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PERSPECTIVE

Don't treat people as bad as they are - treat them as good as you are.

Election Commission appoints 11 nodal officers for 2027 Manipur Assembly polls

IMPHAL

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has appointed 11 nodal officers to oversee key arrangements for the 2027 Manipur Assembly elections, as the state steps up preparations for the next round of polling.

According to a notification issued by the office of the Manipur Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) senior Indian Police Service (IPS) officer Kamei Angam Romanus has been appointed nodal officer for law and order and security planning. Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer Hungyo Worshang will oversee excise-related arrangements.

Konsam Binku has been assigned responsibility for monitoring election expenditure, while Khumanthem Diana will serve as the nodal officer for transport management.

The Election Commission has also appointed officers to oversee computerisation, cybersecurity, communication planning and other election-related arrangements, officials said on Wednesday.

The appointments are aimed at ensuring coordination among departments and facilitating the smooth conduct of the Assembly elections.

Manipur is likely to go to the polls in February or March 2027, although the official election schedule is yet to be announced.

Senior Election Commission officials visited Imphal last week to review poll preparedness across all 16 districts of the northeastern state.

The appointment of nodal officers marks part of the preparatory process ahead of the elections, with key administrative, security and logistical responsibilities being assigned well in advance.

WHO SAID WHAT



If Prasars Bharati can spend 15 crore a year on a DD News show featuring a star anchor, while the ISRO Chairman's basic pay is about 27 lakh a year, shouldn't we rethink our priorities? If India wants to conquer space and attract our finest scientific minds, our rewards must match our ambitions.

- Harsh Goenka, Chairman, RPG Enterprises

Meghalaya launches five-year HIV mission with Rs. 25 crore initial funding

State records 9,244 people living with HIV; Conrad Sangma calls for expanded testing, sustained treatment and a campaign against stigma

SHILLONG

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Tuesday announced a five-year special mission to tackle the state's HIV burden, with an initial allocation of ₹25 crore. The state has recorded 9,244 people living with HIV, highlighting the need for stronger testing, treatment and awareness initiatives.

Addressing the State Red Ribbon Youth Festival 2026 in Shillong, Sangma called for coordinated action across government departments and greater public participation to contain the spread of HIV and address the stigma associated with the virus and drug abuse.

The chief minister said the responsibility of tackling the challenge could not rest solely with the Meghalaya AIDS Control Society or the health department. He stressed that the government, other departments and citizens must work together to strengthen prevention and healthcare efforts.

"There is an urgent need for all of us to work together," Sangma said, warning that delays in addressing the issue could make the challenge more difficult in the coming years.

The five-year mission will adopt a



KRC TIMES

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‘ULFA protected Assam for 50 years’: Minister Biswajit Daimary hails outfit’s role

GUWAHATI

Assam minister Biswajit Daimary has praised the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), crediting the Moran-Matak communities with providing its core leadership and claiming that the outfit had helped protect Assam over the past five decades.

Daimary made the remarks while addressing a gathering after receiving the Bengmara Samanway Award at the central foundation day celebration of the Matak Yuva Chhatra Sanmilan. The event was held at Dirak Nawajyoti village in Kakopathar, near the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border in Tinsukia district.

Highlighting the Moran-Matak community's contribution to the organisation, Daimary said, "Because of the ULFA, no one has been able to lay a hand on Assam."

He asserted that members of the community had played a significant role in shaping ULFA's leadership and specifically referred to its command-



er-in-chief, Paresh Baruah, who belongs to the Matak community.

"The people who provided ULFA with its core leadership were from the Moran-Matak communities," the minister said, adding that the situation in Assam over the past 50 years could have been very different without their involvement.

"Only God knows what the condition of Assam would have

been over the past 50 years had the Moran-Matak people not been there," he remarked.

Daimary also described ULFA as an organisation that had demonstrated resilience over several decades, saying it was a force that others had been unable to weaken in the past 50 years.

His comments came during a community gathering where he was honoured for his association with the Moran-Matak community. The remarks placed the spotlight on the community's historical role in Assam's political landscape and its links with the state's insurgency movement.ULFA emerged in 1979 amid demands for the protection of Assam's identity, resources and political rights. Over the decades, however, the organisation's armed campaign has also been associated with violence and prolonged instability in the state. Daimary's remarks reflect his assessment of the outfit's historical influence and the role of the Moran-Matak community in its leadership.

‘No Compromise, This Is the New Assam’: Himanta Biswa Sarma on Apprehension of 9 Bangladeshis



GUWAHATI

Nine Bangladeshi nationals have been apprehended in Assam's Dhubri district for allegedly entering the country illegally and handed over to the Border Security Force (BSF), Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said. Reiterating the state government's tough stance on illegal infiltration, Sarma asserted that there would be no compromise on border security. In a post on X late Tuesday night, the Chief Minister said the nine individuals had been handed over to the BSF. The next step, he indicated, would be to send them back across the India-Bangladesh border.

However, Sarma did not disclose the specific location in Dhubri district where the individuals were apprehended.

"This is a clear message. If you cross the border illegally, you will face the law. There will be no compromise on border

security. This is the New Assam," the Chief Minister said in his post. The Assam government has maintained a strict approach towards alleged illegal infiltration, with security personnel continuing to apprehend people suspected of entering the state unlawfully. The latest incident in Dhubri comes amid the state's ongoing efforts to strengthen border surveillance and prevent unauthorised crossings. Assam's Cachar, Dhubri and South Salmara-Mankachar districts share an international border with Bangladesh spanning approximately 267.5 kilometres. The state has an Integrated Check Post (ICP) at Sutarkandi in Sribhumi district. Two other such facilities along the India-Bangladesh border in the Northeast are located at Dawki in Meghalaya and Akhaura in Tripura. Another Integrated Check Post is situated at Darranga in Assam's Tamulpur district along the India-Bhutan border. The apprehension of the nine individuals has once again brought border security and alleged illegal infiltration into focus. However, authorities have not yet disclosed further details about the identities of those apprehended, the exact route they allegedly used to enter India, or the arrangements for their return to Bangladesh.

Arunachal Minister Balo Raja Says India Is ‘Very Strong’ Amid China Border Row

ITANAGAR,

Arunachal Pradesh Minister Balo Raja on Wednesday asserted that India was in a position of strength along the China border, questioning remarks attributed to the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) leadership about continuing face-offs between Indian and Chinese forces along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

Raja, who holds the Urban Affairs, Land Management and Civil Aviation portfolios, said India's expanding intelligence capabilities should not be overlooked and questioned why senior officials should project the country as being weak.

"Why make statements like that when you are a DIG? Why perceive yourself as weak? India is very strong," Raja told reporters in Itanagar.

Referring to the spy thriller Dhurandhar, the minister highlighted what he described as the growth of India's intelligence capabilities.

"You must have seen the 'Dhurandhar' movie; watch it, and you will see how much India's intelligence capabilities have grown," he added.

Raja's remarks come amid a political controversy over reported comments by ITBP Director General Shatruej Singh Kapur concerning continuing face-offs between Indian and Chinese forces at several locations along the Arunachal Pradesh frontier.

