmar Border Fencing Project Reviewed by Manipur Governor

**IMPHAL**  
Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla has reviewed the progress of the Centre’s ₹31,000-crore India-Myanmar border fencing project, stressing the need to complete the work within the stipulated timeframe.

The review took place during a security meeting at Lok Bhavan on Thursday, where officials also discussed law and order in border areas and measures to strengthen security arrangements.

The project covers the 1,643-km international boundary shared by Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland. Officials highlighted challenges including land acquisition, difficult terrain, boundary disputes and opposition from sections of local communities.

Colonel Dev, Commanding Officer of the Border Roads Task Force (BRTF), briefed the meeting on the progress of the fencing project. The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) is responsible for executing the construction work.



The meeting was attended by the state’s chief secretary, security adviser, director general of police, addition-

al chief secretaries, the home commissioner and senior officials from Assam Rifles and the BRTF. District officials

from Ukhrul, Churachandpur, Chandel and Tengnoupal also presented updates on security conditions and construction activities in their respective areas.

Progress along the international boundary

The India-Myanmar border stretches across four northeastern states, with 520 km in Arunachal Pradesh, 510 km in Mizoram, 398 km in Manipur and 215 km in Nagaland. According to administrative information presented during the review, 1,472 km of the international boundary has been demarcated, while around 171 km remains unresolved because of legal and geographical complications. Boundary-related difficulties have also affected work in parts of Manipur’s Chandel district.

In the Moreh sector, 9,214 km of fencing, along with a parallel patrol road, has been completed. Work has also been authorised for an additional 20,862 km stretch.

Electronic surveillance under trial

Alongside physical fencing, authorities are exploring technology-based surveillance systems to strengthen monitoring along vulnerable sections of the border.

Assam Rifles is implementing two pilot projects under the Hybrid Surveillance System (HSS), one each in Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. Each pilot covers a one-kilometre stretch to assess the effectiveness of virtual fencing and electronic surveillance.

Depending on the outcome of the trials, the system is proposed to be extended to an additional 83 km of the border.The Centre is also moving towards biometric verification for cross-border movement within a 10-km border belt as part of changes to the existing Free Movement Regime (FMR). The proposed arrangements could significantly affect how residents of border communities cross the international boundary.

Terrain and local opposition pose challenges

Officials identified difficult mountainous terrain, delays in

land acquisition, opposition from Naga and Mizo organisations and occasional militant attacks as major obstacles to the project’s implementation.

During a visit to Kamjong district on October 21, Manipur Director General of Police Mukesh Singh and other senior police officials met representatives of Assam Rifles and the Border Security Force (BSF) to assess the security situation and improve coordination among the forces.

The team also interacted with representatives of Kuki and Naga civil society organisations and assured them of government support for restoring peace in the area.

The border fencing project is intended to strengthen surveillance and curb infiltration, smuggling and other illegal activities. However, its timely completion will depend not only on construction progress but also on resolving land and boundary disputes, addressing local concerns and maintaining security in the border regions.



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PUNJAB’S  
DRUG WAR

With drug networks expanding, unemployment deepening and rehabilitation remaining inadequate, Punjab needs coordinated action from the Centre and the state-not political promises, but measurable results.

Punjab's battle against drugs has reached a point where political declarations can no longer substitute for tangible progress. Union Home Minister Amit Shah's promise to eliminate the drug menace by December 2029, should the BJP win the 2027 Assembly election, has brought the issue back into the political spotlight. The ambition is significant, but the challenge demands more than an electoral pledge. It requires a sustained strategy that addresses the drug trade, protects those who expose it and tackles the social and economic conditions that make addiction difficult to overcome.

The scale of the problem is alarming. Punjab accounted for 298 of the 305 drone-linked smuggling cases detected across India in 2025, according to the figures cited in the latest debate over the state's drug crisis. Such incidents point to the growing importance of cross-border smuggling networks and the use of technology to transport narcotics and other contraband. Investigations have also highlighted alleged links between drug traffickers, organised crime and arms smuggling. The problem, therefore, cannot be reduced to individual drug users or isolated police cases. It involves networks that require intelligence-led policing, financial investigations and effective coordination between central and state agencies.

The killing of anti-drug activist Parvinder Singh Jhota at a chemist's shop in Mansa on October 13 has added a disturbing dimension to the crisis. Jhota was reportedly shot dead during a Facebook Live broadcast, allegedly by the shop owner. The incident raises serious questions about the safety of those who challenge suspected drug-related activities and the ability of law enforcement agencies to protect witnesses and activists. An effective anti-drug campaign must create an environment in which citizens can report suspected trafficking without fearing retaliation.

Punjab's drug problem, however, cannot be understood through law enforcement alone. Economic distress, unemployment, underemployment, falling agricultural returns and indebtedness have contributed to the vulnerability of sections of the state's youth. When farming offers uncertain returns and secure employment remains elusive, the attraction of migration can grow, while some young people become susceptible to substance abuse and exploitation by criminal networks.

The relationship between addiction and economic hardship is also circular. Substance dependence can destroy livelihoods, strain families and push people further into debt and social isolation. Treating addiction merely as a criminal problem overlooks this reality. Equally, acknowledging its social roots must not become an excuse for allowing traffickers and organised criminal groups to operate with impunity.

The Aam Aadmi Party government has launched initiatives intended to combine enforcement with treatment. Its Yudh Nashian Virudh campaign, introduced in March 2025, has reportedly resulted in tens of thousands of people being referred to de-addiction and opioid-substitution centres. The government has also highlighted arrests, convictions and action against individuals accused of involvement in drug-related activities. These measures indicate the scale of the official response, but administrative figures alone cannot establish whether the drug trade is shrinking or whether recovery is becoming more sustainable.

Arrests are important, but they are only one measure of performance. The more consequential questions are whether the supply of narcotics has declined, whether major trafficking networks have been dismantled, whether illicit financial flows have been traced and whether those who provide protection or logistical support to traffickers have faced investigation. Equally important is whether people who enter treatment can access counselling, medical care and long-term support to prevent relapse.

The distinction between enforcement and outcomes is central to any serious assessment of Punjab's anti-drug campaign. A high number of arrests may reflect active policing, but it does not automatically demonstrate that the supply chain has been disrupted. Similarly, a high conviction rate must be assessed alongside the quality of investigations, the prosecution of major operators and the extent to which the criminal infrastructure has been weakened. The political contest over responsibility has done little to resolve these questions. The AAP government has accused previous administrations of allowing the problem to grow, while opposition parties continue to question the effectiveness of the present campaign. The BJP, meanwhile, has made the drug menace a prominent political issue ahead of the 2027 election. Yet the Centre has substantial responsibilities of its own through border security, the Narcotics Control Bureau and coordination with other agencies.

