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STAY ENRICHED



VOLUME:1, ISSUE 919 | SILCHAR FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2026. EAST AND NE INDIA EDITION | e-mail: krctimes@gmail.com ,www.krctimes.com

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PAN, Voter ID Not Enough to Prove Indian Citizenship, Rules Gauhati High Court

Court upholds Foreigners Tribunal order declaring Darrang woman a foreigner; says documentary evidence failed to establish citizenship and parental lineage

GUWAHATI

A PAN card or a voter identity card cannot, by itself, establish Indian citizenship or prove family lineage, the Gauhati High Court has ruled, emphasising that the underlying records supporting the issuance of such documents must also be produced and verified.

The court made the observation while dismissing a writ petition filed by Kulchan Begum, a resident of Assam's Darrang district, challenging a 2018 order of the Foreigners Tribunal in Mangaldai that had declared her a foreigner who entered India after March 25, 1971.

A division bench comprising Justice Kalyan Rai Surana and Justice Susmita Phukan Khaund upheld the Tribunal's opinion in its judgment dated November 5, holding that the documents submitted by Begum were insufficient to establish either her



Indian citizenship or her claimed relationship with her parents.

"The PAN card and EPIC exhibited by the petitioner are not proof of citizenship," the court observed, adding that such documents could not be accepted as evidence unless the records forming the basis of their issuance were also proved.

Begum had claimed that she was born on April 25, 1977, and brought up in Luitpar, Kharghuli, in Guwahati. She identified Sabed Ali and Jaheda Khatun as her grandparents, claiming that their names appeared in the 1966 and 1970 electoral rolls of Nosotra village in the then Kamrup district. She identified their son, Abu Chand Mohammad, as her father.

To support her citizenship claim, she submitted the 1966 and 1970 electoral rolls, her father's PAN card and voter identity card, her own Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC), a family ration card, the 2018 electoral roll and an acknowledgement receipt for her application to the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

She also argued that her father was an Indian citizen whose name featured in electoral records. According to her submission, he had contested the 2009 Lok Sabha election from Barpeta and the 2011 Assam Assembly election from Baghbar. He had also served as an elected councillor of the Guwahati Municipal Corporation in 2013.

However, the High Court held that her father's electoral credentials and political participation could not, by themselves, establish her claimed relationship with him.The bench also identified inconsistencies in the family history presented by the petitioner and the ages recorded in electoral rolls. It noted that her claimed father's name first appeared in the 1997 electoral roll, where his age was recorded as 50.The court further observed that there was no documentary evidence to establish the continuous residence of her claimed grandparents and father in Assam between 1970 and 1997.It also found that the family linkage documents, including the ration card and electoral records, failed to adequately establish her relationship with the persons she identified as her parents.

The bench rejected the certificate issued by an Area Sabha representative, observing that its author had not appeared to prove the document.

On the NRC application acknowledgement receipt, the court held that it could not be treated as proof of citizenship, as the final draft of the NRC had not been updated when the Foreigners Tribunal delivered its opinion.

"None of the exhibited documents helps the petitioner discharge her burden under Section 9 of the Foreigners Act, 1946 to prove that she is a citizen of India and the daughter of Indian parents," the judgment stated.

The case against Begum was originally registered in 2000 under the erstwhile Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, 1983. It was subsequently transferred to the Foreigners Tribunal system after the Supreme Court struck down the legislation in 2005.

With the dismissal of her writ petition, the High Court upheld the Foreigners Tribunal's decision. It also recalled and revoked the interim bail granted to Begum on April 18, 2022.

PERSPECTIVE

Just when you think you know people, they disappoint you in ways you never thought they could.

Guwahati, Kamrup Hit by Petrol Pump Shutdown; Dealers Threaten Statewide Strike from November 23

GUWAHATI

Fuel supply across Guwahati and Kamrup district was disrupted on Thursday as petrol pump dealers observed a 24-hour 'no purchase, no sale' protest against alleged harassment and arbitrary decisions by oil marketing companies (OMCs).

The shutdown, called by the North East India Petroleum Dealers' Association (NEIPDA), began at 6 am on Thursday and is scheduled to continue until 6 am on Friday.

The disruption hit gig workers, cab drivers and two-wheeler riders particularly hard, as their daily earnings and mobility depend on an uninterrupted supply of fuel. While many motorists had filled their tanks on Wednesday anticipating the shutdown, several others from Guwahati and different parts of Kamrup district travelled to neighbouring Meghalaya to refuel.

Rajib Goswami, president of NEIPDA's Greater Guwahati unit, warned that dealers would launch an indefinite shutdown of petrol pumps across Assam from November 23 if their demands remained unaddressed.

The association has accused oil marketing companies, including Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), of taking unilateral decisions and threatening to disrupt fuel supplies to dealers.

Among the major grievances are the cancellation of tank-truck transportation agreements without prior notice, pressure to purchase additional products, particularly lubricants, alleged unauthorised deductions from dealers' SAP accounts and insistence on installing specific point-of-sale machines.

WHO SAID WHAT



"The climate crisis is a double injustice. Between countries: those who have contributed the least to it are the hardest hit.

Between generations: what we emit today will be paid for by our grandchildren."

~ Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General, United Nations

Closed Brake Valve Suspected in Kolkata-Sairang Express Derailment in Assam

GUWAHATI

A closed brake valve may have caused the Kolkata-Sairang Express to overshoot a red signal and derail near Digaru railway station in Assam on November 11, according to preliminary findings of an investigation into the accident.

A six-member probe team has found the locomotive's brake pipe (BP) angle cock in an isolated or closed position, raising the possibility that the train's main braking system had become dysfunctional. The valve regulates the flow of compressed air required to activate the brakes across the train's coaches.



According to a joint note prepared by the investigation team on the day of the accident, the closed angle cock may have prevented the brakes from functioning even though the train crew attempted to apply them. The preliminary findings, reported by PTI, suggest that the braking system might have remained isolated when the train approached Digaru.

However, investigators have yet to establish who closed the valve or whether the braking system was properly checked before the train resumed its journey.

The loco pilot, assistant loco pilot and guard reportedly told investigators that the braking system was functioning normally when they took charge of the train at Guwahati around 5.30 am on November 11.