The issue has also drawn criticism from opposition leaders, with All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) chief Asaduddin Owaisi demanding answers from the Narendra Modi-led government over alleged Chinese intrusions and reports that

Indian patrols and civilians had been prevented from accessing certain areas.

On October 24, Owaisi called for a detailed explanation of the reported remarks attributed to the ITBP chief, arguing that they raised serious questions about the situation along the border.

He sought information on the number of locations in Arunachal Pradesh where Chinese troops had allegedly intruded, obstructed Indian patrols and civilians, or refused to withdraw. He also asked how long the alleged restrictions had continued and demanded clarity on the government's approach towards China.

Criticising the absence of a parliamentary debate on the issue, Owaisi called for greater transparency and accountability. He also referred to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks in June 2020 concerning Chinese presence in Indian territory, questioning their accuracy in light of subsequent developments.

The AIMIM chief demanded a comprehensive, independent report on the border situation and called for a special session of Parliament to discuss territorial security and India's policy towards China.Meanwhile, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has sought to clarify its position following the controversy surrounding the ITBP director general's reported comments.During a briefing on Friday, the ministry said questions concerning specific incidents should be directed to the Ministry of Defence. It acknowledged, however, that the situation along the India-China border could be disrupted when Chinese forces deviated from established patrolling patterns.

CRPF Chief Reviews Manipur Security, Calls for Stronger Coordination to Maintain Peace



IMPHAL

Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) Director General Gyanendra Pratap Singh reviewed operational preparedness in Manipur and directed officers and ground commanders to ensure peace and security across their respective jurisdictions.

According to a post shared by the CRPF on social media, Singh received a guard of honour at the force's Group Centre in Imphal before holding a high-level meeting with senior officers and ground commanders to assess operational readiness and security arrangements.

During the meeting, the CRPF chief issued directives aimed at strengthening security and maintaining peace across the state."In a high-level review with senior officers and ground commanders, he issued firm directives to ensure peace and security across respective operational commands," the force said.

Singh later met Assam Rifles Director General Lt Gen Vikas Lakhera for a joint operational review meeting, bringing senior officers of both forces together to discuss the prevailing security situation in Manipur.

According to the Assam Rifles, the meeting focused on strengthening coordination between the two forces, assessing operational preparedness and reinforcing joint efforts to maintain peace, stability and public order.

The review underscored the importance of coordinated security operations and cooperation between the CRPF and Assam Rifles in addressing security challenges across Manipur.

Zubeen Garg Death Case: Wife, Associates Seek Governor’s Intervention

GUWAHATI

Seeking justice for singer Zubeen Garg, his wife Garima Saikia Garg and a delegation of artistes and close associates met Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya at Raj Bhavan on Wednesday and submitted a seven-point memorandum calling for stronger prosecution and an expeditious trial in the case.

The delegation urged the state government to oppose pending bail applications, challenge bail granted to some of the accused and strengthen the prosecution to ensure that the proceedings are not delayed. The memorandum also sought action in connection with any additional offences that may have emerged during the investigation and regular communication between the government and the singer's family.Rahul Gautam Sharma, a close associate of Garg, outlined the seven demands, including a unified prosecution coordination mechanism under the supervision of the Assam Advocate General and the engagement of experienced legal counsel to strengthen the case.

"The society has faith in the Indian judiciary, and in order to keep up that trust, we have come to the Assam Governor to request his intervention," Sharma said.The delegation also called for measures to protect the prosecution and ensure that the trial proceeds without unnecessary delays or interruptions. Speaking to the media, Garima said the memorandum had been submitted amid ongoing legal proceedings and concerns over bail granted to some of the key accused.



"We want to know what exactly happened on the last day with an asset as Zubeen Garg. Why did it happen?" she said.

Garima also expressed concern over the scheduled Supreme Court hearings on the bail petitions of Shyamkanu Mahanta on November 4 and Siddharth Sharma on November 6."If they get released too, then it will pose a challenge not just to the government but also to us, because an accused such as Mahanta had attempted witness tampering while in jail," she alleged.She further demanded that developments and findings in the case be communicated not only to the family but also to the people of Assam.Responding to questions about separate protests organised by different groups, Garima maintained that the demand for accountability remained united despite differences in the methods adopted by various organisations.

"See, we are not divided. There are certain limitations and I am still with the people. My witness trial has not yet taken place. Everyone knows what is going with me. Please let my witness trial go by peacefully. We all are united. We have to assume a sensitive and responsible role in this," she said.



multi-sectoral approach, bringing the government machinery together to expand HIV testing, improve access to

treatment and strengthen awareness programmes.

The initiative is aligned with the

UNAIDS 95-95-95 targets, which seek to ensure that 95 per cent of people living with HIV know their status, 95 per cent of those diagnosed receive antiretroviral therapy (ART), and 95 per cent of those receiving treatment achieve viral suppression.

Emphasising the importance of early diagnosis and consistent treatment, Sangma said antiretroviral medicines could suppress the virus and help prevent its transmission.

The mission will focus on encouraging people to undergo testing and ensuring that those diagnosed can access sustained treatment and supportive healthcare services.

Stigma remains a major concern Sangma identified social stigma and discrimination as significant obstacles to controlling HIV, noting that fear of being judged often prevents people from seeking testing and treatment.

He called for greater efforts to create an environment in which people can access healthcare without fear of discrimination.

Reducing stigma surrounding HIV and drug abuse, he said, was essential to encouraging people to seek help.

The chief minister also urged young people to take an active role in prevention and awareness campaigns. He

encouraged them to make informed decisions, resist peer pressure and remain confident in refusing unsafe situations.

Awards recognise HIV response initiatives

The festival also recognised districts and organisations for their contributions to HIV-related services and community interventions.

South Garo Hills received the Surakshit District Award, while Jalong Community Health Centre was named the Best Performing Antiretroviral Therapy Centre for its services to people living with HIV.

The Mihmyntdu Community Social Welfare Association in West Jaintia Hills received the Best Performing Targeted Intervention award.

The State Red Ribbon Youth Festival aims to engage young people as peer educators and advocates in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Its outreach initiatives seek to promote awareness and prevention activities in schools, colleges and villages.

Sangma also felicitated winners of various competitions held as part of the festival, reinforcing the role of youth participation in the state's broader HIV response.



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INDIA’S DRONE DOCTRINE



Modern warfare is no longer decided solely by the size of a nation’s fleet of fighter jets or the sophistication of its missiles. Increasingly, it is decided by who can field the greatest number of cheap, expendable, precise machines and who can defend against them. The Indian Army’s decision to begin procuring three distinct classes of drones, announced after a hard look at the lessons of recent conflicts, reflects a sober understanding of this shift.

The evidence from abroad is hard to ignore. The wars of Ukraine-Russia and Iran-USA have repeatedly shown how lethal unmanned systems have become. A drone costing perhaps a thousand dollars can wreck an oil refinery, as Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states have learned to their cost. Warships, including aircraft carriers, once considered the untouchable symbols of naval supremacy, can no longer assume safety from swarms of small, low-flying attackers. When a weapon that costs almost nothing can compel a defender to use interceptors worth many times more, the economics of war are fundamentally altered.