Punjab's geographical position makes cooperation particularly important. Border surveillance, drone detection, intelligence-sharing and investigations into interstate and transnational trafficking cannot be handled effectively through fragmented efforts. The Centre and the state must work together regardless of their political differences. Blame-shifting between Chandigarh and New Delhi risks creating precisely the gaps that organised criminal networks can exploit. A coordinated strategy should begin with a permanent Centre-state task force focused on cross-border trafficking, drone-assisted smuggling, arms supplies and the financial operations of drug networks. Investigations must move beyond the seizure of consignments to identify suppliers, financiers, intermediaries and alleged protectors.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

“Whoever wants music instead of noise, joy instead of pleasure, soul instead of gold, creative work instead of business, passion instead of foolery, finds no home in this trivial world of ours.”  
- Hermann Hesse

RUBIO’S INDIA VISIT SIGNALS  
SHIFT TOWARDS TRADE AND  
ENERGY DIPLOMACY



DR D. K. GIRI

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's two-day visit to India on October 20-21 came at a time when political differences had strained relations between Washington and New Delhi. Yet, rather than concentrating exclusively on diplomatic disagreements, Rubio placed trade, energy security and private-sector investment at the centre of his engagements. His meetings in Mumbai and planned visit to Jamnagar, home to the world's largest oil-refining complex, highlighted an approach that seeks to sustain practical cooperation despite wider geopolitical tensions.

The visit also raised a broader question about India's foreign policy: should economic engagement be treated as a central instrument of diplomacy rather than a separate track? Economic cooperation can strengthen political relationships, just as diplomatic understanding can facilitate trade and investment. Rubio's itinerary offered a reminder of how closely the two are linked.

Mumbai meeting sparks political debate

Rubio arrived in Mumbai on October 20, beginning his second visit to India in six months. At 3.40 pm, he paid tribute at the 26/11 memorial at the Taj Mahal Palace hotel. Ten minutes later, he held bilateral talks with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar at the same venue.

The choice of Mumbai rather than New Delhi triggered a political controversy. US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor reportedly said that Rubio had asked to meet Jaishankar in Mumbai. Opposition leaders questioned the circumstances, arguing that the arrangement appeared to undermine India's diplomatic standing. They asked why India's foreign minister should travel to meet his American counterpart rather than host him in the national capital.

The Ministry of External Affairs sought to play down the controversy. Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal pointed out that India had hosted foreign dignitaries outside New Delhi for years. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he noted, had received the Spanish prime minister in Vadodara and the Mauritian prime minister in Varanasi, while meetings of foreign ministers had also taken place in Goa.

According to the government's explanation, holding the talks in Mumbai did not signify a reduction in diplomatic status. Instead, it recognised the importance of India's commercial centre-a point Rubio also emphasised.

The episode illustrates how the location and format of diplomatic meetings can become subjects of domestic political debate. But the substantive question is whether the engagement produces progress on issues important to both countries.

Jamnagar and the significance of energy cooperation

Rubio's visit to Jamnagar on October 21 was expected to underline the growing importance of energy ties. The refinery complex operated by Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries has a capacity of around 1.4 million barrels a day, making it one of the most significant refining facilities in the world.

Jamnagar has acquired added strategic importance amid discussions about potential Indian investment in the United States. In March, President Donald Trump announced that Reliance was investing up to \$10 billion in a proposed oil refinery in Brownsville, Texas. If realised, the project would

represent a major addition to US refining capacity.

The prospect of such investment provides a commercial rationale for Rubio's interest in India's refining industry. His Mumbai schedule also included meetings with Gautam Adani and Tata Sons chairman N. Chandrasekaran, signalling Washington's desire to strengthen engagement with major Indian business groups.

These contacts suggest that the private sector could play an important role in stabilising the bilateral relationship. Corporate investment, energy infrastructure and supply-chain cooperation create interests that can endure even when governments disagree on other issues.

Russian oil remains a sensitive issue

The visit took place against the backdrop of continuing tensions over India's purchases of Russian crude oil. India, one of the largest buyers of Russian oil, has sought to balance its energy requirements with pressure from Western governments over Moscow's war in Ukraine.

Shortly before Rubio arrived in India, Trump announced a temporary exemption from certain restrictions affecting Indian purchases of Russian oil. The relief offered Indian refiners greater flexibility at a time when conflict in West Asia was adding uncertainty to global energy markets.

The wider sanctions framework has remained a source of concern. Legislation associated with US Senator Lindsey Graham in 2026 proposed giving the American president the authority to impose tariffs of up to 100 per cent on countries buying Russian oil. Any such measures could have significant implications for India's energy security and trade relations with Washington.

However, the exemption was not necessarily a permanent change in American policy. Rubio indicated that the Trump administration could take up to 60 days to assess the effects of the restrictions. The immediate relief therefore offered flexibility, but left uncertainty over the longer-term position.

Speaking in Samarkand on October 20, Rubio acknowledged the difficulties countries face in changing their energy sources quickly. He said that countries such as India had voluntarily diversified their supplies but continued to obtain substantial amounts of energy from Russia because replacing existing sources overnight was not easy.

His remarks reflected the tension between Washington's sanctions policy and the practical realities of energy markets. For India, affordable and reliable supplies remain important to domestic economic stability. For the United States, the challenge is to pursue its strategic objectives without allowing disagreements over energy purchases to damage broader cooperation.

Trade agreement close, but not yet concluded

Trade negotiations were another major focus of Rubio's meeting with Jaishankar. Speaking to journalists in Mumbai, the US secretary of state said Washington and New Delhi were working to finalise a trade agreement and were close to resolving the remaining issues.

"We are very close," Rubio said, indicating that only a few matters remained to be settled and expressing hope that the process could be completed soon.

A successful agreement could help address commercial differences and

provide greater certainty for businesses operating in both countries. But the final outcome would depend on the terms negotiated, including how the two sides reconcile their respective economic priorities.

Rubio also described India as a "superpower" in crude-oil refining and urged it to process more Venezuelan crude. His comments underscored Washington's interest in India's refining capacity and its potential role in international energy supply chains.

Jaishankar said the discussions covered trade and energy, as well as technology, defence and regional developments. He also thanked Rubio for paying tribute to the victims of the November 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks and reiterated India's position of zero tolerance towards terrorism.

The agenda demonstrated that bilateral ties extend well beyond commerce. Trade negotiations and energy cooperation remain linked to security concerns, technological competition and the changing strategic balance in Asia.