The train was subsequently halted at Panbari station at 6.16 am after the wheels of one coach overheated due to jammed brake pads. Railway staff attended to the problem, and the train remained at the station for approximately 30 minutes before resuming its journey at 6.46 am.

The incident at Panbari has now emerged as a crucial part of the investigation.

As the train approached Digaru station, the station master instructed the crew to enter the loop line and stop to allow another train to pass. However, when the crew attempted to apply the brakes, the system allegedly failed to respond.

The train overshot the red signal, continued towards the end of the track and collided with a dead end, resulting in the derailment of the locomotive and five coaches.

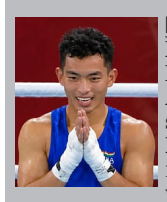
Railway safety experts believe the crew may have relied on the alternative regenerative braking system to regulate the train's speed during the journey. The failure of the main braking system may have become apparent only when they attempted to bring the train to a halt near the loop line. A key question being examined is whether railway personnel closed the BP angle cock while attending to the jammed brake pads at Panbari but failed to reopen it before allowing the train to depart.

Advisories issued by some railway divisions following the accident have also flagged the possibility that the angle cock was left closed after the repair work. However, this explanation remains unconfirmed.

The preliminary findings have raised serious questions about maintenance procedures, safety checks and the verification of braking systems before trains are allowed to resume operations after repairs.

Investigators are now expected to establish the sequence of events at Panbari station and determine whether a failure to restore the braking system to its normal operating condition contributed to the accident.

Manipur's Lairenlakpam Ambekar Meetei Creates History, Wins India's First Youth Olympics Boxing Gold



DAKAR

Manipur boxer Lairenlakpam Ambekar Meetei scripted history on November 12 by becoming the first Indian to win a boxing gold medal at the Youth Olympic Games, defeating Ireland's Jubani Kristian 3-2 in the men's 50kg final at Dakar 2026. His landmark victory not only brought India its first-ever Youth Olympics boxing gold but also marked the country's first gold medal at the ongoing edition of the Games. According to the Boxing Federation of India (BFI), the triumph took India's overall medal tally to nine. India had never won a gold medal in boxing at the Youth Olympic Games before Ambekar Meetei's achievement. The country's tally now stands at one gold, three silver and five bronze medals, placing the Indian contingent ninth in the overall standings.Ambekar Meetei had displayed impressive form throughout the competition. Before entering the final, he registered a convincing 5-0 victory over Colombia's Izzon Jeffrey Galea Arevalo in the semi-finals.India could add another gold to its tally, with Gunjan scheduled to compete in the women's boxing final at 10.30 pm IST on Thursday. She booked her place in the title clash after defeating Great Britain's Lily Bassett 4-1 in the semi-finals.India's medal-winning performances at Dakar have come across several disciplines, including athletics, wrestling, judo, badminton, swimming and wushu.

In athletics, Shourya Ambure won bronze in the women's 100m hurdles with a personal best of 13.59 seconds, becoming the first Indian woman to win an athletics medal at the Youth Olympic Games.

Nagaland Seeks Year-Round PAP Exemption for Foreign Visitors, Rio Writes to Amit Shah

KOHIMA

Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio has urged the Centre to extend the exemption from the Protected Area Permit (PAP) requirement for foreign nationals visiting the state throughout the year, arguing that the existing 10-day relaxation during the Hornbill Festival is inadequate to support tourism, investment and international engagement.

In a letter to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Rio welcomed the Ministry of Home Affairs' decision to relax the Protected Area Regime in Nagaland from December 1 to 10 every year, coinciding with the Hornbill Festival. However, he stressed that a limited exemption window does not address the state's broader tourism and economic requirements.

For the 2026 edition of the festival, the chief minister has sought an extension of the exemption from November 15 to December 15. He pointed out that international tourists often arrive ahead of the festival and continue exploring Nagaland's cultural heritage and tourist destinations even after the event concludes. According to Rio, restricting the exemption to just 10 days creates logistical difficulties for foreign visitors, tour operators, travel agencies and hospitality businesses, thereby limiting the potential economic benefits of international tourism.The chief minister has also called for PAP exemptions for foreign investors, corporate representatives, business delegations and their accompanying family members visiting Nagaland for trade and investment-related engagements.

Similar relaxations have been sought for foreign sportspersons, professional players, coaches, technical officials and team management personnel participating in sporting events in the state.

Referring to the Indian Football League, which Nagaland is hosting, Rio said national-level clubs were scheduled to arrive from November 14, including teams featuring foreign players. He warned that the existing restrictions could create difficulties for their movement and participation in the competition.

Rio has further sought exemptions for diplomats and representatives of countries having international partnerships with Nagaland. Foreign companies and institutions collaborating with the state government on human resource development, employment generation and overseas placement of skilled professionals should also be covered under the proposed relaxation, he said. Describing Nagaland as the 'Land of Festivals', the chief minister emphasised that cultural celebrations and tourism activities take place throughout the year. A short-duration exemption, therefore, cannot adequately support the sustained growth of the tourism and hospitality sectors. He also referred to difficulties arising from a similar limited exemption last year and reiterated the need for a broader arrangement to facilitate foreign tourist arrivals.

While acknowledging the security considerations underlying the Protected Area Regime, Rio maintained that legitimate tourism, business, cultural exchanges and sporting activities should not be subjected to unnecessary restrictions.

Manipur IDPs to Hold Mass Rally on November 22, Demand Safe Return and Rehabilitation

IMPHAL

The Apex Committee of Meitei Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Manipur has announced a mass rally on November 22, demanding the safe return and rehabilitation of families displaced by the ongoing crisis in the state.

The rally will be held under the theme "Eikhoi Eikhoigi Yumda Hanjinjarage" (We Want to Return to Our Homes) and is scheduled to begin at THAU Ground before proceeding towards Khuman Lampak in Imphal.

Announcing the programme on Thursday, committee representatives said the demonstration aims to draw public and administrative attention to the prolonged displacement of thousands of families and the hardships they continue to face.

The organisers said the rally would highlight the frustration among displaced residents over the uncertainty surrounding their return, rehabilitation and long-term security.

The programme is being organised jointly by an umbrella body representing conflict-affected communities and victim groups from different parts of Manipur.