India has experienced this firsthand. During Operation Sindoor in May last year, Pakistan launched hundreds of drones, with estimates ranging from 300 to more than 500, across a front stretching from Ladakh to Sir Creek, targeting dozens of locations. Those intrusions achieved little, chiefly because the armed forces’ anti-drone systems performed effectively. Yet complacency would be foolish. The Army has noted that Türkiye and China supplied Pakistan with some of their best drone technology. Next time, the numbers may be larger and the machines more capable.

The Army’s response is therefore both defensive and offensive. Its plan covers small tactical drones for surveillance and strikes within 10 to 15 kilometres, one-way attack drones with a reach of around 150 kilometres, and high-altitude, long-endurance platforms for surveillance and pinpoint long-range attack. The technology roadmap released in April identifies some 30 types of UAVs and loitering munitions across strike, surveillance, air defence, special roles and logistics. The Army is also building capacity to operate thousands of drones. The newly raised ‘Baaz’ battalion, under 11 Corps, is dedicated to drone operations on the western front. Every one of the 380 infantry battalions now has a 25-man drone platoon, while artillery and armoured units run their own drones for target location. Drones have ceased to be a niche accessory and have become part of the Army’s structure.

The geography makes the case compelling. India’s borders with Pakistan and China run for thousands of kilometres across mountains, rivers, ravines, deserts and glaciers. Patrolling such terrain on foot is exhausting, hazardous and, in many places, practically impossible. Drones can watch what soldiers cannot reach, day and night, without risking a single life. They can track enemy movements, guide artillery and, if hostilities begin, strike with precision. Long-range variants can threaten airfields, armour and other vital installations deep in hostile territory. Yet the decisive factor is not the technology itself but the capacity to produce it. Ukraine and Iran have shown that a country with strong in-house manufacturing can inflict heavy damage even on far more powerful adversaries. Dependence on foreign suppliers is a vulnerability, since components can be withheld at the very moment they are needed. Here the signs are encouraging. The Army has signed contracts worth Rs 1,577 crore for 840 domestically built one-way attack drones. Private firms and established industrial houses are aligning themselves with the Army’s requirements. Bulk, domestic production at low cost must remain the guiding principle.

India’s counter-drone ecosystem deserves equal attention. Indigenous systems such as DR-DO’s SHIELD programme along with Indrajala and several other platforms, show that home-grown answers to the drone threat are emerging. Attack and defence must advance together, because a nation that masters one without the other remains exposed. The Indian Army is battle-tested, and its courage is beyond question. But valour must now be matched by technology suited to a new age of warfare. By investing in drones, raising dedicated units, nurturing domestic industry and strengthening its defences, the political and military leadership has shown that it understands the threats ahead. The nation can take reassurance that the preparation is serious and that the country will be ready for whatever the future brings.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

“To spare the guilty is to injure the innocent.” — Publilius Syrus

UN AT 81: A GLOBAL INSTITUTION STRUGGLING TO UPHOLD WORLD ORDER



KRC NEWS DESK

Born from the devastation of the Second World War, the United Nations remains central to international cooperation, but funding pressures, Security Council vetoes and geopolitical rivalries continue to undermine its ability to maintain peace

The United Nations marked the 81st anniversary of its founding Charter coming into force on October 24, 2026, at a time when its authority, finances and ability to respond to global crises face mounting challenges. Established to prevent another world war and promote international cooperation, the organisation is increasingly constrained by the rivalries of the very powers entrusted with safeguarding global peace.

The financial strain is one indication of its difficulties. The UN’s regular budget for 2026 has been reduced to \$3.45 billion, around 7 per cent below the previous year’s level. Unpaid contributions from member states, including the United States, which traditionally accounts for roughly one-fifth of the regular budget, have added to the pressure on the organisation.

Leadership transition has presented another challenge. The process to select a successor to Secretary-General António Guterres has also exposed divisions among major powers. According to the reported straw poll held on October 16, none of the seven candidates had secured the support of all five permanent members of the Security Council. The selection process highlights the influence these countries continue to exercise over the institution’s leadership.

Lessons from the failure of the League of Nations

The UN emerged from the failure of the League of Nations, established after the First World War to prevent future conflicts. The League lacked effective enforcement mechanisms and never included the United States as a member. Its inability to respond decisively to aggression by Japan, Italy and Germany contributed to the collapse of the international arrangements intended to preserve peace.

The UN Charter, signed in San Francisco in June 1945, sought to create a stronger framework. It prohibited the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of states, empowered the Security Council to take enforcement measures and linked international peace with development and human rights.

However, the arrangement also reflected the realities of power at the end of the Second World War. The five victorious powers - the United States, Russia, China, Britain and France - secured permanent seats on the Security Council, along with veto powers over substantive decisions.

The compromise helped persuade the major powers to participate in the new organisation. At the same time, it created a structural limitation: when a permanent member’s interests clash with a proposed international response, collective action can be blocked.

That tension continues to shape the UN’s record.

A record of achievements and shortcomings

Despite its limitations, the United Nations has played an important role in international cooperation over the past eight decades. Its membership has expanded from 51 founding countries to 193, largely reflecting decolonisation and the emergence of independent states.

UN agencies have contributed to global public health, humanitarian assistance, refugee protection and food security. The eradication of smallpox, supported by international cooperation and led by the World Health Organization, stands as a landmark achievement. UN peacekeeping operations have also helped implement peace agreements and support political transitions in countries including Namibia, Cambodia and Sierra Leone.

The organisation has provided a forum where countries of different sizes and political systems can negotiate, raise disputes and coordinate responses to shared challenges. Its humanitarian agencies continue to deliver assistance in conflict zones and areas affected by natural disasters.

The absence of a third world war since 1945, however, cannot be attributed to the UN alone. Nuclear deterrence, diplomatic negotiations, regional arrangements and other factors have also shaped the international security environment. The continued existence of wars and humanitarian emergencies demonstrates the limits of the organisation’s ability to prevent conflict.

Security Council vetoes expose divisions

The Security Council’s inability to act consistently in major conflicts remains one of the most persistent criticisms of the UN system.

The failures to prevent mass atrocities in Rwanda and Srebrenica during the 1990s damaged the organisation’s credibility. More recent disagreements over Gaza and Ukraine have again highlighted the difficulty of securing collective action when the interests of major powers diverge.

In 2025, the United States vetoed two proposed Security Council texts on Gaza drafted by the ten elected members of the Council. Russia, meanwhile, vetoed amendments to a text on Ukraine, including one that reaffirmed Ukraine’s territorial integrity.

These episodes illustrate how veto power can prevent the Council from adopting resolutions even when other members support action. The consequences extend beyond individual votes, raising questions about consistency, accountability and the ability of international institutions to apply agreed principles across different conflicts.

Secretary-General Guterres warned in 2024 that divisions among major powers had seriously damaged the Security Council’s authority. The challenge is particularly pronounced when permanent members are directly involved in a conflict or support one of its parties.

The veto was designed to keep the major powers within the UN system. Yet its use can also leave the organisation unable to respond when its collective intervention is most needed.

Financial pressure is not a substitute for reform. Questions about the UN’s administrative costs and efficiency deserve attention. Critics have argued that its bureaucracy needs streamlining, resources must be used more effectively and programmes should be assessed against measurable outcomes.