A trilateral energy dialogue with the UAE

Rubio and Jaishankar also held a trilateral meeting with Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the United Arab Emirates' foreign minister, who was in Mumbai for energy-related discussions.

The meeting focused on regional energy security and shared economic priorities. Such engagement offers an opportunity for India, the United States and the UAE to explore practical cooperation in areas where their interests overlap.

The format also reflected the wider logic of the I2U2 grouping, which brings together India, Israel, the United States and the UAE to promote cooperation in areas including investment, technology, food security and infrastructure.

While a single meeting does not establish a new strategic framework, regular dialogue among the three countries could help identify areas for investment and strengthen economic links across the region.

Technology and the wider strategic relationship

Rubio's visit also had a cultural and technological dimension. On the evening of October 20, he attended the 'Freedom 250' reception at the Jio World Convention Centre, marking the 250th anniversary of American independence. Jaishankar attended as a distinguished guest.

Speaking at the event, Rubio highlighted the importance of cooperation between the United States and India on artificial intelligence and what the Trump administration describes as "superintelligence". He said the two countries shared an interest in ensuring that advanced intelligence technologies were used for the benefit of humanity.

Technology is likely to remain an important area of bilateral engagement, particularly as both countries seek to strengthen their positions in artificial intelligence, digital infrastructure and advanced manufacturing. Cooperation, however, will require agreement on commercial interests, security concerns and the rules governing emerging technologies.

The strategic context is equally significant. Washington has long viewed India as an important partner in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in efforts to balance China's growing influence. Successive US administrations have supported closer engagement with

New Delhi, although the relationship has not been free from disagreements.

Recent strains have included Washington's renewed contacts with Pakistan's military leadership, differences over the conflict involving Iran, and US tariffs and immigration restrictions affecting Indian businesses and students. These issues have complicated a partnership that both governments have repeatedly described as important.

Trump has often referred to his personal relationship with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, reflecting his preference for leader-to-leader engagement. Yet personal rapport cannot, by itself, resolve differences over trade,

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

**Hundreds of people marched from Bhai Vir Singh Marg to the ECI headquarters in New Delhi at the joint call of farmers', workers', women's, youth and student organisations and civil society groups, demanding the removal and prosecution of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, halt to the SIR process, revocation of legal immunity for the Election Commission, and other demands. ~ CPI (M)**



sanctions, immigration or regional security. Durable progress requires institutional dialogue and agreements that can withstand political changes.

Economic diplomacy must deliver tangible results

Rubio's visit offered signs of an effort to maintain momentum in India-US relations despite these disagreements. A US secretary of state who has previously taken a tough position on China and criticised India's Russian oil purchases was now discussing trade negotiations, refining cooperation and investment opportunities with Indian officials and business leaders.

The shift does not mean that political differences have disappeared. Rather, it suggests that both sides see value in keeping economic channels open while continuing to negotiate on contentious issues.

For India, the central lesson is the importance of integrating economic priorities more closely into foreign policy. Trade agreements, energy partnerships, private investment and technology cooperation should not be treated as secondary to diplomatic protocol. They are instruments through which strategic relationships can be strengthened.

The location of a meeting matters less than the outcomes it produces. If discussions in Mumbai help move a bilateral trade agreement forward, improve energy cooperation or encourage major investment, their significance should be assessed in terms of those results rather than geography alone.

At the same time, India must ensure that closer commercial engagement does not come at the cost of its ability to make independent decisions on energy security and other national interests. Partnership requires negotiation, not automatic alignment.

The challenge for New Delhi and Washington is therefore to convert expressions of goodwill into practical agreements. Rubio's visit has created an opportunity to do so. Whether it marks a lasting improvement in relations will depend on progress in trade talks, the stability of energy arrangements and the willingness of both governments to manage their differences through sustained dialogue.

# Manipur to Resume Helicopter Services to Remote Areas; Loktak Day Gets State Festival Status



**IMPHAL**  
The Manipur Cabinet, chaired by Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh, has approved the resumption of heli-

copter services to remote areas, granted state festival status to Loktak Day and allowed eligible newspaper printing presses to seek permission to use a limited area of contiguous paddy land.

The decisions were taken at a Cabinet meeting held at the Chief Minister's Office in Mantripukhri .  
The Cabinet approved engaging Pawan Hans Limited, a Government of India undertaking, to restore helicopter services in Manipur, which have remained suspended since October 1, 2026.  
Under the proposed arrangement, a twin-engine helicopter will operate for six months or until a regular operator is selected through a tender process. The service will have a minimum commitment of 40 flying hours per month.  
The resumption is expected to improve connectivity between Imphal and remote hill areas, particularly for residents who depend on air transport to access essential services and medical assistance during emergencies.  
The expenditure will be shared with the Union Ministry of Home Affairs un-

der its North East helicopter scheme. If central assistance is unavailable, the state government will bear the cost to ensure continuity of operations.  
Loktak Day declared a state festival  
In another key decision, the Cabinet approved the annual observance of Loktak Day as a state festival on the full-moon day of Mera, also referred to as Thanil of MeraTha.  
The tradition originated in 1990 at Thanga and celebrates Loktak Lake, the largest freshwater lake in Northeast India and an important source of livelihood, cultural identity and ecological wealth for Manipur.  
This year's celebrations will begin on October 26 and take place at two venues: Loktak Lairembi Ground in Thanga and Komlakhong.  
The Loktak Development Authority, in collaboration with local clubs, will or-

ganise cultural programmes, traditional sports and conservation activities. Members of the public, students and young people are expected to participate.  
The decision to grant state festival status is expected to give greater recognition to the lake's cultural significance while providing a platform to promote awareness of its conservation.  
Newspaper printing presses eligible for limited paddy land use  
The Cabinet also approved an amendment to the list of activities classified as "public purposes" under the Manipur Conservation of Paddy Land and Wetland Act, 2014.  
Under the decision, registered and licensed newspaper printing presses equipped with web offset machines will be eligible to seek permission to use up to 0.62 acre of contiguous paddy land,

subject to the Act's safeguards and other approval requirements.  
The move aims to facilitate the relocation of larger newspaper printing facilities from congested residential neighbourhoods, where printing operations can cause noise disturbances, particularly at night.  
The government has maintained that the eligibility conditions and approval requirements will remain in place to prevent misuse of the provision and protect paddy fields and wetlands.  
The three decisions address different priorities, ranging from connectivity in remote areas and recognition of Manipur's cultural heritage to the operational needs of newspaper printing facilities. Their implementation will depend on the arrangements put in place by the concerned departments and the applicable regulatory safeguards.