The participating organisations include CMUC Churachandpur, Meitei Council Moreh, Torbung GP Victim



Committee, Apex Committee of Victim Villagers of Imphal East, Committee on Protection of Meitei Victims, Kangpokpi Meitei Union and the Mandop Yumpham Relief Camp.

According to the organisers, the participating committees have come together to bring the grievances and demands of displaced residents from multiple districts onto a common platform.

They have appealed to members of the public to extend moral support and solidarity to the November 22 demonstration, urging people to stand with families who remain unable to return to their homes.

The announcement comes against the backdrop of the ethnic violence that erupted in Manipur in May 2023, forcing thousands of people to leave their homes and seek shelter in relief camps and temporary accommodations.

More than three years after the violence began, many displaced families are still unable to return to their original settlements. Rehabilitation and resettlement measures remain underway, while concerns over security and the conditions necessary for a safe return continue to persist.

For the displaced families, the demand extends beyond temporary relief and shelter to include permanent rehabilitation, security guarantees and the restoration of normal life.

The November 22 rally is expected to provide a common platform for affected communities to reiterate these demands and press the authorities to address their prolonged displacement.

Four Killed in Ambush on Imphal-Ukhrul Road in Manipur; Mother-Son Duo, Siblings Among Victims

IMPHAL

Four people, including a mother and her son and a pair of siblings, were killed in an ambush at New Haven along the Imphal-Ukhrul road in Manipur on Friday while they were travelling towards Imphal in two separate vehicles.The deceased have been identified as Kapangkhui RS and Haoleila RS, residents of Shangshak village, and August Ngalung and Khanmila, residents of Tashar village.

According to information received, Kapangkhui RS and Haoleila RS were siblings, while August Ngalung and Khanmila were a mother-son duo.The victims were travelling in a Maruti Swift and a Bolero when the vehicles came under attack. Two occupants were reportedly travelling in each vehicle.

The circumstances surrounding the ambush and the identity of those responsible were not immediately known. Further details are awaited.

The killings have once again raised serious concerns over the security situation in Manipur, particularly the safety of civilians travelling along key roads amid recurring incidents of violence.Reacting to the incident, Congress Legislature Party (CLP) leader K Meghachandra questioned the response of the Central and state governments, expressing concern over the continuing violence and the suffering of people in the state.

The latest attack comes a day after a 40-year-old woman was killed and two others injured in a firing incident at Taphou Kuki village along the Senapati-Kangpokpi district boundary. The shooting reportedly took place as farmers were harvesting paddy under security protection, triggering panic in the area and raising further concerns over civilian safety.

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VOLUME:1, ISSUE 919

COP31

With global temperatures continuing to rise and climate disasters becoming more frequent, the Antalya summit must move beyond ambitious targets and deliver concrete commitments on climate finance, adaptation and a just energy transition.

The 31st United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP31), which began on November 9 at the Antalya Expo Centre in Türkiye, has opened without the urgency and political momentum that a climate emergency of this magnitude demands. More than a decade after the Paris Agreement, the world is still struggling to translate its ambitious climate commitments into meaningful action. Global temperatures continue to climb, extreme weather events are becoming increasingly destructive, and the gap between promises and performance remains alarmingly wide.

Scheduled to conclude on November 20, COP31 comes at a critical juncture. The challenge before world leaders is no longer simply to agree on ambitious emission-reduction targets or reaffirm their commitment to limiting global warming. It is to demonstrate that the international community has the political will, financial resources and institutional capacity to turn those commitments into measurable results. Without concrete action, climate conferences risk becoming elaborate diplomatic exercises in which declarations multiply while the planet continues to deteriorate.

The urgency is undeniable. Current projections indicate that the world remains on a trajectory towards approximately 2.8°C of warming by the end of the century under existing policies and commitments, far exceeding the 1.5°C threshold that countries sought to preserve under the Paris Agreement. Every fraction of a degree matters. The consequences are already visible in unprecedented heatwaves, devastating floods, prolonged droughts, erratic monsoons and increasingly destructive storms. Climate change is no longer a distant scientific prediction; it is an immediate economic, social and humanitarian crisis.

Yet the burden is distributed unequally. Developing countries, despite having contributed comparatively less to historical greenhouse gas emissions, are among the most vulnerable to the consequences of global warming. Their economies often depend heavily on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture, fisheries and forestry, while their capacity to invest in adaptation and disaster preparedness remains limited. For many developed nations, climate change is still treated primarily as an environmental and economic policy challenge. For vulnerable countries, it is increasingly a question of survival.

India illustrates this unequal reality. Hundreds of millions of people depend directly or indirectly on agriculture, much of which remains vulnerable to changing rainfall patterns. Even a marginal increase in average temperatures can affect crop yields, agricultural productivity, rural employment and food security. More intense cyclones, floods and prolonged dry spells place additional pressure on already vulnerable communities. The economic losses are accompanied by displacement, livelihood insecurity and, in the worst cases, loss of life. The recent cyclone Arnab is another reminder of the growing risks associated with extreme weather events.

Against this backdrop, climate finance remains the most contentious and consequential issue confronting the international negotiations. Developing nations cannot be expected to undertake an expensive transition to cleaner energy, strengthen climate-resilient infrastructure and rebuild after climate disasters without adequate financial support. The countries that industrialised through decades of fossil-fuel consumption carry a greater historical responsibility and must recognise that responsibility through meaningful financial commitments.

The $300 billion annual climate-finance target agreed upon at COP29 in Baku, to be achieved by 2035, was presented as an important step forward. However, it falls considerably short of the estimated $1.3 trillion annually that developing countries require to address their climate challenges. The problem is not merely the size of the commitment but also its quality. A substantial portion of climate finance continues to arrive in the form of loans rather than grants, adding to the debt burden of countries already struggling with limited fiscal resources. Climate assistance that pushes vulnerable nations deeper into debt cannot be considered an equitable solution.

Climate finance must therefore become the central pillar of international climate cooperation. It should be predictable, accessible, transparent and substantially grant-based, particularly for countries facing the most severe climate impacts. The proposed expansion of adaptation funding, support for vulnerable communities and operationalisation of the Loss and Damage Fund must move beyond procedural assurances. Countries suffering irreversible damage from climate disasters cannot afford to wait for another decade of negotiations.