But financial pressure caused by unpaid contributions does not, by itself, address these concerns. When member states fail to meet their financial obligations, the organisation’s ability to sustain programmes and fulfil mandates is weakened.

Reform therefore requires both greater accountability within the institution and a stronger commitment from member states to honour their obligations. Budgetary discipline and timely payments are essential if the UN is to maintain its humanitarian, developmental and peacekeeping responsibilities.

A Security Council that reflects today’s world

The composition of the Security Council is another major issue. Its permanent membership reflects the distribution of power in 1945 rather than the political and demographic realities of the present day. Africa and Latin America have no permanent representation, while India, the world’s most populous country, also lacks a permanent seat. Calls for reform have increasingly focused on expanding representation to make the Council more reflective of the contemporary international system.

Changing the UN Charter is difficult because amendments require ratification by two-thirds of member states, including all five permanent members of the Security Council. Any comprehensive reform must therefore overcome resistance from countries that benefit from the existing arrangement.

One possible avenue is greater restraint in the use of the veto, particularly in cases involving genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Proposals for voluntary commitments

by permanent members not to block action in mass-atrocity situations have gained attention, although their effectiveness would depend on political willingness.

A 2022 General Assembly resolution also established a mechanism for the Assembly to meet and debate when a permanent member casts a Security Council veto. While this does not remove the veto, it provides an avenue for broader scrutiny of decisions that

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

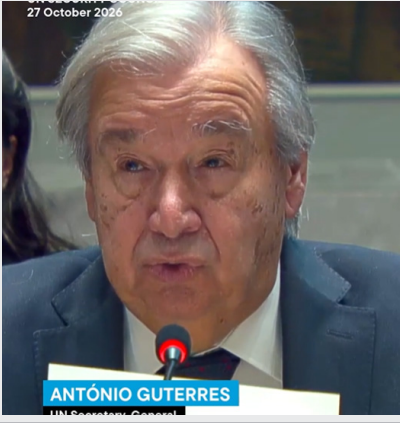
Despite efforts over the last few decades, the plague of gender inequality persists. Women & girls continue to face violence, exclusion, discrimination & abuse.

It doesn’t have to be this way.

Gender equality isn’t a dream. It’s a decision.

A decision the world needs to take.

~ António Guterres, Secretary-General, United Nations



might otherwise end discussion within the Council.

Leadership will shape the next phase

The selection of the next secretary-general will provide an early indication of how the major powers view the organisation’s future. The five permanent members will remain central to the process, but the wider membership will also have a stake in choosing a leader capable of representing the international community.

The next secretary-general will face the task of navigating geopolitical divisions while defending the UN’s core principles. The role requires sustained diplomacy, the ability to build coalitions and a willingness to raise difficult questions with powerful governments.

There have also been calls for the next secretary-general to be a woman, which would mark a historic first in the organisation’s leadership. The eventual choice, however, will depend on the selection process and the support of member states.

At 81, the United Nations remains an essential platform for diplomacy and international cooperation, even as its limitations become increasingly visible. Its agencies continue to perform functions that individual countries cannot easily replace, from coordinating humanitarian assistance to supporting public health and development.

The central question is not whether the world can dispense with the UN, but whether its members are willing to reform it. Without changes to representation, greater restraint in the use of vetoes, more reliable funding and stronger political commitment, the organisation risks becoming increasingly limited to humanitarian relief and diplomatic declarations.

The UN was created to help build an international order in which disputes could be managed through cooperation rather than force. Preserving that ambition will require its members, particularly the most powerful among them, to accept that the credibility of the institution depends on more than their participation. It also depends on their willingness to allow collective principles to guide their actions.

The challenge at 81 is therefore reform, not retirement: making the United Nations more representative, accountable and capable of responding to a world whose conflicts and power structures have changed considerably since 1945.

Assam child marriage crackdown: 524 arrested, 441 cases registered

GUWAHATI

Assam has arrested 524 people and registered 441 cases in its ongoing crackdown on child marriage, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Tuesday, reaffirming the state government's commitment to eliminating the practice.

Sharing the latest figures on X, Sarma said the data were recorded as of 5 pm on October 27. He warned that the government would take action against those involved in child marriage.

"We will not spare anyone involved in this heinous crime and ensure that Assam is free from Child Marriage," the chief minister said. The latest figures come as the



state continues its campaign against underage marriages through police action, legal proceedings and awareness initiatives.

Crackdown launched in 2023
Assam intensified its campaign against child marriage in 2023, with successive police drives targeting alleged offenders and those accused of facilitating or solemnising underage marriages.

The first two major operations, conducted in February and October 2023, resulted in thousands of arrests. A third special drive in December 2024 led to 416 arrests, according to police figures reported at the time.

The enforcement campaign has targeted not only those accused of entering into underage marriages but

also individuals allegedly involved in arranging or solemnising such unions.

Cases may be registered under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, and other applicable laws, including the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, depending on the circumstances of each case.

Government points to decline in child marriages

The Assam government has cited a reported decline in child marriages as an indication of progress under the campaign. In September 2026, Sarma referred to more than 12,000 cases registered and over 11,000 arrests over the preceding years, while highlighting a reduction in the prevalence

of child marriage in the state.

A separate child-rights study cited in a September 2025 report indicated an 84 per cent decline in child marriages among girls and a 91 per cent decline among boys between April 2022 and March 2025. The findings were based on selected villages and should not be treated as a comprehensive statewide count.

Despite the reported decline, the government has maintained that enforcement and awareness efforts will continue.

The latest figures underline the administration's continued focus on curbing child marriage through legal action, alongside efforts to address the social factors that allow the practice to persist.

Tripura MLA Ranjit Debbarma accuses SP security of bias, seeks Governor's intervention

AGARTALA

Tipra Motha Party MLA Ranjit Debbarma has written to Tripura Governor Indrasena Reddy Nallu, alleging security lapses, communal bias, corruption and partiality by Superintendent of Police (Security) Amitabha Paul. The MLA has sought appropriate action against the officer, claiming his personal security has been compromised.

In a two-page letter dated October 27, Debbarma, who represents the 24-Ramchandraghat Assembly Constituency, alleged that he had been left without Personal Security Officers (PSOs) for several days despite representing a remote, hilly constituency that he described as high-risk.

According to the letter, his PSO Sukesh Debbarma was withdrawn on October 10 without prior information. The MLA said he subsequently lodged a complaint against the PSO on October 13, seeking impartial action.

Alleging inaction by the SP Security office, Debbarma stated that he voluntarily surrendered his two remaining PSOs on October 23 at 3 pm in protest and directed them to report to the SP Security. He claimed that he had been without security cover since then.

The MLA further alleged that repeated transfers of his PSOs were intended to exert psychological pressure on him. He also accused the SP Security of running the wing in a partisan manner and alleged financial irregularities and preferential treatment for certain police personnel. "There is no implemented transfer policy for police persons," the letter stated, alleging that some personnel continued to enjoy facilities with VIPs and VVIPs for over three years, and in some cases eight to ten years, while others were deprived of similar privileges.

Referring to past instances of political violence in Tripura, Debbarma named former MLAs Parimal Saha, Madhusudhan (Bhola) Saha and Gautam Datta, along with former minister Bimal Sinha. He cited these incidents while expressing concern over what he described as negligence, partiality and bias within the police administration.