## Petrol Bomb Attack Targets ED Office Building in Shillong



**SHILLONG**

A petrol bomb attack was reported at a building housing the Enforcement Directorate (ED) office in Shillong early , marking the second reported attack on a government establishment in the Meghalaya capital within two days.  
According to police, two masked men riding a motorcycle allegedly hurled a petrol bomb at the building in the Lankyrding area on the morning of October 22. No structural damage was reported.  
Superintendent of Police Vivek Syiem confirmed the incident, saying a security guard inside the building first noticed it on Thursday morning. Police have initiated an investigation to identify those responsible and establish the motive behind the attack.  
Investigators are examining CCTV footage from the surrounding area to identify the suspects and trace the motorcycle allegedly used in the incident. Police have also initiated the formal process of registering a case.  
The latest incident follows reports of petrol bomb attacks targeting government establishments in the Laitumkhrach, Keating Road and Kench's Trace areas.  
The sequence of incidents has raised concerns over the security of government installations in Shillong. Police have increased patrolling in several areas and tightened surveillance as part of efforts to prevent further attacks.  
Investigators are also examining whether the incidents are connected. However, authorities have not yet disclosed any confirmed information about the identity of the suspects or the motive behind the latest attack.

## BTC By-Elections: Final Electoral Rolls for Three Constituencies on Nov 30



**KOKRAJHAR**

The Assam State Election Commission has initiated preparations for the possible by-elections in three constituencies under the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), issuing a notification for the preparation of electoral rolls for Kajalgaon, Darangajuli and Rowta.  
According to the schedule announced by the commission, draft electoral rolls for the three constituencies will be published on November 7, while the final rolls are scheduled to be released on November 30.  
Voters will be able to submit claims and objections, including requests for the inclusion or correction of names, until November 21.  
The commission has set November 27 as the deadline for disposing of all claims and objections received during the process.  
The revision of electoral rolls is being viewed as an important preparatory step ahead of the proposed by-elections. However, the commission has not yet announced the polling dates for the three constituencies.  
Political parties and other stakeholders are expected to closely monitor the next phase of preparations following the publication of the final electoral rolls. The announcement of the election schedule will determine the timeline for the subsequent stages of the by-election process.

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## Manipur CM Assures Maring, Tangkhul Nagas of Action on Key Concerns



**IMPHAL**  
Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh has assured representatives of the Maring and Tangkhul Naga communities from Machi in Tengnoupal district that his government remains committed to addressing the concerns of all communities and building a peaceful, secure and inclusive state.  
During a meeting at the Chief Minister's Secretariat on Thursday, a delegation from Machi apprised Singh of pressing issues relating to road connectivity, healthcare, security and community development in Maring Naga-inhabited villages.  
According to a senior official of the Chief Minister's Office (CMO), Singh gave the delegation a patient hearing and assured its members that the government would take necessary action on the issues raised.  
Demand for better roads and healthcare

The Maring Uparap Assembly, an apex civil society organisation representing the Maring Naga community, highlighted the need to improve infrastructure and public services in the area.  
The delegation urged the government to improve roads and bridges to strengthen connectivity between villages and ease the movement of residents.  
It also sought an upgrade of the existing Primary Health Centre (PHC) at Machi to a Community Health Centre (CHC), saying the

surrounding the Bank of Baroda, reportedly the only bank serving the Machi Block area. They sought adequate security arrangements to protect the bank's staff, customers and assets.  
The delegation further urged the state government to provide a community hall in every village to facilitate public meetings, social gatherings and other community activities.  
The delegation was led by Jajo Sylvester, headman, Wairok Hangshing, president of the Maring Uparap Assembly, and Bosco Maring, chairman of Machi Village.  
The meeting comes amid the state government's stated efforts to address the needs of different communities and strengthen public services in Manipur's hill areas. The government's response to the delegation's demands will be closely watched by residents seeking improvements in connectivity, healthcare and security.

## Nagaland Tribal Bodies Question Plan to Privatisise Hornbill Festival Venue

**KOHIMA**  
Tribal organisations in Nagaland have raised concerns over the state government's decision to privatise the Kisama Heritage Village complex, the venue of the annual Hornbill Festival, including its traditional tribal morungs or community houses.  
The concerns emerged during a consultative meeting convened ahead of the 27th edition of the festival, where representatives of various tribal hohos (organisations) questioned the proposed move and sought greater clarity on its implications for community ownership, maintenance and revenue sharing.  
Nagaland Tourism Secretary Kovi Meyase informed the meeting that the state Cabinet had decided to privatise the entire complex in view of concerns over its maintenance and long-term sustainability. Following objections from tribal representatives, Meyase said the Tourism Department would

take up the matter with the government.  
The meeting also discussed the annual allocation of Rs 1.5 lakh for the maintenance and improvement of each morung. Tribal leaders pointed out that although communities operating the traditional houses could generate revenue, the organisations continued to shoulder substantial maintenance costs.  
They urged the government to increase the annual allocation to ensure that the morungs could be properly maintained without placing an excessive financial burden on the respective communities. The proposed privatisation has brought the management of the heritage complex, the role of tribal organisations and the financial sustainability of traditional community spaces into focus ahead of the festival.  
The Tourism Department proposed limiting the number of food

stalls at Kisama to 15 as part of efforts to improve cleanliness and manage the venue more effectively.  
Tourism Director Veyielo Doulo said one company of the Indian Reserve Battalion had been deployed at the heritage village, with additional security arrangements planned for the festival period. Officials also discussed infrastructure requirements, including increasing water storage capacity to five lakh litres and ensuring uninterrupted electricity supply throughout the day.  
Doulo said space constraints at Kisama made it difficult to construct additional morungs without acquiring more land. Ten government departments were already accommodated at the venue, while several others had requested space.  
Debate over expanding festival activities The meeting also considered plans to expand Hornbill-related events to other districts in phases.

Some participants expressed concern that the Mini Hornbill Festival could overshadow the main event at Kisama, while officials said the programme had been renamed the tribal festival. Meyase said visitor numbers were expected to rise slightly compared with the previous year and emphasised the need for better coordination among all stakeholders. Held annually from December 1 to 10 at the Naga Heritage Village in Kisama, around 12 km south of Kohima, the Hornbill Festival showcases Nagaland's diverse tribal cultures, traditional practices, music, dance and crafts. The event attracts visitors from across India and abroad. With the next edition approaching, the proposed privatisation and the concerns raised by tribal organisations are likely to remain key issues in discussions over the management, maintenance and future development of the festival venue.