Equally concerning is the continuing reluctance to confront the central role of fossil fuels in driving global warming. Despite repeated commitments to accelerate the transition towards cleaner energy, coal, oil and natural gas continue to dominate the global energy system. The failure to make fossil-fuel transition a sufficiently central element of the Antalya negotiations raises questions about the seriousness of the international response. A climate summit that avoids confronting the principal source of the crisis cannot reasonably claim to be addressing it.

There is also a question of credibility. Countries hosting and steering climate negotiations must demonstrate consistency between their diplomatic commitments and domestic energy policies. Türkiye, the host, and Australia, which is co-chairing the negotiations, face the challenge of reconciling their climate commitments with their continuing dependence on fossil-fuel industries. Leadership in climate diplomacy cannot rest solely on the ability to negotiate communiqués; it must also be reflected in national decisions on energy production, investment and emissions.

The retreat of the United States under President Donald Trump from the Paris Agreement and its broader scepticism towards multilateral climate cooperation have further complicated the international effort. The absence or reduced engagement of major emitters weakens collective ambition and creates uncertainty about the future of climate finance and technology cooperation. Nevertheless, the climate crisis cannot be allowed to become hostage to changing political administrations or geopolitical rivalries. The atmosphere does not recognise national borders, electoral cycles or diplomatic differences. Climate action requires sustained international cooperation regardless of political circumstances.What, then, should COP31 deliver? First, the Antalya conference must establish a credible Climate Finance Work Programme with clear timelines, identifiable sources of funding and mechanisms for accountability. Second, it must create a practical roadmap for substantially increasing adaptation finance, including a credible pathway towards tripling available resources. Third, the Loss and Damage Fund must receive adequate and predictable financial contributions so that vulnerable countries can respond to the consequences of climate disasters that they can neither prevent nor absorb independently.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Keep your attention focused entirely on what is truly your own concern, and be clear that what belongs to others is their business and none of yours." ~ Epictetus

MIDTERMS JOLT TRUMP TO THE CORE



KALYANI SHANKAR

Trump's weakened political position may give New Delhi some breathing room on trade, but shifting Congressional priorities could complicate bilateral negotiations. For India, the challenge is to preserve bipartisan support and ensure that the strategic partnership remains insulated from domestic political turbulence in Washington.

The recent US midterm elections have added complexity to US politics, but the US-India relationship remains fundamentally strong. Democrats scored their biggest victory in the House of Representatives since at least 2008, flipping Senate seats in traditionally conservative states including Kansas, South Carolina, and Texas. The Democrat victory is seen as a move to limit the impact of the Trump administration. The Indian government says that since India has bipartisan support, India will not be affected too much. It is also reported that India sees some trade relief, as well as new challenges.

A Bruised Trump also gives India some breathing room in negotiations over a trade deal, reducing pressure on New Delhi to agree to terms it sees as unfavourable, officials said. However, India must sustain bipartisan support and respond to changing US priorities. As both countries face global challenges—great-power competition, economic shifts, and climate change—their partnership will be vital in regional and global outcomes. Looking at the picture, India faces both obstacles and prospects in maintaining bipartisan support, navigating policy transitions, and expanding collaboration with multiple US stakeholders.

As both democracies address shared global challenges, the strength of their partnership will continue to influence regional and international affairs. Midterm elections are often seen as a referendum on the sitting president's performance and the effectiveness of the ruling party's policies. The midterms resulted in a split Congress—Democrats still hold the Senate, while Republicans now control the House. For India, this means broad continuity, but with slower and less predictable US decision-making. Key committees that impact foreign affairs, defence, and trade may see new leaders and priorities, so India must engage across party lines and stay alert about shifts in the US legislative agenda. India-US ties enjoy bipartisan support: MEA says US midterm election results an "internal matter" A shocked Trump asked, ' Does anybody believe that these elections were honest?

How could the polls be so wrong? Some early voting dumps were so large that it was impossible to win, no matter how many people went to vote. It's all about the machine, which was far more important than the voter!"

These damaging results will hurt Trump for the rest of his presidential term. While Democratic lawmakers are preparing to pass their legislation, Trump still has presidential rights, and he could always reject it. Trump said, "It is the power of the veto. It is one of the stronger powers the President has," underscoring its importance. US-India relations enjoy strong bipartisan support, with both US parties viewing India as key for Indo-Pacific stability and as a counterbalance to China. Existing cooperation in defence and counterterrorism should continue, but new trade, defence, or immigration initiatives may face delays. Indian officials will need to maintain broad engagement with US political, business, and community leaders.

Midterms are widely viewed as a national scorecard on the sitting president's performance and the ruling party's policies. The US is one of India's largest trade partners, with substantial two-way commerce and investment. Reuters reports that India is continuing talks with the US to finalise the first tranche of a bilateral trade deal, and US officials visited the country earlier this month for discussions, an Indian official told reporters on Tuesday. Midterms are unlikely to bring major trade policy changes, but debates on tariffs, market access, and supply chains could return. Sectors like pharmaceuticals, IT, and agriculture are sensitive to changes in US policy, and Indian investments in tech or infrastructure may face closer scrutiny. Ongoing trade talks may lead to a limited agreement that boosts economic ties. Technology and innovation remain pillars of US-India ties, with joint research in AI, cybersecurity, and semiconductors. US Congressional actions on tech transfer, data, and digital policy directly affect Indian firms.

Immigration, especially H-1B visas, is vital for Indian professionals, though major reforms are unlikely. The growing Indian-American diaspora further strengthens the relationship through advocacy and cultural ties. Both countries share an interest in a stable Indo-Pacific and countering China's influence. Defence cooperation, joint military exercises, and intelligence exchange are set to continue, though Congressional reviews may slow arms sales and technology transfers. US policy toward Russia and Iran will also affect India, especially on energy security and regional diplomacy.

Climate and public health are rising priorities, but Congressional divisions may slow progress. The US and India are working together on clean energy, climate adaptation, and public health, with joint research and investment in renewables. India's pharma industry closely watches US regulatory transitions, given its importance as a generics supplier. Midterms bring uncertainty yet also new opportunities. India can deepen cooperation with US states, cities, business groups, and civil society, helping diversify and strengthen the partnership beyond federal channels. Building broad connections will be key for sustained resilience. Despite midterm challenges, the fundamentals of the US-India relationship remain strong. India must maintain bipartisan support, adapt to shifting US policies, and broaden engagement.