Assam to levy Green Cess on transfer of older vehicles, EVs and two-wheelers exempt



GUWAHATI

The Assam government plans to introduce a Green Cess on the transfer of ownership of older vehicles as part of its efforts to curb pollution and promote environmental sustainability across the state.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced the proposed measure on social media platform X, stating that the revenue collected through the levy would be used to support the state's greening initiatives.

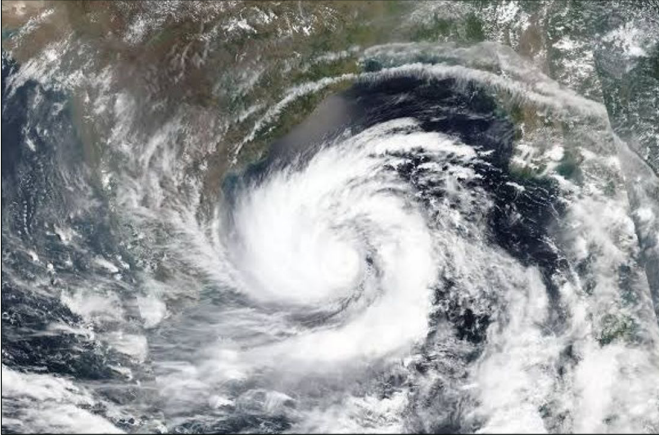
The proposed cess is intended to discourage the continued use of older, more polluting vehicles and encourage owners to switch to newer, cleaner alternatives. The move is part of the government's broader push to address environmental concerns and strengthen green initiatives.

However, the levy will not cover all categories of vehicles. According to the announcement, two-wheelers, three-wheelers, electric vehicles (EVs) and compressed natural gas (CNG)-powered vehicles will be exempt from the proposed cess.

The government has yet to disclose the rate of the levy, the minimum age a vehicle must attain to fall within its ambit, or the date from which the measure will come into force.

Further details are expected as the state government finalises the framework for implementing the proposed Green Cess.

Bay of Bengal system delays winter chill in Tripura, normal temperatures likely in a week



AGARTALA

Tripura residents may have to wait another five to seven days for the seasonal winter chill, with a cyclonic circulation over the Bay of Bengal keeping temperatures above normal and

raising the possibility of isolated light rainfall across parts of the state.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), temperatures are expected to gradually return to near-normal levels as the weather system

weakens.

IMD scientist Partha Roy said the prevailing warm conditions were linked to the cyclonic circulation over the Bay of Bengal. Although the system is not expected to directly affect Tripura, its outer rain bands could bring light showers to some areas over the next few days.

The IMD forecast isolated light rainfall in South Tripura, Gomati, Sepahijala and North Tripura on October 27. Similar conditions may persist at one or two places in each district on October 28 and 29.

The weather system is expected to make landfall near Visakhapatnam on October 28. However, Tripura is far from the anticipated landfall area, and no weather warning has been issued for the state.

Roy said the maximum temperature in Tripura was hovering around 34-35°C, considerably

higher than the normal level of approximately 31°C for this period. Such rises in temperature are commonly observed when cyclonic systems or circulations develop over the Bay of Bengal, he explained.

The above-normal temperatures have delayed the seasonal transition to cooler weather, leaving residents waiting for the usual decline in temperatures associated with the onset of winter.

The IMD expects the influence of the weather system to diminish over the next five to seven days, allowing temperatures to gradually settle closer to seasonal averages.

For now, the forecast suggests that any rainfall in Tripura will remain light and localised, while the return of cooler conditions will depend on the weakening of the Bay of Bengal system.

Mizoram Seizes Drugs Worth Rs. 77.15 Crore in September, Arrests 29 Including Six Myanmar Nationals

AIZAWL

Mizoram Police seized narcotics worth an estimated ₹77.15 crore and arrested 29 people, including six Myanmar nationals, in 29 cases registered across the state in September, highlighting the continuing challenge of drug trafficking in the north-eastern region.

According to a statement issued by the state police on Monday, the largest seizure by value was methamphetamine, with 78.746 kg of the drug recovered during the month. The consignment was estimated to be worth ₹62.99 crore.

The seizures also included 8.112 kg of morphine valued at ₹8.11 crore and 2.922 kg of heroin worth ₹5.84 crore. Police additionally recovered 3.7 kg of opium, estimated at ₹18.5 lakh, and 4.22 kg of cannabis, valued at ₹2.11 lakh.

Major methamphetamine seizures

Champhai district accounted for one of the major recoveries, with police seizing 25.646 kg of methamphetamine. In Saitual district, two separate cases led to the recovery of 18.194 kg and 12.746 kg of the same drug, the statement said.

In another operation, police seized 8.946 kg of methamphetamine, 3.087 kg of morphine and

50 grams of heroin.

Other significant recoveries included 3.7 kg of opium in Champhai, 1.618 kg of heroin in Kolasib and 4.22 kg of cannabis in Lawngtlai district.

The 29 people arrested in connection with the cases included Indian and foreign nationals. Several of the accused were identified as residents of Manipur and Myanmar, according to the police statement.

Police seek public cooperation

Mizoram Police said the seizures reflected continuing efforts to disrupt drug trafficking networks and prevent the circulation of narcotics across the state. The department, however, stressed that enforcement measures alone would not be sufficient without sustained public cooperation.

Residents have been urged to share information about suspected drug trafficking and the movement of narcotics with the authorities, village councils, the Young Mizo Association (YMA) and other non-governmental organisations.

The police reiterated that cooperation between law enforcement agencies and local communities remains crucial to tackling drug trafficking and limiting the availability of narcotics in Mizoram.

Minister Kaushik Rai reviews road, bridge projects and key development proposals in Cachar

SILCHAR

Minister for Food and Public Distribution, Housing and Urban affairs & Cooperation, Kaushik Rai chaired two review meetings at the New Conference Hall of the DC's Office in Silchar on Monday to assess the progress of road and bridge projects and examine development proposals placed before the Sub-Divisional Level Advisory Committee (SDLAC).

The first meeting reviewed the progress of ongoing road and bridge works across the district with particular attention to delays, implementation challenges and the need for better coordination among the departments concerned. The meeting was attended by MLAs Kishor Nath, Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha and Rajdeep Goala, Cachar District Commissioner Rahul Kumar Gupta, IAS, Additional District Commissioners Sauvik Bhuyan, ACS and Dhruvjayoti Pathak, ACS, Circle Officers, officials of the Public Works Department (Roads) and other concerned officials.

During the review, officials discussed the status of ongoing bridge construction projects and the hurdles affecting their timely completion. The departments concerned were directed to expedite the



work, maintain close coordination and adhere to the stipulated deadlines.

The meeting also took up issues relating to civic cleanliness, improvement of the drainage system along Kathal Road, the quality of ongoing works and the maintenance of road conditions. Ensuring smooth and safe movement for the public was another key concern discussed during the deliberations.

District Commissioner Rahul Kumar Gupta directed the officials concerned to take prompt follow up action on the decisions taken at the meeting and address the issues identified during the review.

In a separate meeting, the Sub-Divisional Level Advisory Committee (SDLAC) examined and approved various

government schemes and development proposals relating to infrastructure and public facilities across Cachar.

