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PERSPECTIVE

The man who controls his mornings owns his life.

Manipur insurgent groups call statewide shutdown on October 15 over 1949 merger

IMPHAL Several banned insurgent groups have called for a statewide shutdown in Manipur on Thursday, October 15, to observe what they describe as “National Black Day” and protest the state’s merger with India in 1949.

In a statement, the National Revolutionary Front of Manipur (NRFM) described October 15 as a watershed date that marked the loss of Manipur’s political independence. The outfit’s information and publicity secretary, Sanajoaba Meitei, urged the public, intellectuals, civil society organisations and educational institutions to observe the day.

The NRFM also called for wider discussions on the historical and political circumstances surrounding the merger, arguing that the issue continues to shape political discourse in Manipur.

The Coordination Committee (CorCom), a coalition of several insurgent organisations, including the KCP, KYKL, PREPAK, PREPAK-Pro, RPF and UNLF, has announced a 12-hour shutdown from 6 am to 6 pm on Thursday.

Separately, the Socialist Revolutionary Party (SOREPA) has called for a strike from 5 am to 5 pm. Medical emergencies, media services and religious activities have been exempted from the shutdowns.

The NRFM cited the 1993 National Convention on the Manipur Merger Issue to support its opposition to the merger agreement. The convention had rejected the validity of the agreement signed on September 21, 1949, alleging that it was signed under coercion in Shillong.

WHO SAID WHAT



Our idea is to open India’s market to the world, as we wish to see other markets open to India.

~ Piyush Goyal, Union Minister of Commerce & Industry

VOLUME:1, ISSUE 898 | SILCHAR WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2026. EAST AND NE INDIA EDITION | e-mail: krctimes@gmail.com ,www.krctimes.com

Manipur protests back Bimol Akoijam, demand withdrawal of police case

Protesters demand withdrawal of police case against Congress MP; parallel sit-in outside his residence as Akoijam says he has maintained silence out of respect for legal proceedings

IMPHAL

Supporters of Manipur Congress MP Bimol Akoijam on Wednesday staged twin protests in Imphal, marching to the state BJP headquarters and holding a sit-in outside his residence to express solidarity with the parliamentarian and demand the withdrawal of a police case registered against him over alleged sexual misconduct.

The demonstrations came amid mounting political controversy following Akoijam’s dismissal from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) after an inquiry into sexual harassment allegations and the subsequent registration of a case by Delhi Police on a complaint from university authorities.

During the march to the BJP headquarters, protesters raised slogans against state BJP president A Sharda Devi for demanding Akoijam’s resignation.



Police personnel pushed the demonstrators back after they reached the headquarters gate.

In a parallel demonstration, supporters gathered outside the Congress MP’s residence, condemning the registration of the case and voicing confidence in his leadership.

A social activist participating in

who has been raising his voice in Parliament for the last three years against the violence and attacks faced by us,” she said.

The activist also alleged that BJP members had attempted to disrupt what she described as a peaceful march, calling the incident discriminatory.

She maintained that Manipur had few representatives capable of articulating the state’s concerns effectively on national platforms and said Akoijam had emerged as one of the prominent voices highlighting the crisis. The protesters demanded that the allegations against him be dropped.

Akoijam reportedly came out of his residence to address the gathering and thank his supporters. He said he had largely refrained from commenting publicly out of respect for the legal process.

The controversy has triggered

sharp political reactions. BJP women MPs have announced plans to approach President Droupadi Murmu over JNU’s decision to dismiss Akoijam, intensifying the political debate surrounding the case.

Akoijam has denied the allegations and maintained that the facts should be established through legal proceedings. He has also rejected claims relating to a gathering of 11 students at his residence, saying a court would determine the facts.

The Congress MP has described the police case as a “witch-hunt”, alleging that he is being targeted for speaking out against the situation in Manipur.

The protests on Wednesday underscored the political divisions surrounding the case, with supporters defending Akoijam’s public role while the allegations against him remain subject to the legal process.

Woman dies after childbirth at RIMS; family alleges negligence



IMPHAL

Tension erupted at the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS) in Imphal after a 25-year-old woman died hours after childbirth, with her family alleging medical negligence. Relatives of the deceased staged a protest and allegedly vandalised hospital property, while refusing to collect her body until their demands are addressed.

The deceased, Thokchom Ongbi Binaroi, a resident of Keishampat Jailor Leirak in Imphal West district, died in the hospital’s Intensive Care Unit (ICU) on October 13, hours after giving birth.

During the protest, relatives allegedly damaged chairs, window panes and flower pots on the hospital premises. The family has demanded an apology from the doctors concerned and accountability for what it claims was negligence in the treatment of the woman.

Binaroi’s husband, Thokchom Marson, said she was admitted to RIMS on Monday following the advice of a

consultant. However, her condition subsequently deteriorated, and she underwent emergency surgery around midnight.Marson alleged that the main consultant was absent during the operation and claimed that his wife remained in the operating theatre for an extended period. He also said she was administered three bottles of blood during the procedure.

According to the husband, doctors had assured the family that there were no complications before the surgery. However, Binaroi allegedly suffered severe bleeding after the operation and was shifted to the ICU.

She was declared dead at around 1 pm on October 13, Marson said.

The family has refused to collect her body, insisting that the medical team acknowledge the alleged negligence and issue a formal apology.

RIMS authorities have not issued a statement on the incident so far. The allegations of medical negligence have not been independently verified, and the circumstances surrounding the woman’s death remain unclear.

Nagaland clash: 19 houses torched, 21 vandalised in Yimkhiung-Tikhir violence

DIMAPUR

At least 19 houses were burned and 21 others vandalised during a clash between the Yimkhiung and Tikhir communities at Zaonger village in Nagaland’s Kiphire district on October 10, according to a damage assessment report released by the district administration on Tuesday. One person was reportedly killed in the violence.

The report said 19 vehicles, including 13 motorcycles, were either burned or damaged during the clash in Zaonger village under Pungro subdivision.

A team led by Pungro Additional Deputy Commissioner Hotolu Sema, accompanied by police personnel and representatives of the Pungro Area Public Forum, visited the village on Monday to assess the destruction and facilitate the collection and documentation of belongings left behind by displaced residents.

The recovered belongings have been deposited at Pungro police station for safekeeping. The police station has been directed to ensure their security until they can be handed back to their respective owners.The district administration said local representatives and civil society organisations had assisted in coordinating the process and maintaining communication among the stakeholders.Security has been tightened around Zaonger village, with authorities closely monitoring the situation to prevent further violence.

The administration said the immediate priorities include ensuring civilian safety, assessing the extent of the damage and providing assistance to residents displaced by the clash.

The latest assessment provides a clearer picture of the damage caused by the October 10 violence, as efforts continue to secure affected areas and safeguard the belongings of residents who have been forced to leave their homes.