Ongoing cooperation will help the partnership thrive and shape global affairs. New Delhi knows how far it can go, and therefore a smooth relationship could remain. These damaging results will hurt Trump for the rest of his presidential term. While Democratic lawmakers are preparing to pass their legislation, Trump still has presidential rights, and he could always reject it The writer is a popular columnist; Views presented are personal.

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Deeply saddened by the devastating fire incident in Parsi-Parlo Circle of Kurung Kumey district, which has left several families homeless and caused immense distress to the local community.
The reports of loss of lives and missing family members make this tragedy even more heartbreaking. My heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families. I pray for strength and courage for everyone affected by this unfortunate incident.
I also express my sincere gratitude to the local administration, police, fire services, emergency responders, volunteers and local residents for their efforts in responding to this tragedy. I urge the concerned authorities to ensure all necessary assistance to the affected families.
~ Pema Khandu, CM, Arunachal Pradesh





Assam CID Probes Fake CISCE Certificate Racket; 4,934 Students Under Scanner

GUWAHATI:
The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of Assam Police is investigating an alleged racket involving forged Class X pass certificates issued in the name of the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE), with 4,934 students identified for securing admission to Class XI using such documents over two academic sessions.The Assam State School Education Board (ASSEB), Division-II, has flagged the admissions, raising concerns over the alleged circulation of forged academic credentials through institutions that are not affiliated with CISCE.

Education Minister Dr Ranoj Pegu said students found to have secured admission using fake certificates would lose their seats. He also claimed that most of the suspected cases had been reported from Nagaon district.

"Most of the students getting admission with fake certificates are from the Nagaon district," Pegu said.

According to the Board, 2,083 students secured admission to Class XI during the 2025-26 academic session, while another 2,851 were admitted during 2026-27 using Class X pass certificates bearing the CISCE name.

The certificates were allegedly issued by institutions that do not have affiliation with the council.

In a communication dated September 5 to the Commissioner and Secretary of the state School Education Department, ASSEB said it had verified the list of affiliated institutions supplied by CISCE.

The verification established that only 28 schools across Assam and Arunachal Pradesh were affiliated with the council. However, the Board identified 94 institutions allegedly issuing certificates in the name of CISCE despite lacking the required affiliation.The Board classified the certificates issued by these institutions as fake and forged, and said both the institutions involved and students who submitted the documents should be held accountable.

As part of the action, ASSEB has blocked the registration of students admitted during the ongoing 2026-27 academic session on the basis of the suspected certificates.

The Board has also urged the state government to instruct district school inspectors to initiate legal proceedings, including the registration of FIRs, against institutions allegedly involved in issuing the documents.

It has further recommended that the concerned institutions be directed to discontinue the studies of students admitted in both academic sessions using the certificates.A district-wise list of institutions where such admissions took place has also been submitted to the government to facilitate further investigation and administrative action.

Meanwhile, the Hojai district committee of the All Assam Minorities Students' Union (AAMSU) has demanded a Special Investigation Team (SIT) probe into the alleged certificate racket.

The organisation claimed that more than 600 students in Hojai district had obtained CISCE-branded certificates and secured admission to various schools during the current academic session.In a memorandum submitted on Tuesday to the Chief Minister, Education Minister and Hojai District Commissioner, AAMSU demanded stringent legal action against those allegedly involved in preparing, selling and distributing forged certificates.

It also sought the identification and arrest of all members of the alleged network.The organisation expressed concern over the reported absence of an FIR in Hojai, despite the Board's directions to initiate legal proceedings against institutions suspected of issuing the certificates and students who used them for admission.

According to the memorandum, the alleged racket initially expanded during the previous Panchayat elections, when certificates purportedly issued by non-existent colleges and universities across the country were allegedly supplied in exchange for large sums of money.

AAMSU further alleged that the network subsequently expanded its operations to students who had failed the High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) and Higher Secondary examinations in Assam.

The organisation claimed that the certificates were allegedly sourced from institutions in Delhi and other states and professionally designed to resemble authentic academic documents.

It further alleged that students who had failed Assam Board examinations were initially shown as having passed through certificates carrying the CISCE name. After those documents came under scrutiny, the alleged operators reportedly began issuing certificates bearing the name of the Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE).

MNF Rejects Allegations of Allotting Former Assam Rifles Land to Private Individuals in Mizoram

AIZAWL
Mizoram's main opposition party, the Mizo National Front (MNF), has strongly rejected allegations that its previous government allotted land formerly occupied by the Assam Rifles in central Aizawl to private individuals, warning that it would initiate legal action against those making what it described as false claims.The controversy centres on allegations that land settlement certificates (LSCs) were issued in areas previously occupied by the paramilitary force. The issue gained attention after retired Assam Rifles officer Major Babie Lalduhsangi claimed in a recent interview with a YouTuber that more than 60 LSCs existed in areas formerly occupied by the force.He also alleged that Lammual ground had been divided into four land settlement certificates issued in the names of private individuals before the land was handed over to the state government.The Assam Rifles had earlier occupied several locations in the heart of Aizawl, including Zodin Square or Lammual, Khatla near Lok Bhavan, Babutlang and the Chite area.

On March 15 last year, Union Home Minister Amit Shah attended a programme in Aizawl marking the relocation of Assam Rifles establishments from the city to Zokhawsang on the eastern outskirts.

The relocation followed an agreement between the paramilitary force and the present Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) government, led by Chief Minister Lalduhoma, in October 2024.

However, the Assam Rifles continues to retain its sector headquarters at Khatla and the DIG's residence at Tuikhuahtlang, near Lok Bhavan. Addressing a press conference in Aizawl, senior MNF leader and former revenue minister Lalruatkima said the party would move court if those making the allegations failed to apologise and issue a public clarification. He accused a political party of using the retired officer to damage the image of the MNF and its previous government.

Rejecting the charge of transferring Assam Rifles land to private individuals, Lalruatkima cited the Mizoram (Restriction on Use of Transferred Land) Act, 2002, which was enacted to prevent such land from being acquired by private persons.

Training Begins for 2,900 Polling Personnel Ahead of Tripura Civic Elections

AGARTALA
Preparations for the November 27 civic elections in Tripura have gathered pace, with training for around 2,900 polling personnel beginning in Agartala on Thursday. The first phase of the programme covers presiding officers, polling officers and Group D employees.