The SDLAC meeting was also chaired by Minister Kaushik Rai and attended by MLAs Kishor Nath, Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha and Rajdeep Goala; District Commissioner Rahul Kumar Gupta, IAS, Additional District Commissioners Sauvik Bhuyan, ACS and Dhruvjayoti Pathak, ACS, Assistant District Commissioner Piyush Raj, IAS, Circle Officers and Assistant Commissioners Masi Topno, ACS, Simanta Basumatary, ACS and Diksha Sarkar, ACS along with officials of PWD (Roads) and other concerned departments.

The committee reviewed proposals covering the construction of government buildings, a Central Jail, a sports stadium, haats and other development works in the district. The proposals were considered as part of the process of examining and approving projects intended to expand public infrastructure and improve access to essential facilities.

The two meetings brought road connectivity, bridge construction, civic infrastructure and other development proposals under review, with the emphasis on timely implementation, quality of work and prompt action by the departments concerned.

This is stated in a press release issued by the Regional Office of Information & Public Relations, Barak Valley Zone, Silchar, Assam.

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‘Indian businesses not playthings’: Rahul slams PM Modi, Shah amid Tata Sons row



NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday accused the BJP-led government of treating Indian businesses as its “plaything”, alleging that business leaders were afraid to speak out, amid a dispute over the reappointment of N Chandrasekaran as Executive Chairman of Tata Sons. In a post shared on X, Rahul Gandhi alleged that Tata was being “criminally destroyed” and questioned the silence of business leaders over the matter. “Tata is being criminally destroyed, and no business leader dares say a word. How long will you stay silent? Until they own you? Indian business is not Modi and Shah’s plaything. You lack courage. We don’t. We will ensure justice for these crimes,” Rahul Gandhi said. The remarks come amid a dispute within the Tata Group after Tata Trusts Chairman Noel Tata challenged the validity of Tata Sons’ board resolution reappointing N Chandrasekaran, alleging

procedural irregularities in the September 17 meeting. In a letter dated October 26 to Tata Sons Company Secretary Suprakash Mukhopadhyay, Noel said the agenda circulated to directors did not explicitly mention Chandrasekaran’s reappointment. He alleged that no Selection Committee was constituted as required under the company’s Articles of Association and that the necessary approvals from directors appointed under Article 104B had not been obtained. Noel also questioned the company’s decision to treat the resolution as final despite unresolved objections and alleged that it had withheld the meeting’s audio and video recordings, final minutes and a certified copy of the resolution despite repeated requests. Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi addresses a press conference, at AICC headquarters, in New Delhi. Tata Trusts says board vote to keep Chandrasekaran in the saddle is illegal “The resolution is void,”

he stated in the letter, arguing that the reappointment did not comply with the relevant provisions of Tata Sons’ Articles of Association. He also questioned the circulation of a certified copy of the resolution in the public domain and its reported filing with the Registrar of Companies before the minutes had been finalised. Seeking to establish the sequence of events at the meeting, Noel said the recordings were the only neutral record of the proceedings. He has sought the recordings, final or revised minutes, voting details, the formal notice, different versions of the agenda and documents filed with the Registrar of Companies and the Ministry of Corporate Affairs within seven days. He has also asked Tata Sons to formally inform the Registrar that the resolution’s validity is disputed by a director nominated under Article 104B and by Sir Dorabji Tata Trust. Noel further urged the company to refrain from taking any additional steps on the resolution until the meeting records are settled.

Andhra, Odisha rush to evacuate people before Cyclone Arnab’s early morning landfall

CHENNAI

Andhra Pradesh and Odisha set up nearly 4,000 cyclone shelters and moved thousands of people to safety while the railways cancelled at least 50 trains in the region ahead of the “very severe” cyclonic storm Arnab’s landfall near Visakhapatnam early on Wednesday. At least 21 flights were cancelled at Vijayawada and Visakhapatnam airports on Tuesday, affecting services to Chennai, Bengaluru, Visakhapatnam and Kadapa. For Wednesday, 15 flights at Vijayawada airport have been cancelled, an official said. According to the India Meteorological Department, the cyclone was hurtling towards the Andhra Pradesh coast with increased speed and was expected to make landfall between 2 am and 4 am of October 28. It will cross Andhra Pradesh and Yanam coasts between Bapatla and Visakhapatnam between 2 am and 4 am, a Met department update said. The weather system is located about 90 km southeast of Kakinada, 170 km south to southwest of Visakhapatnam, 170 km east to northeast of Machilipatnam, 240 km east to northeast of Bapatla and 410 km southwest of Gopalpur. “It is very likely to continue to move nearly west-northwestwards during next few hours, then north-westwards and cross Andhra Pradesh and Yanam coasts between Bapatla and Visakhapatnam, close to south of Yanam as a very severe cyclonic storm with the maximum sustained wind speed of 125-135 kmph (and) gusting to 150 kmph during early hours of October 28,” it said. It observed that Arnab is interacting with the land surface and the outer spiral band has entered into the land. “Due to faster movement, the landfall of the cyclone is expected early, likely during early hours around 2 am to 4 am on Wednesday,” it added. Both the eastern coastal states have put disaster management personnel on standby and imposed traffic restrictions on many roads. The Andhra Pradesh government has set up 2,131 cyclone shelters across the state’s 20 districts, kept 1,087 medical teams on standby in areas likely to be



affected by the storm, and readied 8,281 emergency beds and 1,274 ambulances, officials said. Besides moving people away from vulnerable areas, the government has also shifted 1,351 pregnant women to hospitals, they said, adding that two months’ worth of essential commodities have been stocked at 14,686 ration shops, and cyclone alerts were being sent to the mobile phones of 2.70 crore people. According to the Andhra Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority (APSDMA) Srikakulam district is likely to experience heavy rain accompanied by strong winds, while strong winds have already begun in Visakhapatnam and Kakinada. Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu directed officials to ensure essential supplies at relief camps and minimise cyclone-related damage. The Indian Railways have placed around 600 km of tracks under close surveillance ahead of the cyclone’s expected landfall, with safety protocols and rapid restoration measures in place, officials said. War rooms have been activated at zonal, divisional and Railway Board levels for round-the-clock monitoring. While the South Coast Railway has cancelled 24 trains scheduled for Wednesday, the East Coast Railway has cancelled 22 trains. So far, the South Eastern Railway has cancelled four trains, officials said.