Nagaland CM pushes for improved roads, tighter coordination ahead of 27th Hornbill Festival



DIMAPUR

Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio has called for coordinated efforts among government departments and local communities to ensure the smooth conduct of the 27th Hornbill Festival, scheduled to begin on December 1.

Reviewing preparations at a meeting of the state government’s High Powered Committee for the Hornbill Festival at Kisama, the festival venue, Rio stressed the need for improved road connectivity, reliable power and water supply, security arrangements, traffic management, cleanliness, parking facilities and public conveniences.

The 10-day festival is one of Nagaland’s major cultural events, attracting visitors from across India and abroad.

Rio said he would convene a separate meeting with the departments concerned to address road-related issues. He also urged villages to take responsibility for maintaining cleanliness along roads, particularly highways passing through or near their areas.

To improve coordination and ensure timely action, the chief

minister directed all departments to appoint nodal officers for the festival. He emphasised that all stakeholders must work collectively to ensure that the necessary infrastructure and arrangements are in place before the event begins.

Tourism Minister Temjen Imna Along, meanwhile, highlighted the growing popularity of mini-Hornbill festivals and the increasing interest among foreign dignitaries in participating in the celebrations.

Commissioner and Secretary for Tourism Kovi Meyase outlined key logistical requirements, including water supply, sanitation, the streamlining of vehicle passes and other arrangements essential for the smooth functioning of the festival.

The Art and Culture Department briefed the committee on preparations for cultural troupes and tribal guests, while the Youth Resources and Sports Department highlighted planned activities, including an e-sports tournament.

Representatives of other departments also presented their proposed programmes and preparations, outlining the arrangements required to support the festival.

The review meeting focused on strengthening interdepartmental coordination and ensuring that infrastructure, visitor facilities and cultural programmes are ready ahead of the December 1 opening.

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Silchar gears up for Durga Puja festival, SMC puts traffic, civic amenities and safety in focus

SILCHAR

With Durga Puja approaching the Silchar Municipal Corporation (SMC) has stepped up preparations to ensure the smooth and peaceful celebration of the festival, placing particular emphasis on traffic management, uninterrupted power and water supply, road repairs, sanitation, noise pollution control and the safe immersion of idols. A preparatory meeting was held at the conference hall of the Silchar Municipal Corporation on Tuesday under the chairmanship of SMC Executive Officer Abhijit Bey, AUAS. The meeting was attended by Udharbond MLA Rajdeep Goala, Assistant Commissioner Masi Topno, ACS, proprietor cum editor Taimur Raja Choudhury, Mridul Majumder, APDCL Director Nitya Bhushan Dey, leading citizens Babul Hore and Dulal Mitra along with officials from various concerned departments and representatives of other sections of society. At the outset, the Executive Officer Abhijit Bey welcomed the participants and outlined the importance of coordinated preparations for the festival which draws large gatherings of devotees and visitors across Silchar. He called upon the Puja committees and the concerned departments to work in close coordination to ensure that the celebrations

remain orderly, environmentally friendly and convenient for the public.

In the meeting special emphasis was laid on loudspeakers , especially playing of D.J System, members present in the meeting also raised concerns over the usage of D.J System during the procession of idols during immersion days.

The Executive Officer also urged Puja committees to refrain from using single use plastic and stressed the need to prevent the construction of pandals on roads which often obstructs vehicular movement and causes inconvenience to commuters. It was made clear that permission would not be issued for roadside pandals.

The authorities also discussed the need to improve sanitation ahead of the festivities. Ward wise squads comprising labourers and supervisory officials have been formed to facilitate the timely cleaning of drains and the removal of roadside garbage. The SMC’s Utility Branch has been directed to undertake a comprehensive drive to repair or replace faulty streetlights across the city before the festival. The Municipal Inspector has also been asked to ensure proper cleaning and the spraying of disinfectants around Puja pandals.

While addressing the meeting, Ud-

harbond MLA Rajdeep Goala highlighted several civic concerns requiring immediate attention, including traffic congestion, power interruptions, water supply and the cleaning of drains in the silchar municipal areas.He also called upon the concerned departments to take prompt measures to address these issues and ensure adequate street lighting and sufficient water supply throughout the festive period.

The MLA also cautioned that any person or Puja committee responsible for digging holes in roads would be held accountable for the resulting damage. He urged the APDCL authorities to ensure uninterrupted power supply during the festival and extended their support for the successful completion of the immersion process.

During the discussion, leading citizen and advocate Dulal Mitra stressed the need to create public awareness against the use of DJ systems and excessive noise during the celebrations. He proposed recognising Puja committees that maintain discipline, cleanliness and environmental standards. He also suggested organising a cultural programme after the immersion ceremonies along with the distribution of awards to the best performing Puja committees for their efforts in maintaining

cleanliness and controlling noise and environmental pollution.

Talking at the event leading citizen of Silchar ,Mridul Majumder drew attention to traffic related concerns and suggested that the road near Sashan Ghat could be considered as an alternative route to ease congestion. He also stressed the need for adequate street lighting. He further raised the issue of holes being dug on the main road at Rangirkhari and pointed to the problems caused by the unrestricted movement of cattle on city roads.

APDCL Director Nitya Bhushan Dey expressed concern over delays in the immersion process particularly involving idols from the Malugram area and stressed the need for deployment of adequate police personnel at Dak Bungalow tripoint for better coordination of the movement of trucks carrying idols to ensure that the proceedings were completed within the stipulated period.

Taimur Raja Choudhury called for the preparation of the meeting minutes in Bengali and appealed to citizens to celebrate the festival in a spirit of brotherhood, harmony and integrity. He also raised serious concern over the delay of repair of PWD roads in Malugram,Ghinala area.



কেআরসি টাইমস

স্টে এনরিচড

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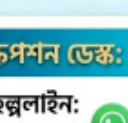
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VOLUME:1, ISSUE 898

AMERICAN DOUBLE STANDARDS

The Russian diesel deal announced by US President Donald Trump on October 9 has exposed a fundamental contradiction in Washington's energy and foreign policy. Having threatened punitive tariffs against countries that continue to buy Russian energy, the United States has now moved to facilitate its own purchases of Russian diesel to contain domestic fuel prices. The message is unmistakable: when national interests demand it, even the most forceful policy positions can be adjusted.

Trump announced an understanding with Russian President Vladimir Putin under which Russia would supply more than 300,000 tonnes of diesel immediately, followed by 500,000 tonnes in November, with further shipments potentially taking the announced total to around 4.8 million tonnes. The US Treasury subsequently issued a general licence permitting specified transactions involving Russian diesel for six months. Explaining the decision on Truth Social, Trump declared that lower prices for Americans were his greatest priority.