## Tripura Left Front Seeks Central Forces at All Booths Ahead of Civic Polls

**AGARTALA**

The CPI(M)-led Left Front has urged Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha to deploy central security forces at every polling booth during the forthcoming elections to 21 civic bodies, including the Agartala Municipal Corporation (AMC), citing concerns over the conduct of recent local elections.  
A Left Front delegation met Saha at his official residence on October 22 and sought his intervention to ensure that voters can exercise their franchise without intimidation or disruption.  
Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Left Front convener Manik Dey said the delegation had specifically demanded central forces at all polling stations on election day to safeguard the electoral process.  
"We categorically sought his intervention for the deployment of central forces on polling day to make the electoral process free and fair," Dey said.  
The delegation also raised concerns over the difficulties allegedly faced by Left parties during the recently concluded elections to the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) and its village committees.  
According to Dey, Left candidates were unable to file nomination papers in eight blocks during the village committee elections because of alleged obstruction by the Tipra Motha Party (TMP) and

its ally, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The allegations have not been independently established.  
The Left Front has called for additional central forces to prevent possible disturbances during the upcoming civic polls and ensure that candidates from all political parties can participate in the electoral process without hindrance.  
Dey said the chief minister had assured the delegation that he would try to arrange additional central forces to maintain peace during polling. Saha also advised the delegation to approach the State Election Commission and Director General of Police G S Rao regarding the deployment of central personnel at polling booths, he added.  
"We will do so once the state election panel announces the polls," Dey said.  
Elections to Tripura's 21 civic bodies, including the AMC, are likely to be held in November. However, the State Election Commission has yet to announce the official schedule. The demand for central forces has brought electoral security back into focus in Tripura, with the Left Front seeking safeguards against alleged intimidation and obstruction. The effectiveness of the arrangements will depend on the measures adopted by the election authorities to ensure that polling remains peaceful, impartial and accessible to all eligible voters.

## 31,000-Crore India-Myanmar Border Fencing Project Reviewed by Manipur Governor

**IMPHAL**

Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla has reviewed the progress of the Centre's 31,000-crore India-Myanmar border fencing project, stressing the need to complete the work within the stipulated timeframe.  
The review took place during a security meeting at Lok Bhavan on Thursday, where officials also discussed law and order in border areas and measures to strengthen security arrangements.  
The project covers the 1,643-km international boundary shared by Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland. Officials highlighted challenges including land acquisition, difficult terrain, boundary disputes and opposition from sections of local communities.  
Colonel Dev, Commanding Officer of the Border Roads Task Force (BRTF), briefed the meeting on the progress of the fencing project. The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) is responsible for executing the construction work.  
The meeting was attended by the state's chief secretary, security adviser, director general of police, additional chief secretaries, the home commission-



er and senior officials from Assam Rifles and the BRTF. District officials from Ukhrul, Churachandpur, Chandel and Tengnoupal also presented updates on security conditions and construction activities in their respective areas.  
Progress along the international boundary  
The India-Myanmar border stretches across four northeastern states, with 520 km in Arunachal Pradesh, 510 km in Mizoram, 398 km in Manipur and 215 km in Nagaland.  
According to administrative information presented during the review, 1,472 km of the international boundary has been demarcated, while around 171 km remains unresolved because of legal and geographical complications. Boundary-related difficulties have also affected work in parts of Manipur's Chandel district.

In the Moreh sector, 9,214 km of fencing, along with a parallel patrol road, has been completed. Work has also been authorised for an additional 20,862 km stretch.  
Electronic surveillance under trial  
Alongside physical fencing, authorities are exploring technology-based surveillance systems to strengthen monitoring along vulnerable sections of the border.  
Assam Rifles is implementing two pilot projects under the Hybrid Surveillance System (HSS), one each in Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. Each pilot covers a one-kilometre stretch to assess the effectiveness of virtual fencing and electronic surveillance.  
Depending on the outcome of the trials, the system is proposed to be extended to an additional 83 km of the border.  
The Centre is also moving towards

biometric verification for cross-border movement within a 10-km border belt as part of changes to the existing Free Movement Regime (FMR). The proposed arrangements could significantly affect how residents of border communities cross the international boundary.  
Terrain and local opposition pose challenges  
Officials identified difficult mountainous terrain, delays in land acquisition, opposition from Naga and Mizo organisations and occasional militant attacks as major obstacles to the project's implementation.  
During a visit to Kamjong district on October 21, Manipur Director General of Police Mukesh Singh and other senior police officials met representatives of Assam Rifles and the Border Security Force (BSF) to assess the security situation and improve coordination among the forces.  
The team also interacted with representatives of Kuki and Naga civil society organisations and assured them of government support for restoring peace in the area.  
The border fencing project is intended to strengthen surveillance and curb infiltration, smuggling and other illegal activities. However, its timely completion will depend not only on construction progress but also on resolving land and boundary disputes, addressing local concerns and maintaining security in the border regions.

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Netanyahu invites Modi to join  
Flydubai pilot Machchhar for Israel's  
Independence Day torch-lighting



TEL AVIV

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi to light a torch alongside Indian pilot Smit Machchhar on Israel's Independence Day, praising the pilot for his role in thwarting an alleged attempt to hijack a Tel Aviv-bound flight.

In a post on X, Netanyahu said Modi had welcomed the invitation and highlighted the longstanding ties between the two countries.

"I spoke with my friend, the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, and invited him to light a torch alongside a brave Indian pilot on Israel's Independence Day," Netanyahu said.

"Modi thanked me for the invitation and said that, on the ground and in the air, India and Israel are fighting together against terrorism," he added in posts in Hindi and Hebrew.

The invitation comes after Israeli President Isaac Herzog earlier this month invited Machchhar to Israel to honour him with the Presidential Award for Civilian Heroism.

Machchhar was injured on September 30 while attempting to stop his co-pilot from alleg-

edly trying to hijack Flydubai flight FZ1073, which was travelling from Dubai to Tel Aviv with 174 passengers on board.

Despite being seriously injured in the cockpit attack, Machchhar managed to open the cockpit door, allowing passengers and crew members to overpower the co-pilot. The aircraft made an emergency landing in Saudi Arabia, and all passengers reached Israel safely later that day.

Machchhar is undergoing treatment at a hospital in the United Arab Emirates. Both Modi and Netanyahu have praised him for his actions.

Netanyahu's announcement came on the same day that he spoke with Modi about developments in West Asia and the need to restore peace and stability in the region.

According to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the two leaders also reviewed bilateral ties and reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening the Special Strategic Partnership between India and Israel.

"The leaders also exchanged views on recent developments in West Asia and underscored the urgent need to restore peace and stability in the region. Prime Minister

Modi reiterated India's call for dialogue and diplomacy as the way forward," the PMO said in a statement.

In a post on X, Modi said the two leaders had reviewed the progress in bilateral relations and discussed the regional situation.