IMD’s Director General Mrunjay Mohapatra said, “During landfall in Andhra Pradesh, wind speed would be at 125 kmph to 135 kmph and gusting up to 150 kmph. The southern Odisha coast will experience wind speeds of 60 kmph to 80 kmph. Wind at this velocity can cause major property damage.” Odisha, where heavy rains have already started, has closed schools in 16 of the state’s 30 districts. Out of its target of shifting 48,000 people to cyclone shelters, more than 30,000 have already been moved there, a revenue department official said. Entry to sea beaches has been banned. The state’s Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) Rajesh P Patil said 135 permanent cyclone shelters and around 1,600 temporary shelters had been prepared to accommodate people from vulnerable areas. The state government has deployed 294 rescue teams -- nine from the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), 60 from the SDRF and 225 Fire Services teams, officials said. Maintaining that the government had set a “zero casualty” target, Patil said district collectors had been directed to take all necessary measures to protect lives and property. Disaster Management Minister Suresh Pujari said heavy rain in the upper catchment areas of rivers in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand could trigger flash floods and waterlogging

in western and northern Odisha. Odisha’s major ports, including Paradip, Dhamra and Gopalpur, have also stepped up preparations in view of the approaching storm. The very severe cyclonic storm also brought rain to parts of West Bengal in the afternoon. The coastal districts of South 24 Parganas and Purba Medinipur experienced moderate rain, while parts of Jhargram, Paschim Medinipur, Howrah and Kolkata also received rainfall, the IMD said. Over the next two days, heavy rain is likely in South 24 Parganas, Purba and Paschim Medinipur, Jhargram, Purulia, Bankura and Paschim Bardhaman, while Kolkata is expected to receive light to moderate rain, it said. In the sub-Himalayan region, heavy rain is expected in Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Alipurdwar and Jalpaiguri on October 29 and 30, it added. In neighbouring Jharkhand, the Ranchi district administration ordered closure of schools on October 28 and 29 as a rain alert was issued. A ‘yellow’ alert for heavy rain has been issued for Ranchi, Khunti, Simdega, Gumla, Lohardaga, Saraikela-Kharsawan, East and West Singhbhum for 24 hours starting from 8.30 am on October 28. Warnings for thunderstorms, lightning and gusty winds were also issued.

INTERNATIONAL

Disinformation videos, likely from Russia, are exploiting real people to malign Senate candidates



NEW YORK

Social media videos believed to be produced with artificial intelligence and linked to Russia are misusing real people’s names and photographs to spread disinformation about two Democratic Senate candidates in the final stretch of midterm voting. One of the targets is Sherrod Brown, who is running against Republican Sen. Jon Husted in Ohio. The video, which appears to include some AI manipulation, depicts a newscast and includes pictures of Haya Akbik, who interned for Brown several years ago, and other former staff

members. It was appalling to Akbik, who told The Associated Press that any claims attributed to her in the clip are “completely made up.” “It’s my name, it’s my reputation, making this allegation, and it’s just completely false,” she said. “And it harms the senator, someone else, in the process. So, it’s just messed up.” The videos demonstrate how foreign adversaries continue to use a familiar playbook to try to influence American voters who are deciding which party controls Congress next year. The threat could be magnified with AI, a powerful tool for

fabricating damaging information that can sometimes appear very real. Another target is James Talarico, who is running against Republican Ken Paxton for a Senate seat in Texas. The video, also believed to include some AI manipulation, is framed as a direct-to-camera confessional from a former student of Talarico. “The most powerful people in the world know they can’t beat James Talarico with the truth, so they’re slandering him with AI deepfakes, foreign bots, and conspiracy theories to protect their broken, corrupt political system,” Talarico spokesperson JT Ennis said in

a statement. The social media company X has taken down the initial posts that shared the videos and suspended the users for violating the platform’s rules. However, copies could still be found online Tuesday — some with hundreds of shares — demonstrating how difficult it can be to contain disinformation that can proliferate in the final days of an election. The videos resemble clips from a Russian network known as Storm-1516 that targeted former Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris and her running mate, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, two years ago. The new ones bear similar hallmarks and are likely products of the same network, according to Clemson University professor and media forensics expert Darren Linvill. He found that the accounts that shared recent material had also shared former content from Storm-1516. The Russian Embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to a request for comment. In the past, it has denied interfering in U.S. elections. The U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, which has publicly identified some videos as Russian disinformation in past election cycles, also didn’t respond to a request for comment. Hany Farid, a Dartmouth College professor who studies artificial intelligence deepfakes, said his analyses showed that videos targeting Brown and Talarico were likely either generated or manipulated using the technology. He noted the video targeting Brown is a “fairly low-tech fake.” The other one, targeting Talarico, is likely generated by AI and “it is consistent with previous disinformation campaigns released close to Election Day,” Farid said. Akbik said the video featuring her shows the importance of Congress regulating “AI slop on the internet.” “This is so damaging,” she said.

As votes are counted, no clear winner emerges in Israel’s election



TELAVIV

Votes were being counted as dawn broke in Israel on Wednesday morning, but exit polls suggested that its momentous national election left no clear winner. That likely meant the beginning of weeks of wrangling among parties to form a governing coalition and declare a new prime minister. In the meantime, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu remains as interim caretaker head of the government. Exit polls released by major Israeli TV stations right after polls closed on Tuesday night and revised overnight indicated that neither Netanyahu’s political bloc nor that of his main rival, former military chief Gadi Eisenkot, secured the 61 seats needed for a majority in the parliament, known as the Knesset. Israelis vote for parties, which then form alliances to create a majority coalition, and no single party has ever won a majority. But the inconclusive

result comes as the country remains deeply divided over Netanyahu’s leadership and scarred by the Hamas-led Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel and the wars that have since shaken the Middle East. The counts from Israel’s Central Elections Committee kept coming in early Wednesday morning. The results are still partial as more voting stations are counted. With around 40% of ballots counted, it reported 21.70% of the vote went to Likud, the party led by Netanyahu, who’s Israel’s longest-serving prime minister, and 15.72% to Yashar, the party led by Eisenkot. The count does not indicate how many seats each party will win in the parliament. Addressing exuberant supporters past 3 a.m. Wednesday morning in Jerusalem, Netanyahu said that exit polls indicate his Likud will be the largest party in the next parliament. He listed Israel’s military accomplishments over the past three years and stressed his close ties

with US President Donald Trump while pledging to finish the job against Iran’s regime. In a message aimed at his rivals, he said no government should be formed that relies on Arab parties. Arab-led parties had a strong showing in Tuesday’s election and could be kingmakers if, as exit polls indicate, Netanyahu’s bloc and his opponents are tied and both unable to form governing coalitions. In a sign of the uncertainty ahead, the mood at both Eisenkot and Netanyahu’s headquarters was celebratory. In a speech early Wednesday in Tel Aviv that focused on national unity, Eisenkot pledged to form a government and promised “a new era — an era of hope” for Israelis. “Today, Israel went out to a referendum over the leadership that will lead Israel in the coming years,” Eisenkot said to cheers from supporters. “The people decided in favor of change.”

Europe’s Trade Ambitions and Northeast India: Who Will Reap the Benefits?

The India-EU free trade agreement could open new avenues for investment in critical minerals, agriculture, tourism and connectivity. But will Northeast India develop its own industries and create jobs, or remain a supplier of raw materials for industries elsewhere?

Northeast India has long been projected as a gateway between South Asia and Southeast Asia. Its proximity to Bangladesh and Myanmar, natural resources and strategic location have made it an important part of India's foreign policy and economic planning. Closer trade cooperation between India and the European Union could give this ambition fresh momentum.

Yet the prospect raises a fundamental question: will greater engagement with Europe translate into tangible economic gains for the people of Northeast India, or will the region primarily serve the commercial interests of others?

Europe is seeking to diversify its supply chains and secure access to critical minerals. India wants to expand exports and strengthen international partnerships. For the Northeast, the opportunity lies in connecting these ambitions with local industrial development, employment and stronger regional enterprises.