That justification is difficult to reconcile with Washington's treatment of other countries purchasing Russian energy. The announcement came just nine days before the October 18 deadline for the initial implementation steps under the Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act (SRIA), signed into law by Trump on September 18. The legislation authorises the President to impose tariffs of up to 100 per cent on goods from countries among the five largest importers of Russian-origin crude oil or natural gas, alongside measures targeting certain facilitators of sanctions evasion. India, a major importer of Russian crude, could be affected, depending on the law's provisions and the administration's decisions.

The contrast raises an unavoidable question: why should the United States be entitled to prioritise affordable energy for its citizens while expecting other sovereign countries to accept economic penalties for doing precisely the same?

National interest cannot be a privilege reserved for America

India has consistently maintained that its energy procurement decisions must be guided by the needs of its economy and the welfare of its 1.4 billion people. Russian crude has been an important component of that calculation, helping India manage supply requirements and costs in a volatile global market.

Washington, however, has sought to penalise India for continuing to purchase Russian oil. An additional 25 per cent tariff imposed in August raised the overall tariff burden on Indian goods to 50 per cent, accompanied by threats of further measures against countries trading in Russian energy.

The American argument has been that revenue from Russian energy exports helps sustain Moscow's war effort. That concern cannot simply be dismissed. Yet the diesel agreement demonstrates that Washington, too, is prepared to weigh its geopolitical objectives against immediate domestic economic pressures.

The circumstances surrounding crude oil and refined diesel may differ, and the new licence does not repeal the SRIA or dismantle the wider sanctions regime. Nevertheless, the underlying principle remains the same. Energy security, affordability and economic stability are legitimate national priorities. If Washington can make pragmatic adjustments to protect American consumers, it cannot reasonably deny India the right to make independent choices in pursuit of its own economic interests.

The principle of national interest cannot apply selectively.

The diesel pact also exposes the limitations of using secondary tariffs to dictate the commercial decisions of other countries. Such measures may exert pressure, but they cannot erase the underlying realities of global energy markets. Countries import fuel according to their requirements, available supplies, prices, infrastructure and long-term economic calculations.

A policy that demands sacrifices from others while preserving flexibility for oneself inevitably weakens its credibility. The United States may still invoke the SRIA against India or other countries within the legislation's scope. The diesel licence does not automatically exempt India from possible penalties. But any future attempt to punish New Delhi for buying Russian energy will now confront an obvious inconsistency in Washington's position.

The issue goes beyond tariffs. Economic coercion, when used to force sovereign states into decisions that conflict with their own assessments of national interest, risks turning commercial relations into instruments of political compliance. It also encourages affected countries to reduce their dependence on the very markets and financial systems through which such pressure is applied.

India should welcome any genuine easing of global fuel-supply constraints. Diesel prices influence freight costs, agricultural operations, small industries and the prices consumers ultimately pay for essential goods. Additional Russian supplies to the United States could help ease pressure in some markets, although their precise effect on global prices will depend on volumes, demand and wider market conditions.

Yet the larger significance of the agreement lies not in its immediate impact on fuel prices but in what it reveals about the relationship between energy security and sanctions policy.

A strategic partnership cannot become a loyalty test

The contradiction deserves serious attention in the context of the India-US Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership established in 2020. A partnership of this importance must be capable of accommodating differences over trade, energy and foreign policy without treating every disagreement as a test of allegiance.

India and the United States share significant interests in the Indo-Pacific, defence cooperation, technology, maritime security and regional stability. Those interests provide a strong foundation for cooperation. But a strategic partnership cannot be sustained by rhetoric alone. It requires mutual respect, predictability and a recognition that partners will not always make identical choices.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

“The difference between a good life and a bad life is how well you walk through the fire” - Carl Jung

GANDHI AND THE GRAMMAR OF MORAL PROTEST



MAKARAND R PARANJAPE

Why India's rulers and protesters alike need to rediscover the moral discipline of satyagraha.

What does the barricading of the national capital on October 10 show? The Indian State is as mighty as ever. No doubt, as was the colonial State. But does that mean that it is impervious to the moral force of satyagraha?

In fact, every takhta palat, change of regime is backed by a moral force. Herein lies the difference between anarchy, violence or chaos and peaceful, principled protest, or, satyagraha.

Insistence on truth is the precondition of every fight for justice, every resistance to oppression, every struggle against curtailment of liberty.

The moot point, however, is whether either the government or those protesting against it recognise this difference.

When invited to deliver the keynote address at the Eternal Gandhi Museum in Houston, Texas just after Gandhi Jayanti, I framed my remarks around three questions. Why is such a museum important? Why is Gandhi being cancelled in the country of his birth? And why does Gandhi persist not merely in India but overseas?

I argued in The Death and Afterlife of Mahatma Gandhi that Gandhi cannot be appropriated. Not by the Congress, not by the BJP, nor any other political party. Because Gandhi was not an ideologue but an exemplar.

On the walls of the Houston museum are emblazoned Gandhi's 11 ashram vows, the ekadash vrata. I asked my audience how many had seriously attempted to practise even one.

The first five were traditional Indian ethical disciplines: satya (truth), ahimsa (non-violence), brahmacharya (self-restraint), asteya (non-stealing) and aparigraha (non-possession). Significantly, Gandhi placed truth, not non-violence, first. The remaining six are sharira-shrama (bread labour), asvada (control of the palate), abhaya (fearlessness), sarva-dharma-samabhava (equal respect for religions), swadeshi (self-reliance) and asprishyata-nivarana (free from untouchability).

I had myself tried to practise just one of these vows: truth. And found even that extraordinarily difficult. In fact, for me that one vow is sufficient, at least for this lifetime.

The point is simple. Gandhi cannot be reduced to a slogan, statue or ritual. To invoke him is to accept a demanding moral responsibility. Unless we are prepared, however imperfectly, to practise even a fraction of what he did.

This brings me to the grammar of protest.

In his celebrated Letter from a Birmingham Jail, Martin Luther King Jr, Gandhi's greatest twentieth-century American disciple, outlined four stages of non-violent resistance: fact-finding, negotiation, self-purification and direct action.

Notice the sequence. Protest was not the first resort but the culmination of a painstaking moral and political process. Before confronting injustice, the protester had to establish the facts, exhaust negotiation avenues and, most importantly, prepare himself or herself to suffer without retaliation.

This is precisely what distinguishes satyagraha from ordinary agitation, much less anarchic or violent disruption.

Does the Cockroach Janta Party, or any contemporary protest movement, measure up to this exacting standard? Are its leaders prepared to submit themselves to the discipline of truth, non-violence and self-purification? Can they demonstrate not merely anger against the government but the moral authority to challenge it?

These are not rhetorical questions. They go to the heart of Gandhi's continuing relevance.