"We reviewed the sustained momentum in our bilateral ties and reaffirmed our commitment to further strengthening our partnership. We also exchanged views on recent developments in West Asia and underscored the urgent need to restore peace and stability in the region," he said.

Modi visited Israel on February 25 and 26. During the visit, the two countries agreed to elevate their relationship to a "Special Strategic Partnership for Peace, Innovation and Prosperity". The strategic partnership was first established during Modi's visit to Israel in July 2017.

During his February visit, Modi said India's security interests were linked to peace and stability in the Middle East and expressed New Delhi's full support for the Gaza Peace Initiative. The two leaders have also held telephone conversations during the US-Iran and Iran conflict.

NEW DELHI

The Opposition INDIA bloc is planning to hold a mock Parliament session and mock impeachment of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar in the capital on October 28, ahead of its November 1 joint rally, a senior Opposition leader said. The event, however, hinges on the alliance securing a suitable venue.

The leader said there was a consensus on October 28 for the programme, which would take forward a proposal discussed by Opposition parties, civil society groups and student representatives earlier this month.

The leader said finding a suitable venue remained the main hurdle. Ramlila Maidan has been ruled out for logistical reasons, while Talkatora Stadium, one of the options considered, was unavailable.

"We are exploring more options. While leaders have agreed on the date, we will go ahead if we can find a venue by October 28," the leader said.

This newspaper had reported on October 13 that the proposal for a mock impeachment of the CEC came up at a meeting of INDIA bloc leaders, civil society representatives and student representatives. Convened by Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi over high tea, the meeting discussed ways to sustain their agitation to restore democracy.

The proposed mock impeachment would give the Opposition a public platform to lay out its case against Kumar as it intensifies its demand for his removal. The plan is to invite judges, legal experts and members of the public for a detailed discussion, a leader said.

The idea was accepted unanimously in the INDIA bloc meeting because such a programme would allow the issues to be examined at length and help convey the Opposition's concerns to the public, the leader added.

The proposed October 28 programme would precede the alliance's November 1 joint rally, placing a public discussion on its demand for Kumar's removal ahead of the mobi-



lisation.

The Opposition's campaign has intensified amid allegations of irregularities in the Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. The INDIA bloc has accused the poll body of facilitating electoral manipulation and demanded Kumar's resignation, with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi alleging that the CEC was not the only person responsible for the alleged wrongdoing. There have been protests in

the last fortnight in different parts of India seeking Kumar's resignation.

The opposition has twice attempted to remove Kumar by moving an impeachment motion.

In the first move, the notices were rejected by both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha while the notices submitted in the second attempt are still pending in the Upper House.

Under the Constitution and law on the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election

Commissioners, Parliament can remove a CEC only as it can impeach a sitting Supreme Court judge. The opposition needs a two-thirds majority in Parliament to remove the CEC, similar to an SC judge.

The Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023, also says the CEC or an Election Commissioner may resign at any time by submitting a written resignation to the President.

INTERNATIONAL

Mississippi releases video showing fatal  
shooting of 1-year-old boy by police officer

MISSISSIPPI

Mississippi authorities released video Thursday showing the fatal shooting of a 1-year-old boy by a police officer who opened fire while dodging the car driven by a family friend. A state investigation found no criminal wrongdoing by the officer, but the family's attorney says it was wanton use of force.

Kohen Wiley was killed in June when Senatobia police officer Sgt. Hunter Foster fired his gun into a moving vehicle while responding to a shoplifting call. Kohen's family says footage of the fatal encounter shows the shooting was not justified.

The Mississippi Attorney General's office said this week its monthslong probe found that Foster's use of force was appropriate. Foster's attorney, Martin Zummach, has said his client had "no choice" but to shoot at the vehicle because it was going to hit him.

Ben Crump, a civil rights attorney representing Kohen's family, said Foster was not in danger when he fired the shot that killed the 1-year-old. Crump said the video shows Foster fired that shot from the passenger side of the car.

Kohen's close relatives watched the footage shot during the June 14 encounter in a Walmart parking lot in Senatobia, about 40 miles (65 kilometers) south of Memphis, Tennessee. The video included footage from the camera worn by the officer who shot and killed Kohen.

Kohen would have celebrated his second birthday in early November, civil rights attorney Ben Crump, who is representing Kohen's family, said during a news conference Thursday.

"The word 'justified' has haunted me," Kohen's maternal grandmother, Veronica Roberson, said during the news conference. "There's no justification for that."

Roberson said she found out from reading the news that the state had cleared the officer, and she also saw parts of the video that had been leaked online Wednesday. She called the lack of notice from the attorney general's office and the leak of the footage a "slap in the face" to her family.

Video shows multiple angles of the fatal encounter

The Mississippi Department of



Public Safety on Thursday released footage showing the shooting from the body-worn cameras of multiple law enforcement officers, including Foster.

Darkhorse Press, a Mississippi crime and community news outlet with a focus on law enforcement, posted some of that footage on its website a day earlier. The organization's founder, Therese Apel, is formerly the department's communications director.

The group of officers were at the Walmart store in response to an unrelated incident, according to a Mississippi Bureau of Investigation report. A Walmart employee then alerted them of two women running from the store.

The videos show Kohen's mother Velleisiya Wiley, holding Kohen as she and her friend run across the parking lot and enter their vehicle. Five officers approach the parked car with guns drawn. The car reverses away and crashes into a parked vehicle nearby as officers yell for it to stop.

The vehicle then accelerates forward as Foster steps toward it, directly in front, with his gun drawn. The wheels

turn away from him, and he appears to put his hands on the hood as he jumps out of the way. He fires his gun, shattering the window of the front passenger side, where Kohen was seated on his mother's lap. The car continues to drive away before the video cuts out.

Crump said the officers' response—running at the vehicle with guns drawn to apprehend alleged shoplifters—was excessive and reckless.

Velleisiya Wiley previously denied that she and her friend stole diapers from the store and they have not been charged, according to state and county court records.

"Diapers are something a mother needs for a child. Diapers should never cost a baby their life," Crump said. "This decision sends a message that a Black baby boy, his life, is not as valuable as the white diapers that he is wrapped in."

Zummach, who represents Foster, has said the footage vindicates his client because it shows he was in danger from the moving vehicle.

"She came right at Hunter Foster

and the other officer and he had to shoot his weapon," Zummach said.

Velleisiya Wiley has disputed that her friend, who was driving, headed toward the officers.

Crump said the footage shows the fatal shot came from the side of the car, disputing that Foster was in imminent danger. An independent autopsy commissioned by the family concluded the same. An image of the vehicle shows its shattered right front passenger window. The family's legal team called for the federal government to investigate the shooting.