The training has been divided into five categories, comprising presiding officers, first, second and third polling officers, and Group D staff. Along with theoretical sessions on election procedures, participants are receiving practical training in operating Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs).Mock polling exercises are also being conducted to familiarise personnel with voting procedures and prepare them for their responsibilities on polling day.Specially appointed master trainers are conducting the sessions. While one group is responsible for theoretical instruction, another is providing practical demonstrations of EVM operations.An administrative official said the training was being organised as part of preparations for the 2026 civic elections. A total of 439 polling stations have been identified in the areas going to polls.

The official added that the first phase of training was currently underway, while a second phase would be conducted later. The State Election Commission's guidelines would be followed at every stage of the election process, the official said.The remaining preparatory work includes EVM commissioning, deployment of polling personnel at designated polling stations and the distribution and collection of election materials before and after polling.

The exercise is aimed at ensuring that polling personnel are fully familiar with their duties and that all procedures are carried out in accordance with prescribed guidelines.

'We Stopped Evictions for Three Years': Badruddin Ajmal Targets Congress Over Dhubri Eviction Drive

DHUBRI
The political confrontation over the recent eviction drive in Assam's Dhubri district has intensified, with AIUDF chief Badruddin Ajmal accusing the Congress and the BJP of working in tandem to facilitate the eviction of families in Gulabganj.

Reacting to demands for the rehabilitation of families displaced during the operation, Ajmal alleged that both parties had reached an understanding over the eviction drive, while elected representatives from the region failed to stand up for the affected families.

Ajmal claimed that during his three-year tenure as Dhubri MP, he had repeatedly prevented eviction attempts with the support of five AIUDF MLAs.

According to the AIUDF leader, eviction attempts were made four to five times under both Congress and BJP governments, but



his party opposed them through protests, representations and interventions at various levels.

He further claimed that the issue was raised in Parliament on at least 10 to 20 occasions as part of efforts to prevent the displacement of families.

Targeting current Dhubri MP Rakibul Hussain, Ajmal alleged that he had failed to intervene during the latest eviction operation and had not visited the affected areas to assess the situation or extend support to displaced families.

The AIUDF chief also alleged that Hussain had reached an understanding with Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and remained silent while the eviction drive was carried out.

Ajmal accused the Congress leadership of attempting to shift responsibility for the evictions onto the AIUDF instead of addressing the concerns of the affected families.

Demanding political accountability, he called on Rakibul Hussain to resign as Dhubri MP. He also sought the resignation of the five MLAs representing the region, alleging that they had failed to visit the eviction sites or assess the hardships faced by displaced residents.

The remarks have added another dimension to the political debate surrounding the Dhubri eviction drive, with the AIUDF chief seeking to hold Congress representatives accountable for their alleged inaction.

However, the allegations levelled by Ajmal against Rakibul Hussain, the Congress leadership and the Chief Minister have not been independently established. Their responses to the charges were not available at the time of publication.

'Congress Will Lose 100 Times Under Rahul Gandhi': Biplab Deb Says No Party Can Challenge BJP

AGARTALA
Tripura BJP MP and the party's national general secretary Biplab Kumar Deb on Thursday asserted that no political party in the country was capable of challenging the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), predicting repeated electoral defeats for the Congress under Rahul Gandhi's leadership.

Deb made the remarks while interacting with the media in Sonamura subdivision of Tripura's Sepahijala district, where he attended a party organisational meeting on November 12.

Taking a sharp swipe at the Congress, the BJP leader alleged that the party had repeatedly failed to mount an effective political challenge to the BJP.

He claimed that even if the Congress contested elections 100 times under Rahul Gandhi's leadership, it would face defeat on every occasion.



Deb also questioned the political relevance of the Communist parties, claiming that they had lost their influence and no longer commanded the political space they once occupied. He further alleged that other opposition parties lacked a clear political agenda or an alternative vision for the country.

Targets Congress over criticism of BJP leadership

Criticising the opposition, Deb alleged that Congress leaders were more focused on attacking Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and other BJP leaders than discussing issues related to national development, public welfare and governance.

He said the BJP was concentrating on development initiatives and future plans, while opposition leaders were largely engaged in political criticism through public statements and social media platforms.

According to Deb, the opposition had failed to present a constructive political alternative and was increasingly relying on criticism of the ruling party rather than addressing public concerns.

Recalls BJP's electoral victories in Tripura

Referring to Tripura's political history, Deb said voters had rejected the Left Front government in 2018 and brought the BJP to power with a clear mandate.

He also cited the 2023 Assembly elections, claiming that the BJP had once again secured public support and maintained its political position in the state.

The BJP leader alleged that the Left parties had failed to retain genuine electoral support and that their political approach had been rejected by the people of Tripura.

Expressing confidence about the party's future electoral prospects, Deb said the BJP would continue to receive public support in the coming elections, just as it had in 2018 and 2023.

His remarks come amid continuing political sparring between the BJP and opposition parties, with the Congress and Left forces remaining among the principal political rivals in the country's wider political landscape.

The claims regarding the electoral prospects and political relevance of opposition parties reflect Biplab Deb's political assessment.

Manipur Tourism Forum Pays Tribute to Japanese Cultural Ambassador Kazuki Oshiro



BISWADEEP GUPTA

IMPHAL: The Manipur Tourism Forum has expressed profound grief over the sudden demise of Kazuki Oshiro of Okinawa, Japan, describing him as a visionary, cultural ambassador and a close friend of Manipur. Oshiro played a significant role in shaping the vision and presentation of the Imphal Peace Museum. During the museum's construction, he made several visits from Okinawa to Manipur, sharing his knowledge and expertise to help develop the institution as a place that would preserve the memories of the Battle of Imphal and promote peace, reconciliation and friendship between Manipur and Japan. His contribution extended beyond the development of the museum. He also mentored and trained its staff in Okinawa, sharing his experience in museum presentation and cultural interpretation.

His guidance and personal involvement played an important role in shaping the museum into what it is today. To pay tribute to the departed soul, members of the Manipur Tourism Forum gathered at the Forum's office at Classic Grande, Imphal, on November 12.