For satyagraha offers civilised societies a third way between enforced submission and retaliatory counter-violence. Where the rule of law prevails, and where governments derive their legitimacy from the consent of the governed, citizens must retain the right to resist injustice peacefully.

Gandhi showed us the possibility of resistance without hatred, confrontation; without cruelty, courage; without aggression.

Which brings me to the second question. Why has Gandhi become increasingly inconvenient in India, particularly since 2014?

My answer may seem provocative. Gandhi is being deliberately diminished not because he is irrelevant, but precisely because he remains dangerous to those who wield power.

Not the Gandhi on currency notes, in official portraits, in cleanliness campaigns or in ceremonial tributes. That Gandhi is harmless enough. Indeed, he can be endlessly applauded. Or reduced to a pair of spectacles.

But the Gandhi who mobilised ordinary people against entrenched authority, who insisted that obedience to conscience might supersede obedience to the State, who demonstrated that legitimate political power ultimately rests upon moral consent?

That Gandhi is decidedly dangerous to all power, especially to State authority.

The systematic denigration of Gandhi, including attempts to rehabilitate his assassin, trivialise his achievements or tarnish his experiments in brahmacharya, cannot be dismissed as harmless historical revisionism. They reflect, I would argue, a deeper design to delegitimise dissent.

Every government prefers a compliant citizenry. Some would even like to emulate China's combination of economic dynamism and political obedience. But India is not China.

Our democratic inheritance includes the right to question, disagree, organise and peacefully resist.

Indeed, what is India without Satyameva jayate, the triumph of truth proclaimed in the Mundaka Upanishad, which is also our national motto? What is our civilisational inheritance without Ahimsa paramo dharma, celebrated in the Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata?

Can we banish Gandhi without also diminishing the very axiological and metaphysical foundations

of Sanatana Dharma?

Yet the responsibility is not the government's alone. Protesters, too, must learn that moral legitimacy cannot be manufactured through slogans, social media outrage or theatrical confrontation. It must be earned through discipline, sacrifice and fidelity to truth. Which finally brings me back to Houston.

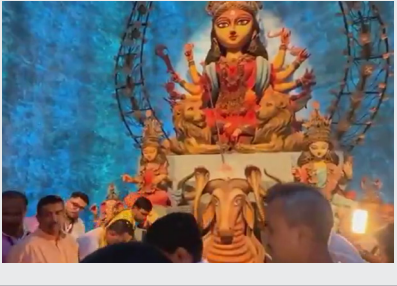
Why does the Eternal Gandhi Museum matter?

Because Gandhi belongs not merely to India but to humanity. If we discard him in the land of his birth, he may well return to us from elsewhere. Perhaps even from somewhere as unlikely as

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

For years, Allen Park on Park Street has been synonymous with Christmas festivities and the iconic Park Street Carnival. Today, this landmark is witnessing the divine devotion and grandeur of Maa Durga's worship.

Jai Maa Durga! ~ BJP



Houston, Texas.

Meanwhile, in Delhi, barricades and police cordons confront the urgency of youth protests. But can fortress Delhi indefinitely withstand the moral force of a genuine satyagraha?

The challenge for India's rulers is to recognise that dissent need not be disloyalty. The challenge for protesters is to demonstrate that resistance need not descend into disorder.

Both have much to learn from Gandhi. For the grammar of protest is also, ultimately, the grammar of democracy.

Makarand R Paranjape



GMF backs Bimol Akoijam, questions due process in JNU dismissal

NEW DELHI

The Global Manipur Federation (GMF) has expressed solidarity with Manipur Lok Sabha MP Angomcha Bimol Akoijam amid the controversy over his dismissal as a professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), raising questions over alleged procedural irregularities in the university's decision.

In a statement issued on Tuesday, the federation said the developments surrounding Akoijam had raised concerns about institutional procedures and could undermine his work, while discouraging the growing public demand



for change in Manipur.

The GMF also cautioned against political exchanges that could divert attention from Manipur's continuing violence and humanitarian crisis. It called for a more rational political discourse, stressing that the state's pressing challenges must remain at the centre of public and media attention.

The federation urged the JNU administration and its governing bodies to ensure strict compliance with statutory provisions, institutional rules and due process while dealing with the matter.

A key concern raised by the GMF relates to Section 16 of the Sexual Harassment of Women at

Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. The provision restricts the disclosure of the identities of the complainant and respondent, as well as details of complaints, inquiries and related proceedings.

The federation flagged questions over the handling of the case in the context of these confidentiality requirements. The precise circumstances surrounding the alleged procedural lapses, however, remain subject to the relevant institutional and legal processes.

The GMF also referred to objections raised by the Jawaharlal Nehru University Teachers' Association (JNUTA), which has criti-

cised the university administration's handling of the matter and alleged that prescribed legal and institutional procedures were bypassed. According to the teachers' association, Statute 30 of the JNU Act vests the authority to dismiss faculty members in the university's Executive Council, raising questions about whether the prescribed process was followed in Akoijam's case.

The controversy has brought the university's disciplinary procedures and the role of its governing bodies into focus. The allegations raised by the federation and the teachers' association remain distinct from any final legal de-

termination on the validity of the dismissal.

The GMF said the dispute also carried wider public implications, particularly at a time when Manipur continues to grapple with violence, displacement and humanitarian concerns, alongside protests over the state's situation.

It warned that political sparring over the MP's dismissal should not eclipse the larger crisis facing Manipur. The federation called for sustained public engagement with the state's problems, arguing that institutional accountability and attention to the humanitarian situation must not be pushed aside by political controversy.

Assam to receive Rs.843 crore under SDRF; Centre reviews disaster relief norms

GUWAHATI

The Centre is reviewing compensation rates and eligibility criteria under the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) and National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF), as Assam prepares to seek around ₹1,100 crore for families affected by the devastating floods in Upper Assam in June.

Rajya Sabha MP Jogen Mohan said on Tuesday that Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai had informed him that the process of revising the relief norms was underway. A committee examining the existing provisions includes representatives from several states, including Assam, Mohan said.

Assam is set to receive ₹843 crore under the SDRF for the 2026-27 financial year. The allocation comprises ₹758.70 crore as the Centre's share and ₹84.30 crore from the state government. Mohan said he had raised the issue of flood relief and rehabilitation in the Rajya Sabha through Zero Hour on July 30 and a Special Mention on August 12. He sought enhanced financial assistance, revised SDRF/NDRF norms and a special relief package for flood-affected families.

"I have been trying to raise the issue of floods in Assam, particularly in the flood-affected districts of Upper Assam, in the Rajya Sabha, highlighting the need for greater assistance for those affected," Mohan said.