Zummach said it was "strictly muscle memory" that prompted Foster to fire additional shots.

"The one that went through the side glass that everybody's going crazy about? That's because she was moving so fast," Zummach said.

"Your brain can't talk to your finger that fast to stop," he added.

John P. Gross, an expert on police use of force against moving vehicles, had a similar explanation for the third shot after reviewing the footage, saying it takes a second or two for someone to recognize they should stop shooting. But, he said, Foster shouldn't have drawn his firearm and positioned himself in front of the car in the first place.

"He should never have placed himself in a position where he could have been struck," Gross said, adding that an accusation of shoplifting did not justify "use of deadly force on a fleeing suspect."

Gross said that as the car accelerated, he moved out of the way. "So, he can't claim he was in danger of being struck by the car when he fired. It was already moving past him."

But Charles "Joe" Key, a former Baltimore police lieutenant who frequently serves as an expert witness in police use-of-force cases, said the driver of the car appeared to use the vehicle to commit assault with a deadly weapon. Velleisiya Wiley's friend, who was driving the vehicle, has not been charged.

"The officer that fired the shots narrowly escaped being run over and appeared to touch the car as he was moving," Key said. "The shooting was objectively reasonable."

Powerful earthquake in Tibet  
collapses hundreds of homes and  
kills at least 16 people



BEIJING

A magnitude 7 earthquake hit China's Tibet region on Thursday evening, killing at least 16 people, injuring 54 and collapsing hundreds of homes in the northern regional city of Nagqu, official media said.

Search and rescue efforts continued following the collapse of at least 339 homes and 20 livestock sheds, the Nagqu media office said, citing city government officials.

More than 1,600 people from the local county were deployed for rescue efforts. Supplies including 1,000 prefabricated housing units, around 3,000 tents and folding beds, as well as flashlights and winter clothing arrived in the region.

The U.S. Geological Survey said the quake occurred at 10:33 p.m. local time, with its epicenter 191 kilometers (119 miles) east-northeast of Nagqu, in a sparsely populated, high-altitude area of northern Tibet. It put the earthquake's depth at 18 kilometers (11 miles).

The U.S. agency recorded at least seven aftershocks with magnitude between 4.3 and 5.2, all of them with a depth of 10 kilometers (6 miles), according to its website.

China's official news agency Xinhua said on Friday that communication in part of the region has been down. Local railway authorities have taken emergency actions to halt trains passing through the region.

The earthquake also caused rockfalls that have forced local authorities to close a section of National Highway 317, allowing only emergency, rescue and official support vehicles through as crews worked to clear debris, according to Xinhua.

Intermittent snows are expected in the earthquake region over the next three days, Xinhua said.

It was the biggest earthquake in the region in the last five years, China's national broadcaster CCTV said.

Chinese President Xi Jinping called for all-out efforts in rescue operations and medical relief work.

Nagqu is more than 300 kilometers (186 miles) north of Tibet's capital, Lhasa.

# COP31 and the Climate Justice Test: India Must Lead the Global South

As the world prepares for COP31 in Antalya, the credibility of global climate diplomacy will depend on whether long-standing promises translate into tangible support for developing nations. India must bring the Global South together to demand fair climate finance, affordable green technology and accountability for historical emissions while demonstrating that climate justice and domestic climate action must advance together.

For more than three decades, the annual climate conferences organised under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) have promised a collective response to one of humanity's greatest challenges. Yet, despite successive declarations, negotiated targets and diplomatic breakthroughs, the gap between climate commitments and their implementation remains a serious concern. For countries already struggling with floods, droughts, heatwaves and rising economic vulnerabilities, the central question is no longer what the world intends to do, but whether it will deliver the resources needed to act.

The 31st Conference of the Parties, scheduled to take place in Antalya, Türkiye, from November 10 to 20, 2026, offers another opportunity to address this credibility deficit. But COP31 cannot become another exercise in diplomatic declarations that leave developing countries to bear disproportionate costs. It must focus on climate finance, technology transfer, adaptation and the fair distribution of responsibility. India, with its economic weight and diplomatic influence, has an opportunity to help the Global South negotiate from a position of greater unity.

Climate finance must not deepen the debt crisis.

Climate finance remains one of the most contentious issues in international negotiations. Developing countries need substantial investment to protect vulnerable communities, rebuild infrastructure after disasters, modernise agriculture and transition towards cleaner energy. Many, however, are already burdened by debt and face competing demands for spending on healthcare, education, employment and basic infrastructure.

If climate assistance comes predominantly through loans, countries hit by climate disasters may find themselves borrowing to repair the damage caused by events they contributed relatively little to creating. The result can be a vicious cycle in which floods destroy livelihoods, reconstruction increases debt, and debt constrains investment in future resilience.

The distinction between grants and loans is therefore fundamental. Climate finance should not be judged merely by the headline amount announced at international summits. Its terms, accessibility, predictability and actual delivery matter equally. Grants are particularly important for vulnerable countries dealing with irreversible losses and disasters, while concessional finance can support projects capable of generating long-term economic returns.

India should use COP31 to press for a transparent system that distinguishes grants from loans, new resources from repackaged development assistance, and announced commitments from money actually disbursed. The objective must be to expand grant-based support and ensure that concessional loans do not impose unsustainable repayment obligations on the countries that need assistance most.

Climate finance is not simply an act of generosity by wealthy nations. It is part of the broader question of how the international community shares responsibility for a crisis shaped by unequal patterns of industrialisation, consumption and historical emissions.

Historical responsibility cannot be brushed aside.

The principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities, embedded in international climate negotiations, recognises that all countries must contribute to climate action, but not necessarily in identical ways. Historical emissions, economic capacity and development needs must inform the distribution of responsibility.

Industrialised economies accumulated considerable wealth through decades of fossil-fuel-intensive growth. Many developing countries, by contrast, are still trying to provide reliable electricity, adequate housing, healthcare and productive employment to millions of people. Requiring them to undertake an identical transition at an identical pace, without adequate financial and technological assistance, would ignore these fundamental differences.

India must therefore insist that climate negotiations consider cumulative historical emissions alongside present-day emissions, per-capita contributions and the development requirements of poorer nations. Annual emission figures alone cannot capture the full history of atmospheric pollution or the unequal benefits derived from fossil-fuel consumption.

However, historical responsibility must not become an excuse for postponing action today. India, too, has a growing stake in reducing emissions, expanding clean energy and protecting its population from climate-related risks. Its strongest negotiating position will combine a firm demand for international equity with credible domestic action.

The challenge is to reconcile two legitimate objectives: protecting the development aspirations of a large population and accelerating the transition towards a low-carbon economy. Climate policy must create the conditions for both rather than treating them as mutually exclusive.