They offered floral tributes and observed a two-minute silence in his memory. Separately, the staff of the Imphal Peace Museum at Nambol also organised a condolence gathering on the museum premises and paid floral tributes to Oshiro in recognition of his invaluable contribution.The Forum stated that his demise was an irreparable loss to those associated with the Imphal Peace Museum and all who cherish the historic and cultural ties between Manipur and Japan. In a condolence message, Manipur Tourism Forum representative Paonam Sommykanta said that Oshiro's vision, kindness and friendship would remain alive in the hearts of the people and continue to inspire future generations. The Forum also conveyed its deepest condolences to his bereaved family, friends and well-wishers in Okinawa, Japan, and prayed for the eternal peace of the departed soul.

Sirarakhong Community Wins National Award for Conserving Rare Hathei Chilli

KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

NEW DELHI: The Sirarakhong community of Manipur's Ukhrul district has received the prestigious Plant Genome Saviour Community Award 2024–25 for its century-long efforts to conserve and promote the rare Sirarakhong Hathei chilli.

The award was conferred by the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority (PPVFRA) in recognition of the community's contribution to preserving the unique chilli variety, which is known for its distinctive aroma and antioxidant properties.

The award was presented during the Authority's 22nd Foundation Day and Award Function at the Bharat Ratna C. Subramaniam Auditorium, ICAR Convention Centre, NASC Complex, New Delhi. Dr Pramod Kumar Mishra, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, presented the award as the Chief Guest.

Several senior officials and dignitaries attended the ceremony, including Atish Chandra, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare; Dr Mangi Lal Jat, Secretary of the Department of Agricultural Research and Education and Director General of ICAR; Virendra R Tiwari, Chairperson of the National Biodiversity Authority; and Dr T Mohapatra, Chairperson of PPVFRA.



The achievement was made possible through the continuous support of Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Ukhrul, with guidance from the ICAR Research Complex for the NEH Region, Umiam, and ICAR Agricultural Technology Assessment and Research Institute, Zone VII, Umiam, Meghalaya.

Dr Soibam Khogen Singh, Senior Scientist and Head of KVK, Ukhrul, who facilitated the community through training and support activities over the past few years, also attended the ceremony.

Congratulating the KVK and the farmers, Dr Anupam Mishra, Vice-Chancellor of Central Agricultural University, Imphal, called for strengthening the research network to address challenges in chilli cultivation.The Plant Genome Saviour Community Award recognises farming communities for their efforts to conserve plant genetic resources. Five communities received the award for 2024–25.

The award comprises a citation, a memento and a cash prize of Rs 10 lakh. The financial assistance is aimed at strengthening the community's ongoing conservation efforts and improving the marketing of the rare chilli variety.

An exhibition showcasing the community's key products and plant genetic resources was also organised at the event, highlighting its achievements in conserving the traditional chilli variety.

Quest!

The blob of toothpaste that sits on your toothbrush before you brush your teeth is called a nurdle.



NATIONAL

Modi will not remain PM after debate with me': Rahul renews challenge to face-off

NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday renewed his challenge to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a one-on-one public debate, claiming that the prime minister would not remain in office after such an exchange.

Responding to a question during an 'Ask Me' session on Instagram about why he was insisting on a public debate when the BJP had said the discussion could take place in Parliament, Gandhi alleged that he was not allowed to speak in the Lok Sabha and that his microphone had been switched off.

"You did not let me talk on the farm bills, vote chori, SIR, China, on (Gen) Naravane's book, Epstein. I want a one-on-one debate. I don't want a debate entailing long speeches," the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha said.

Gandhi said he wanted a direct exchange in which both leaders could make allegations against each other, rather than deliver lengthy speeches.

"I want that Narendra Modi makes allegations against me and I do the same to him. He can come; there will be a table, on one side there will be Narendra Modi ji and on the other side, it would be me," he said. He added that he would have no objection to Adani Group chairperson Gautam Adani or RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat being appointed as the judge for the debate.

"But I guarantee that the prime minister will not remain the PM after a one-on-one debate with me," Gandhi said.

Gandhi has repeatedly challenged Modi to an open debate. On an earlier occasion, he had claimed that it would take him just five minutes to establish that the prime minister was a "traitor".

BJP leaders have dismissed the challenge, accusing Gandhi of avoiding debates in Parliament.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had said that Parliament was already an available forum for a debate and urged Gandhi to show "some seriousness and responsibility" in his role as the Leader of the Opposition. She had also questioned why he was asking the prime minister to choose a venue when the House was available.



MHA extends ban on Zakir Naik's Islamic Research Foundation for more five years under UAPA



NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on Friday extended the ban on controversial Islamic preacher Zakir Naik's Islamic Research Foundation (IRF) as an unlawful association for a period of another five years, pointing out that the institution has been indulging in activities prejudicial to the security of the country and has the potential of disturb peace and communal harmony as well as disrupt the secular fabric of the country.

The IRF was founded in February 1991 in Mumbai by Naik, who left India and moved to Malaysia, where he obtained permanent residency. The MHA had declared the IRF an unlawful association on November 17, 2016 and banned the organisation for five years. Later, the ban was extended on November 15, 2021. The fresh notification was issued as the previous ban on the IRF was to cease on November 14.

Indian authorities and intelligence agencies have accused Zakir Naik and the IRF of delivering inflammatory speeches and promoting religious enmity and hatred between communities. The ministry announced a notification in exercise of the powers conferred by Sub-section (1) of Section 3 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.

"In exercise of the powers conferred by Sub-sections (1) and (3) of Section 3 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (37 of 1967), the Central Government hereby declares the Islamic Research Foundation (IRF) as an unlawful association and directs that this notification shall, subject to any order that may be made under Section 4 of the said Act, have effect for a period of five years from the date of its publication in the Official Gazette," reads the notification.

As per the notification, the Central government believes that "the IRF and its members, particularly, the founder and President of the IRF, Zakir Abdul Karim Naik alias Dr. Zakir Naik, has been encouraging and aiding its followers to promote or attempt to promote, on grounds of religion, disharmony or feelings of enmity, hatred or ill-will between different religious communities and groups which are prejudicial to the integrity and security of the country." The ministry clarified the extension of ban on the IRF pointing grounds, "the statements and speeches made by Dr. Zakir Naik, are objectionable and subversive."