The Centre had earlier sanctioned ₹379.35 crore as an advance release of the first instalment of its SDRF contribution to Assam. The amount was part of a ₹2,117.85 crore assistance package for seven flood-affected states.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Monday that the state government had completed three rounds of surveys covering 57,000 flood-affected families in Upper Assam. The estimated compensation requirement stands at around ₹1,100 crore.

"Within two to three days, we will send the proposal to the Centre, and I think we will receive the funds soon," Sarma said at a press briefing in Chopaidong, Guwahati.

The chief minister said the government would distribute compensation in phases if the Centre delayed releasing the funds.

Tripura CM Manik Saha unveils Rs.1,400 crore projects, signs MoU with Tata Trusts

DHARMANAGAR

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Monday inaugurated development projects and laid foundation stones in North Tripura, highlighting the state government's focus on public infrastructure, rural livelihoods and delivery of essential services. The programme also featured a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the district administration and Tata Trusts.

Addressing a gathering at the newly constructed District Magistrate and Collector's office in Dharmanagar, Saha said projects worth approximately ₹1,400 crore were being inaugurated as part of the state's ongoing development initiatives. He said the government had prepared a roadmap to improve infrastructure and public services across Tripura, with an emphasis on completing projects within stipulated timelines. "Every day, you will see that we are inaugurating

something or the other at different places. Even today, projects worth about ₹1,400 crore are being inaugurated here," Saha said, referring to the development agenda under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership. The programme included initiatives related to Anganwadi centres, rural empowerment and administrative infrastructure. The MoU with Tata Trusts was another key component of the event, although details of the proposed collaboration were not specified in the statement.

Saha inaugurated a new office building aimed at streamlining public administration and flagged off a fleet of Swachhata vehicles to strengthen sanitation services.

He also launched TRLM Didi vehicles under the Tripura Rural Livelihood Mission (TRLM). The initiative is intended to support rural women-led self-help groups by improving their financial independence and access to markets.

Sharda Devi accuses Bimol Akoijam's supporters of mistreating women amid JNU row

IMPHAL

Manipur BJP president and Rajya Sabha MP A. Sharda Devi on Tuesday accused supporters of Lok Sabha MP Angomcha Bimol Akoijam of mistreating women, escalating the political controversy surrounding the Congress MP's dismissal as a professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU).

Sharda Devi made the allegations on October 13 as a delegation of BJP women leaders met President Droupadi Murmu in New Delhi.

Addressing the controversy, the BJP leader criticised the alleged sexual harassment of students at a university and questioned why those who were aware of the matter had remained silent.

"A university, an institution meant to impart moral education, has a professor engaging in such vile conduct. It is shameful," she said, alleging that students had faced sexual harassment.

Sharda Devi further claimed



that women had been mistreated by people supporting Akoijam amid the ongoing agitation in Manipur.

"We have filed numerous FIRs there, FIRs with the police and

complaints with the Cyber Crime cell," she said, referring to complaints allegedly lodged over incidents involving women.

Expressing her anguish over the controversy, the BJP lead-

er said the incident had left her ashamed to identify herself as being from Manipur.

The allegations come amid a widening dispute over Akoijam's dismissal from JNU and the circumstances surrounding the decision. The Global Manipur Federation (GMF) has expressed solidarity with the MP, raising concerns over alleged procedural irregularities and urging the university to follow statutory provisions and due process.

The Jawaharlal Nehru University Teachers' Association has also questioned the university administration's handling of the matter, alleging that prescribed institutional procedures may have been bypassed.

The accusations made by Sharda Devi against Akoijam's supporters could not be independently verified from the information available. The allegations should therefore be viewed as claims made by the BJP leader and not as established findings.

NSF backs Angami body's ILP resolution, seeks action against illegal immigration in Nagaland



KOHIMA:

The Naga Students' Federation (NSF) has backed the Angami Public Organisation's (APO) resolution on enforcing the Inner Line Permit (ILP) system in Nagaland, urging tribal organisations and apex bodies to unite behind a coordinated approach to address illegal immigration and ensure compliance with existing laws.

In a statement issued on October 13, the federation's Inner Line Regulation Commission (ILRC) welcomed the APO's resolution, saying it had drawn attention to persistent gaps in the implementation of safeguards under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873.

The commission specifically flagged concerns over enforcement in Dimapur, Chümoukedima and Niuland, calling for more effective

implementation of the regulatory framework.

The ILRC also backed the APO's proposed phased approach, which it said would allow individuals and non-indigenous communities time to address issues relating to illegal immigration and bring employment, services, documentation and tenancy arrangements into compliance with the law. Clarifying its position, the commission said the Naga people were not opposed to non-indigenous individuals who enter Nagaland, work, conduct business or reside in the state legally. Instead, it stressed that the concern centred on illegal immigration and non-compliance with existing legal provisions. The commission urged other Naga tribal organisations and apex bodies to support the initiative and work collectively towards effective enforcement of the ILP system.

The issue has also prompted the commission to seek interven-

tion from the state government. According to the ILRC, it submitted a representation to the chief minister on October 1, 2026, following a national seminar on the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation.

However, the commission said it had not received a response from the Chief Minister's Office.

The ILRC noted that the representation had been reported in print media, although space constraints had prevented the publication of its complete text. Calling for a timely response, the commission urged the state government to examine the concerns raised and take appropriate action without further delay.

The NSF's backing of the APO resolution adds to calls for a coordinated institutional response to immigration-related concerns in Nagaland, with the implementation of existing legal safeguards emerging as a central demand.

Assam-Arunachal border dispute: Two-month deadline set, alternative land arrangements considered

GUWAHATI

Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have set a two-month deadline to resolve their remaining boundary disputes, with alternative land arrangements being considered in cases involving established villages and family-owned properties that prove difficult to settle.

The decision was taken at a joint meeting of the regional committees of the two states in Biswanath on Tuesday, where ministers, legislators and senior officials discussed outstanding issues along the inter-state boundary. The meeting was attended by Assam Cabinet Minister and Regional Committee chairman Keshab Mahanta, Assam's Biswanath district guardian minister and committee vice-chairman Ranaj Pegu, and Arunachal Pradesh Cabinet Minister and Regional Committee chairman Balo Raja, along with officials from both states. Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Mahanta said several stretches of the boundary were undisputed, but some locations continued to face problems, particularly where families lived in one state while their land fell within the territory of the other.

"Some areas have no disputes, while others have minor issues. There are instances where families live in Assam but their land

falls in Arunachal Pradesh, or vice versa. These matters will be addressed through visits by district officials and discussions involving the respective MLAs. We want to resolve the issues within a month, but have set a two-month period," Mahanta said.

Commissioners, district administrations and legislators from both states will coordinate consultations to identify and settle the remaining differences within the stipulated period.