Critical minerals: From resource extraction to industrial development

The potential availability of rare earth elements and other critical minerals has brought renewed attention to Northeast India's geological resources. The Geological Survey of India has identified prospective areas in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya and Nagaland, including 38 potential exploration blocks across the four states.

Reports citing geological exploration have referred to more than 70 million tonnes of potential rare earth elements and critical minerals in the region. However, this figure should not be interpreted as proven, commercially recoverable reserves. Further exploration and assessment are needed to establish the scale and economic viability of the resources.

Preliminary findings have indicated vanadium-bearing mineralisation in Arunachal Pradesh, while rare earth elements, including neodymium, have been reported in the Lodo-so area of East Kameng district. Exploration in Assam's Jashora and Samchampi areas has also produced encouraging indications.

The international significance of these resources is considerable. Rare earth elements are used in electric vehicle motors, wind turbines and various advanced electronic technologies. According to European Commission figures cited in discussions on supply-chain dependence, the EU has historically sourced around 98 per cent of its rare earth magnet consumption from China.

Reducing this dependence has become an important European industrial priority, potentially creating opportunities for India as an alternative supplier.

But mineral discoveries alone will not determine the Northeast's economic gains. If raw materials are extracted locally and processed elsewhere, much of the value generated will accrue outside the region. Establishing economically viable processing facilities, research centres and downstream industries could create more skilled jobs and build technical expertise.

Such development would require careful assessment of commercial viability, environmental risks, infrastructure needs and the availability of skilled workers. The aim should be to connect resource exploration with a realistic industrial strategy rather than assume that mineral wealth will automatically produce prosperity.

Connectivity: A gateway for whom?

India's Act East policy and regional cooperation initiatives, including BIMSTEC, have placed considerable emphasis on connecting Northeast India with neighbouring countries and Southeast Asian markets.

At a conference held on June 1-2, 2023, representatives associated with India-EU engagement and the Asian Confluence discussed investment opportunities in connectivity infrastructure across Northeast India and the adjoining sub-Himalayan region.

The EU's Global Gateway initiative, launched in 2021, set a target of mobilising up to €100 billion in investment worldwide between 2021 and 2027. Its priorities include transport, digital connectivity, clean energy and other strategic infrastructure.

Improved roads, railways, logistics facilities and border trade infrastructure could reduce transport costs and help regional producers reach wider markets. However, the benefits will depend on whether local businesses can use these facilities effectively.

Small farmers and manufacturers often face barriers that better roads alone cannot resolve, including inadequate storage, limited access to affordable credit, inconsistent product quality and difficulties meeting export standards. Without support to address these constraints, larger companies may be better positioned to capture the opportunities created by improved connectivity.

Infrastructure planning should therefore be linked to the needs of local producers, particularly in agriculture, food processing, handicrafts and other sectors where small enterprises play an important role.

The objective must be to make the region an active participant in trade, not simply a corridor through which goods move.



From investment announcements to implementation

At the 2023 conference, discussions included identifying 120 projects across five sectors and developing an EU-India Northeast Investment Pipeline Roadmap for 2025.

However, reports have indicated that the proposed roadmap had not been made publicly available after the target period. An official associated with the State Institute for Transformation in Mizoram was also reported to have said that the institution had no information about such a roadmap involving the state.

The status of these initiatives highlights the need for greater transparency in regional investment planning. Project identification is only the beginning; implementation requires financing, regulatory clarity, environmental approvals, skilled personnel and credible timelines.

India and the EU should clarify which proposals have progressed, which states and sectors are involved, and what funding arrangements are envisaged. Details on local employment, participation by regional businesses and implementation schedules would help distinguish concrete commitments from preliminary discussions.

For state governments, this information would also provide a basis for aligning infrastructure, training and industrial policies with potential investment.

Indigenous communities and the question of ownership

Economic development in Northeast India cannot be separated from the region's land systems, cultural diversity and dependence on natural resources.

In Mizoram, Nagaland and Meghalaya, indigenous communities constitute a substantial share of the population. Land and forests are closely connected to livelihoods, customary institutions and cultural identity. Mining, infrastructure and tourism projects can generate income, but they can also place pressure on these resources.

Environmental assessments, meaningful consultation and safeguards for local rights must therefore be integral to project planning. Communities should have opportunities to influence decisions, access training and employment, and participate in the benefits of economic activity.

Local enterprises and cooperatives could also be involved in supply chains and service provision, helping residents participate directly in new business opportunities.

Tourism offers another potential avenue for growth. The region's landscapes, biodiversity, cultural traditions and heritage could attract international visitors, while creating demand for accommodation, transport, food, crafts and local services.

However, tourism development needs to balance commercial expansion with environmental protection and cultural preservation. Supporting locally owned businesses would help ensure that tourism revenue reaches communities rather than remaining concentrated among a small number of outside operators.

The free trade agreement: Opportunities and practical barriers

An India-EU free trade agreement could improve market access for products from Northeast India, depending on its final provisions, tariff concessions, rules of origin and applicable standards.

Agricultural products, processed foods, bamboo goods, handicrafts and textiles could offer export opportunities. But access to European markets would require consistent quality, appropriate certification, reliable supply and competitive logistics.

Small businesses may need assistance with packaging, traceability, testing and compliance with European requirements. Producer cooperatives, common processing facilities and export-support services could help them overcome some of these barriers.

State governments could also identify products with realistic export potential and develop sector-specific plans around them. This would be more effective than assuming

that all regional products would automatically benefit from a broad trade agreement.

For critical minerals, the corresponding priority would be to assess the feasibility of local processing and manufacturing. Both approaches would require coordination between central and state governments, investors, technical institutions and local businesses.

The agreement's regional impact will ultimately depend not only on the concessions negotiated between India and the EU, but also on the capacity of Northeast India's producers to meet market requirements.

Building a stronger regional economy
Closer engagement with Europe offers Northeast India an opportunity to strengthen its position in international trade. But the region's long-term prospects will depend on more than its geography or natural resources.

A coordinated strategy should connect mineral exploration with feasible downstream industries, agricultural production with processing and export facilities, and improved transport links with stronger local supply chains. Technical education, access to finance and support for small enterprises would be essential to this effort.

Progress should be measured through

outcomes that matter to the region: investment actually delivered, sustainable jobs created, local businesses entering supply chains, skills developed and value added within the Northeast. Environmental protection and community participation should form part of the same assessment.

Europe's interest in diversifying its supply chains and India's ambition to expand trade could complement the Northeast's development priorities. But this alignment will require clear commitments and sustained implementation rather than investment announcements alone.

The central question is whether Northeast India can use its growing international economic relevance to build industries and opportunities of its own. If the region remains primarily a supplier of raw materials and a transit corridor, greater trade may bring limited structural change. If investment also strengthens local production, skills and enterprise, the partnership could help create a more diversified regional economy.

The success of India-EU economic engagement should therefore be judged not simply by the volume of trade passing through Northeast India, but by the opportunities it creates for the people who live there.

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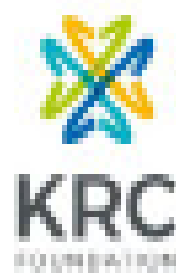
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