Green trade barriers must not punish developing economies.

Another emerging fault line concerns the relationship between climate policy and international trade. The European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), which imposes carbon-related costs on certain imported goods, illustrates the difficulties developing economies face as environmental standards increasingly influence market access.

The objective of reducing emissions from industrial production is legitimate. But the cost of meeting new standards can vary sharply between economies. Industries in wealthier countries may have better access to advanced technology, affordable finance and established low-carbon infrastructure.

Producers in developing countries may have to undertake expensive upgrades while competing in the same markets.



Without adequate support for technological modernisation, climate-related trade measures risk creating new disadvantages for countries that industrialised later. They may also weaken confidence in international climate cooperation if developing nations perceive environmental rules as instruments of commercial protectionism.

India should seek greater transparency in the design and implementation of such measures, along with arrangements that account for differences in technological capacity and development needs. Climate-related trade policies should encourage cleaner production rather than simply transfer costs to less wealthy exporters.

One proposal worth advancing is to explore internationally agreed mechanisms through which revenues from certain carbon-related trade measures could support climate adaptation and loss-and-damage initiatives in vulnerable developing countries. Such an arrangement would require clear legal rules, transparent accounting and agreement among participating countries, but it could help align trade policy with climate solidarity.

Affordable technology is essential to a fair transition.

The global energy transition will remain unequal if advanced clean technologies are available only to countries and companies that can afford them. Solar power, wind energy, battery storage, green hydrogen and low-carbon industrial processes are increasingly important, but access to these technologies depends on finance, infrastructure, technical expertise and intellectual property arrangements.

Technology transfer should not mean abolishing intellectual property rights. It should mean creating practical ways for developing countries to access essential technologies on affordable terms, build local manufacturing capacity and participate in research and innovation.

India can help advance this agenda through a Global South Green Technology Consortium, bringing together countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Building on cooperation through the International Solar Alliance, such a platform could promote joint research, shared technical expertise, collaborative manufacturing and affordable licensing arrangements for selected clean-energy technologies.

The benefits would extend beyond emissions reduction. Local production of solar components, batteries and other clean-energy equipment could generate employment, strengthen supply chains and reduce excessive dependence on a small number of suppliers.

Climate cooperation must therefore be viewed not only as an environmental necessity but also as an opportunity to build a more inclusive global industrial system.

Climate action must begin at home.

India's claim to leadership cannot rest exclusively on its ability to articulate the concerns of developing countries. It must also demonstrate that climate action can be integrated with economic growth, urban development and rural livelihoods.

Indian cities face growing risks from extreme heat, intense rainfall and urban flooding. Expanding concrete surfaces, shrinking wetlands, inadequate drainage and insufficient tree cover can intensify these problems. The consequences are especially severe for low-income households, outdoor workers and residents of poorly serviced neighbourhoods.

Urban planning must move beyond conventional drainage and road construction towards integrated climate resilience. Permeable pavements, restored wetlands, rain gardens, urban green spaces and systems for retaining stormwater can help cities absorb heavy rainfall and reduce runoff. Better tree cover, reflective rooftop materials and green roofs can help moderate urban heat, provided that projects are designed for local conditions and maintained effectively.

Public transport is equally important. Reliable buses, rail services, safe pedestrian routes and better urban mobility can reduce dependence on private vehicles while improving access to employment and essential services. Rooftop solar power and decentralised electricity systems can further strengthen local energy resilience.

These measures should not be treated as isolated environmental projects. They are investments in public health, economic productivity and the protection of vulnerable communities.

Rural climate policy requires similar attention. Farmers face the combined pressures of erratic rainfall, droughts, floods and rising temperatures. Watershed management, groundwater recharge, soil conservation, crop diversification and the adoption of drought-tolerant crops can reduce vulnerability. Millets such as sorghum and pearl millet can play a role in suitable regions, although crop choices must reflect local soil, rainfall and market conditions.

Agri-voltaics, which combines solar electricity generation with crop cultivation, may offer additional opportunities where land conditions and farming practices permit. Decentralised renewable-energy systems can also improve electricity access for agricultural operations, rural enterprises and households.

The larger objective must be to make climate

resilience part of development planning rather than an emergency response after every disaster.

Building a credible Global South coalition.

India cannot reshape global climate governance alone. It needs sustained cooperation with Brazil, South Africa and other developing economies, while engaging China because of its major role in manufacturing, clean-energy technology and the global economy.

Such a coalition must be built around practical common interests: predictable climate finance, greater grant-based assistance, accessible technology, support for adaptation and credible mechanisms for addressing climate-related losses and damage.

At the same time, the Global South is not a uniform bloc. Countries differ in their energy requirements, industrial structures, financial resources and exposure to climate disasters. A successful coalition must recognise these differences and develop flexible proposals that accommodate the needs of least-developed countries and climate-vulnerable states alongside those of larger emerging economies.

India's diplomatic task is to turn shared grievances into a workable negotiating agenda. That means presenting concrete proposals, identifying potential partners and pursuing measurable outcomes rather than relying on rhetoric alone.

It also means recognising that international leadership requires domestic consistency. Progress in renewable energy, climate-resilient agriculture, urban adaptation and ecosystem protection will strengthen India's credibility when it calls for more ambitious action from wealthier nations.

From diplomatic promises to climate justice COP31 should be judged not by the length of

its final declaration but by the practical commitments it secures. Are developing countries receiving more predictable and accessible finance? Is support reaching vulnerable communities? Are clean technologies becoming more affordable? Are governments being held accountable for promises already made?

These are the questions that matter to people facing floods, heatwaves, crop losses and damaged infrastructure. For them, climate diplomacy is meaningful only when it produces tangible improvements in safety, livelihoods and economic security.

India must enter the Antalya negotiations prepared to defend the development priorities of the Global South while advancing a credible programme of climate action.

It should push for fairer finance, practical technology partnerships, stronger adaptation measures and a transparent system for tracking commitments.

The choice before the international community is stark. Climate conferences can continue to produce ambitious declarations while implementation falls short, or they can become instruments for delivering measurable and equitable change.

COP31 must be a test of political will, not another performance of diplomatic goodwill. India should lead the Global South in demanding a climate order that recognises historical responsibility, shares the costs of transition fairly and makes essential technology accessible. Climate justice will remain an empty slogan until financial commitments are delivered, vulnerable communities are protected and every country is enabled to contribute according to its capacity.

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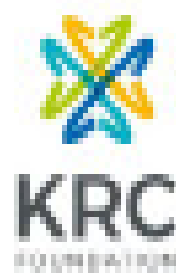


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