Mahanta acknowledged that some disputes could be more complicated, particularly those involving long-established villages and ancestral or family-owned land that either state might be reluctant to relinquish. In such cases, the regional committees may consider alternative arrangements, including providing land at another location, he said.

"In some cases, there may be old villages or land belonging to families that a state may not be willing to give up. In such situations, an alternative arrangement, including offering land at another location, may have to be considered. These matters will require further discussion by the regional committees. If necessary, the chief ministers of both states will take a final decision," Mahanta said.

Scindia urges state-specific lending plans for Northeast

AIZAWL

Union DoNER Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Tuesday urged banks and financial institutions to expand lending across the Northeast through state-specific credit strategies, arguing that a uniform approach cannot address the region's diverse economic needs.

Addressing the third Northeast Bankers' Conclave at Mizoram University, organised by the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) in collaboration with the North Eastern Development Finance Corporation (NEDFi), Scindia said the annual gathering should measure tangible progress rather than become a routine exercise.

Referring to discussions at the previous conclave in Agartala, he said a standardised financial package would not work across all eight northeastern states. While the earlier meeting focused on infrastructure, the current deliberations centred on improving access to credit for businesses and individuals



who need it.

Scindia said the Rising Northeast Summit had generated investment commitments worth nearly ₹4.3 lakh crore, of which around ₹40,000 crore had been grounded following follow-up by his ministry.

He said the investment interest needed a stronger response from the banking sector, with better coordination between financial institutions, state governments and development agencies to translate commitments into projects.

The minister also referred to develop-

ment roadmaps prepared by chief minister-led task forces following the North Eastern Council's plenary. Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma, who heads the task force on the North Eastern Economic Corridor, has proposed an integrated multimodal mobility corridor, an aviation hub and a North-east tourism circuit.

Scindia said such initiatives would require adequate financing and lending plans tailored to the economic priorities of individual states. Mizoram targets higher credit-deposit ratio

Lalduhoma called on banks to lend more proactively in Mizoram, setting a target of increasing the state's credit-deposit ratio from 55.83% in 2025-26 to at least 67% by 2028-29. He said seven banks operating in the state had recorded credit-deposit ratios below 40% as of June 2026, highlighting the need to improve the flow of bank credit into productive economic activities.

The chief minister also called for district-wise lending targets with clear timelines, stressing that credit expansion should extend beyond Aizawl to reach entrepreneurs and businesses in other parts of the state.

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Jantar Mantar breach: CJP’s Das, Ranka sent to 5-day judicial custody; Dipke tells Modi to ‘show guts’



NEW DELHI

Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) leaders Saurav Das and Ashutosh Ranka were sent to five-day judicial custody and lodged in Tihar Jail on Wednesday for allegedly violating their peace bonds and trespassing into Jantar Mantar, which was denotified as a protest area, police sources said. Bail bond formalities for their associate Ajinkya Shinde are being finalised, they said. The three were produced before the Executive Magistrate again on Wednesday morning. Notably, the trio were detained early Tuesday after allegedly breaching barricades and entering the protest site, which was recently denotified as a designated venue for demonstrations, and raising slogans demanding Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar’s resignation.

Police have registered a case against them on charges including trespassing, violating prohibitory orders, breaching a peace bond and obstructing a public servant from discharging official duties, sources said. Ranka and Das had signed a bond to maintain peace for a year after being detained on Saturday during an earlier protest in the national capital, officials said. Reacting to the development, CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke slammed the Central government for crushing dissent. In an X post, he said, “Ashu and Saurav have been sent to five days’ judicial custody. Their fault? Unfurling the Tricolour at Jantar Mantar.” “Show some guts, @narendramodi. If you’re so determined to crush dissent, have the courage to officially

declare an Emergency instead of hiding behind these cowardly tactics,” he posted. The arrests come amid heightened security in the national capital following a series of protests by the CJP and other organisations over alleged irregularities in the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. On October 11, Delhi Police Commissioner Anurag Kumar issued an order designating Ramlila Maidan, Burari Ground and CBD Ground as venues for protests and demonstrations. Jantar Mantar was subsequently denotified as a designated protest site. The CJP has criticised the move, arguing that shifting demonstrations away from the political centre of the national capital would weaken the visibility of public dissent.

India rejects ‘unsubstantiated reference’ in UN Special Rapporteur’s report on indigenous land rights



NEW DELHI

India has rejected what it described as an “unsubstantiated reference” in a report by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, defending its constitutional safeguards and legal framework for protecting the rights of Scheduled Tribes. Anuj Swarup, First Secretary at

India’s Permanent Mission to the United Nations, delivered India’s response at the 81st Session of the UN General Assembly’s Third Committee. The objection concerns a report issued in August 2025, which questioned whether India’s constitutional provisions for Scheduled Tribes provide substantive, rights-based protections or primarily serve administrative purposes.

Rejecting this assessment, India highlighted its existing legal mechanisms for recognising tribal rights, particularly those relating to land and forests. It maintained that the country’s legal and constitutional framework provides safeguards for tribal communities and supports their social and economic development. In its defence, India cited data on title claims under the Forest Rights

Act, 2006, which recognises the rights of eligible forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers over forest land and resources. The legislation provides a framework for recognising individual and community forest rights, including rights over land under occupation and access to forest resources. India cited the Act’s implementation to counter the suggestion that tribal protections are merely administrative rather than grounded in legal rights. India also underscored its constitutional safeguards and welfare programmes aimed at improving the living conditions of Scheduled Tribes and other disadvantaged communities. The government’s approach, framed around the principle of “Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas”, emphasises inclusive development and equal opportunities. India presented these measures as evidence of its commitment to protecting tribal interests while promoting their social and economic advancement. The response also reiterated India’s longstanding position on the use of the term “Indigenous Peoples” in the country’s context. While reaffirming its support for the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), India maintained that its entire population was indigenous at the time of the country’s independence. This position reflects India’s approach to the international debate over identifying Indigenous Peoples within its national context. The exchange highlights ongoing differences between India and the UN Special Rapporteur over how international standards and India’s domestic legal framework should interpret the rights and status of tribal communities.

INTERNATIONAL

Trump went all the way to Alaska in a sign of how close its US Senate race may be

WASILLA

It’s a long way from Washington, has a small population and hasn’t backed a Democrat for Senate in nearly 20 years. Yet President Donald Trump on Tuesday devoted a big chunk of his dwindling time ahead of crucial mid-term elections to head to Alaska — attempting to bolster a Republican incumbent senator in another sign of GOP fears about retaining control of Congress after Election Day on Nov. 3. Trump headlined a rally for Sen. Dan Sullivan in Wasilla, about 45 miles (72 kilometers) north of Anchorage — famous for being the hometown of former Republican vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin and the headquarters of the Iditarod sled dog race across the state. Trump’s stop is part of a western swing also taking him to rallies in Arizona and Montana on Wednesday. The president noted to the crowd that he had flown eight hours to rally for Sullivan, whom he called “one of the best and most respected senators in D.C.” Sullivan, seeking a third term, faces Democrat Mary Peltola, a former congresswoman who is running to put “Alaska first” and emphasizing cost-of-living issues. During Tuesday’s rally, Trump announced that Taiwan would purchase gas from a proposed mega-gas project that he has been highlighting amid Sullivan’s campaign and that it would invest more than \$4 billion. There was no immediate confirmation from Taiwan, the self-governing island that China claims as its own. The White House did not immediately provide further details. Trump also said the Federal Communications Commission would vote in the coming weeks on investing an additional \$162 million in expanding high-speed internet access in Alaska. And he announced pardons for two men who had pleaded guilty in 2022 to Clean Air Act violations for tampering with federally mandated monitoring devices on certain vehicles. Democrats last won a Senate seat in Alaska in 2008, and the state hasn’t elected a governor from that party since 1998. The only time Alaska didn’t vote



Republican for president was during Lyndon B. Johnson’s landslide 1964 reelection. Yet high gasoline prices from the Iran war and persistently elevated inflation have damaged Trump’s approval ratings enough to leave Democrats dreaming of Alaska upsets. Alaska pollster Ivan Moore said he’s seen a decline in Trump’s support statewide that mirrors the president’s falling approval ratings nationally. That means the Senate race may be decided by Trump 2024 voters who are now unsure they still back him. “The visit is certainly appropriate. Whether the visit will be effective or not is another matter,” said Moore, who said when he first heard that Trump would visit Alaska, he didn’t believe it would actually happen. The Trump administration has prioritized expanding oil and gas drilling in the state. Vice President JD Vance last week campaigned in Fairbanks for Sullivan and Republican Rep. Nick Begich. Sullivan recently joined Trump in the Oval Office, where the president announced a \$54 billion investment by South Korea’s government into the proposed Alaska gas project. That’s despite South Korea saying the deal, and its total value, haven’t been finalized. Versions of a gas project have been proposed in Alaska for decades. Trump trekking four time zones west to get to Sullivan’s home turf — an unusually long trip so close to the midterms — is his strongest show of support for the incumbent. Alaska is home to around 740,000

people, making it slightly less populous than Denver. It ranks 48th out of 50 states in population, smaller than all but Vermont and Wyoming. Trump endorsed Kelly Tshibaka, who challenged Murkowski that year, but that didn’t stop incumbent Murkowski from winning reelection. In Wasilla, Max Christensen was waiting in line for the rally and said he hoped to hear more specifics from Trump about the natural gas project, and said he was “really curious just to see how he’s going to handle things like inflation and gas prices and things like that.” Christensen, 22, said he thinks Trump has been a great president “despite all his flaws and stuff,” adding, “I think he really does genuinely care about the people of the United States of America.” Trump has complained about Alaska’s unique elections system. The state has open primaries, in which the four top vote-getters — regardless of party affiliation — advance to the general election, which uses ranked choice voting. That’s led to a scenario where there also will be another Dan Sullivan on the November ballot: retired teacher Dan J. Sullivan, whom Trump and other allies of Sen. Sullivan have called a sham candidate. Dan J. Sullivan has denied this, but Trump continued to hammer the other Sullivan at his rally. “They found a guy named Dan Sullivan, they put him up to get things a little confused,” Trump said, as he repeatedly urged his supporters to vote for “the

real Dan Sullivan.” Trump also touted Begich, who is facing a competitive challenge from Bill Hill, an independent. Alaska has a history of rewarding candidates with an independent streak — something Vance acknowledged during his trip to Fairbanks last week. “In very deep red years, Alaska is competitive. In very deep blue years, Alaska is still competitive,” Vance said. “I think it’s just a reality of the politics of the state.” Independence has been hard to find in the Republican Party, where Trump for years has had total control. Some Republicans facing tough elections have begun tiptoeing away from the president on key issues such as Iran and tariffs, but not Sullivan, who has been vocal in supporting both. Trump also questioned why three Republicans were running against Bernadette Wilson, who finished third in the August primary but was the top vote-getting Republican. This came at the same time state GOP leaders — including outgoing Gov. Mike Dunleavy — are urging voters to rank Republicans on the ballot. Many Republicans — despite reservations with ranked voting — have seen a ranking strategy in that race as crucial for Republicans trying to win the seat. Trump has also triggered a trade war with Canada, which shares a 1,500-plus-mile (2,450-kilometer) border with Alaska and is among the state’s most important trading partners. The US banned nearly \$1 billion worth of imports from its neighbor — including alcoholic beverages, dairy products and motorcycles — after previously imposing 50% tariffs on about \$20 billion in Canadian products. Canada has responded with reciprocal bans and its own import levies, and the back-and-forth could raise prices for Alaska consumers. Making Canada an enemy of sorts is “discomforting” for many Alaskans, said pollster Moore. “We associate, I think, probably more closely with the Canadians — more than a lot of the Lower 48,” he said.

Pope Leo XIV diagnosed with lung cancer after surgery to remove part of right lung

ROME

Pope Leo XIV underwent surgery Tuesday that confirmed that he has lung cancer, and doctors removed the lower lobe of his right lung, the Vatican said. Tests confirmed a diagnosis of lung adenocarcinoma, the Vatican said in a medical bulletin after the surgery. It said the diagnosis had been suspected by preoperative tests and was confirmed during surgery. The statement made no mention of treatment going forward, and the Vatican said doctors were not currently speaking of chemotherapy or other therapies pending the results of other tests. The Vatican press office noted the medical statement spoke of the “radical” removal of the lobe as an indication that doctors removed all suspect tissue in hopes of removing any lingering traces of the cancer. Leo’s lymph nodes also would have been removed and tested, to determine if the cancer had spread, and there was no word yet on those test results. “Adenocarcinoma is the most common (type of lung cancer), also with the most favorable prognosis,” said Dr. Stephen Liu, a lung cancer expert at Georgetown’s Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center. “While we know the diagnosis we now need to know the stage.” “We now need to know how big it is, how many spots in the lung are involved. Is it just one nodule, or more than one, and the lymph nodes, are they cancerous?” Liu said. If the cancer has spread, more tests will be needed to determine what kind of therapy to pursue, he said. Options include chemotherapy, a combination of chemotherapy and immunotherapy or targeted therapy, which involves oral pills for specific cancers. The 71-year-old was in the operating room for about three hours, the Vatican statement said. The surgery itself lasted approximately 90 minutes. “The surgery was success-

ful, and there were no complications,” the statement said, adding that the pope later returned to his room. The right lung is divided into three sections or lobes while the left has two. After one lobe is removed, the remainder of the lung can gradually compensate, especially in otherwise healthy and physically active people. Leo had walked into Rome’s Gemelli hospital through the main entrance earlier in the day and waved to dozens of well-wishers who had gathered to greet him. The Vatican said the surgery would be performed by a team led by Gemelli’s chief thoracic surgeon, Dr. Stefano Margaritora. The American pontiff has offered a rare level of transparency about the first publicly disclosed major health problem of his 17-month papacy. He revealed the discovery of the localized nodule during his Sunday noon prayer and announced that he would have it removed. Oncologists said prior to the operation that even if the nodule turned out to be cancerous, Leo’s prognosis would be “excellent” since it would have been removed at an early stage. The Vatican on Monday canceled all Leo’s audiences through Oct. 20. While Gemelli has a specific papal apartment that past popes have used, complete with a private chapel on the 10th floor, Leo will actually be staying in a nearby room since the papal apartment is undergoing renovations, according to the Vatican press office. There was no word on whether Leo would be able to keep his planned trip to South America next month. Oncologists often advise patients not to fly for three weeks after surgery — which would give the pope just the interval needed to make his planned Nov. 6-17 trip to Uruguay, Argentina and Peru, depending on his recovery. The current itinerary for the trip is ambitious and the longest of his papacy to date, calling for Leo to clock just over

31,000 kilometers (19,000 miles) on a dozen flights and two helicopter rides, and a significant altitude change in Peru. “He has decided to undergo surgery soon in order to not change his plans for future overseas trips, so there is no need to worry, as it is not an emergency,” said Tokyo Cardinal Kikuchi Tsutomu, who saw Leo on Monday. A lung nodule is a small abnormal area measuring less than 3 centimeters (1.2 inches) that sometimes appears on a CT scan of the chest or abdomen. Often, the scans are done to investigate trauma or a lung infection, unrelated to a lung cancer screening. A nodule can be benign or malignant, and oftentimes surgical removal is recommended both to establish whether it is cancer and to treat a malignancy while it is still localized. This is believed to be the second hospitalization for Leo, who is known to be sporty and in good shape, with weekly tennis games and swimming. As a young missionary priest, he came down with typhoid fever in 1965, soon after arriving in Chulucanas, Peru. The illness and hospitalization were a cathartic moment for him to decide to stay in the poverty and discomfort of Peru after living in relative comfort in Rome — a decision that ultimately paved the way to his papacy, according to an interview Leo gave to Elise Ann Allen in 2025 for “Pope Leo XIV: The Biography.” According to the book, Leo said he prayed to God to let him die rather than suffer the “horrible” pain of the fever. “I was hooked up to an IV, and I said, ‘If this is your sense of humor, Lord, I think you could do a little better.’” “Obviously, I survived; I recovered, but it turned out to be a very significant moment for me, because it was like, ‘Well, you’ve already dealt with the illness; you already see what the needs are here — the order, the Augustinians, the church are telling you, ‘We need you here; go for it.’ I never looked back.”

India hosts global mercury conference for first time; Northeast research gains prominence



Scientists from 26 countries gather at IIT Hyderabad to discuss mercury pollution, public health and environmental policy; Assam and Arunachal Pradesh researchers highlight regional concerns

India hosted the 17th International Conference on Mercury as a Global Pollutant (ICMGP 2026) for the first time in the event's 36-year history, bringing together scientists, policymakers and researchers from 26 countries at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Hyderabad from October 4 to 9.

The six-day conference, themed "Reaching Ten Years of Enforcement of the Minamata Convention," focused on mercury contamination, atmospheric emissions, ecosystem health and human exposure. Discussions also explored ways to translate scientific findings into effective environmental policies and strengthen international cooperation to tackle mercury pollution.

The conference was jointly chaired by Professor Asif Qureshi of IIT Hyderabad and Dr Jagannath Biswakarma of the University of Bristol, United Kingdom.

A major highlight was the World Health Organization's (WHO) first official participation in the conference series. Dr Elena Jordan of the WHO's Chemical Safety and Health Unit led a plenary session on mercury and human health, addressing biomonitoring, exposure assessment and national public health responses.

The Secretariat of the Minamata Convention on Mercury also participated in the event. Its Executive Secretary, Monika Stankiewicz, underscored the importance of scientific research in strengthening international efforts to control mercury pollution.

The human consequences of contamination were brought into focus by Masami Ogata, a Minamata disease patient and storyteller from Japan. Sharing his experience of the long-term social and human impact of industrial mercury pollution, Ogata connected the historical tragedy of Minamata disease with the continuing global challenge of preventing similar environmental disasters.

Minamata disease was caused by industrial mercury discharge into coastal waters in Japan, exposing communities to toxic contamination and highlighting the devastating consequences of inadequate pollution controls.

Scientific sessions featured experts working in atmospheric mercury, toxicology, aquatic ecosystems and pollution monitoring. Researchers from South Africa, China, Russia, Brazil and Argentina discussed persistent gaps in long-term monitoring

and emissions data, particularly in developing economies.

Research from Northeast India emerged as an important part of the conference, drawing attention to the links between industrial activity, environmental contamination, agriculture and public health.

Researchers from Nagaon University in Assam presented findings on

mercury contamination in agricultural soils and crops. Dr Farishta Yasmin of the university also served on the conference's Scientific Steering Committee.

The research is particularly relevant to Assam, where the Brahmaputra basin supports extensive agricultural activity and sustains communities dependent on local land and water resources. Mercury contamination can have implications for soil quality, food safety and human health, making regional monitoring and assessment important for environmental protection.

The region's industrial history adds another dimension to these concerns. Coal mining in Assam's Maum coalfield dates back to the late 19th century. Mining waste associated with high-sulphur coal can release heavy metals, including mercury, into surrounding soil, water and air, underlining the need for sustained environmental monitoring.

Arunachal Pradesh also featured in the conference's concluding discussions. During the valedictory session, Gumjum Haider highlighted community-led biodiversity conservation in the Eastern Himalayas, focusing on the Singchung Bugun Village Community Reserve, protection of the endangered Bugun liocichla and hornbill conservation efforts near Pakke Tiger Reserve.

Although centred on biodiversity rather than mercury pollution, the presentation broadened the discussion on how local communities can contribute to protecting fragile ecosystems and sustaining environmental conservation efforts.

The conference, which began in Sweden in 1990, received support from the Telangana government and the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. It concluded with awards for 11 student researchers, recognising emerging scientific contributions across the field.

Organisers said the research exchanges and partnerships established in Hyderabad are expected to support continuing international efforts to address mercury pollution and strengthen the connection between scientific evidence, environmental governance and public health action.

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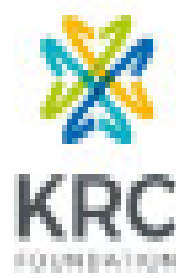
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