Through such speeches and statements, MHA said, Zakir Naik has been promoting enmity and hatred amongst different religious groups and inspiring youths of a particular religion in India and abroad to commit terrorist acts. It further said that Zakir Naik made radical statements and speeches to millions of people worldwide through international satellite TV networks, the internet, print and social media. As per the MHA, if the unlawful activities of the IRF are not curbed and controlled immediately, it will take the opportunity to continue its subversive activities and re-organise its activists who are still absconding, disrupt the secular fabric of the country by polluting the minds of the people by creating communal disharmony, propagate anti-national sentiments, escalate secessionism by supporting militancy, and undertake activities which are prejudicial to the sovereignty, integrity and security of the country.

-The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Tribunal constituted under Section 5 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, for the purpose of adjudicating whether or not there is sufficient cause for declaring the IRF as an unlawful association and the Tribunal, by its orders on May 22, 2017 and March 30, 2022, has confirmed the declaration.

INTERNATIONAL

Trump bluntly tells JD Vance to shift focus from Iran to targeting 'corruption and crime' at home

WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump on Thursday directed Vice President JD Vance to shift his focus away from the Iran war and instead devote himself to fighting what the president says is corruption and crime in Democratic-controlled cities and states.

Vance, who served as the lead negotiator for a short-lived truce in the eight-month old war, has been blunt in blaming the war — and the economic reverberations it has caused—for Republicans' sweeping losses in last week's midterm elections in the United States.

But Trump brusquely told the vice president in a social media post Thursday to shift his energies away from the Iran war to what he argues is a more pressing — and perhaps more politically salient — issue after Republicans were trounced at the polls.

"We don't need a deal with Iran," Trump said in the post. "Those days have long since passed. We've got their money, Hundreds of Billions of Dollars, and we've got their Strait!"

Trump earlier this week said he believed the war "militarily is effectively over," and appeared to double down on that message by pointedly directing Vance "to focus his complete and total attention" on his anti-fraud campaign.

Democrats have promised intense oversight of Trump's business dealings and other targets when they take control of Congress in January after voters identified corruption as one of their top concerns. Trump's post about Vance and the Iran war was, in part, responding to a flurry of reports about Democrats' plans.

But it also came after The Wall Street Journal reported Wednesday evening that Vance was weighing engaging in a new round of direct talks with a senior Iranian official.

The vice president's office did not respond to a request for comment.

The White House press office, in an email, responded to a query by highlighting that Trump made clear in his post that he sees no need to negotiate with Iran.

Vance, who had long advocated for restraint in U.S. military interventions overseas, was lukewarm in his defense of the conflict after Trump launched it and became the face of an unsuccessful attempt to end the fighting when he headed up negotiations over the summer.

Following the Nov. 3 losses, Vance wrote a lengthy post on X in which he didn't mince words about the political impact of the conflict.

"If you'd like to argue it was worth it, that losing the Senate for the next 6 years was worth it, then do so," Vance said. "Argue it was a worthwhile cost to pay. Agree or disagree, that's at least honest."

The vice president is considering whether to launch a 2028 run for the White House. Voter dissatisfaction with Trump's handling of the war could weigh down those ambitions.

The president has yet to endorse a successor for the 2028 race. In a CBS "60 Minutes" interview that aired Sunday, the president said he "may or may not get involved" in offering an endorsement.

Trump earlier this week said that he believed that mediation efforts led by Qatar are making progress and that it was unlikely he would need to make good on earlier threats to restart the full-scale bombardment of Iran after he was past the midterm elections.

The president said in an interview on "The Hugh Hewitt Show" on Thursday that he stood ready to restart strikes if necessary. "If something doesn't work out, I would not hesitate," he said.

US President Donald Trump and Vice President JD Vance pause near the Oval Office of the White House, April 14, 2025, in Washington.

Attacks in Strait of Hormuz reach highest level since start of war: security data

Separately, in an interview with commentator Stephen A. Smith, Trump suggested he hasn't ruled out carrying out strikes on Iran's Pickaxe Mountain, a facility linked to Iran's nuclear program, if the U.S. detects signs of activity at the facility.

Oil shipments coming out of the Strait of Hormuz have recovered to near prewar levels after Iran effectively choked the critical waterway for months, stemming the flow of crude and energy resources from its Persian Gulf neighbors.

But international tankers now are relying on U.S. Navy escorts to get the oil out of the strait. The U.S. military has recently carried out limited strikes on Iran, including against its air defenses.

And while crude and liquefied natural gas exports from the Gulf are climbing, there's also been an uptick in attacks on ships trying to traverse the waterway.

The British military on Thursday reported at least two tankers were struck by projectiles in recent days while traversing contested waters near Iran.

The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations Center, an agency that monitors maritime safety, said one of the tankers was struck Wednesday in the Strait of Hormuz, northwest of Ras al-Khaimah. The agency reported the crew evacuated safely and no casualties were reported.

At the same time, a Saudi-led coalition is mired in fighting with Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen. That fighting has made it precarious to transport oil and other goods through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean.

Meanwhile, Iran's chief negotiator and parliament speaker, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, said in an interview that the United States has asked for Russian President Vladimir Putin to facilitate direct negotiations between the U.S. and Iran.

"It was the Americans who, during a visit to Moscow, spoke with Mr. Putin and asked him to speak with Iran so that, in any case, Iran would agree to speak directly with them," Qalibaf told Al Jazeera in the interview. "Look, Russia and Mr. Putin, the Russian president, are friends of ours. We have strategic relations with Russia. We are very close, and we hold Mr. Putin in particularly high regard."

The White House did not directly respond to a query about whether the U.S. has asked Putin to facilitate talks with Iran.

Qalibaf said the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, Maj. Gen. Mohsen Rezaei, traveled to Russia and briefed Putin on details of the negotiations. "He informed him that we had conveyed our positions, which represent the legitimate rights and rightful demands of our people, to the Americans," he said, adding that it is up to the U.S. side to respond.

"It is up to them to decide. If they are truly telling the truth and are sincere about negotiations, then they should respond and begin the process," Qalibaf said. "But if they want to pursue the path of war, then naturally, we are fully prepared for that as well."

Microsoft struggles to restore Outlook after global outage, says recovery measures not working as expected



WASHINGTON

Microsoft's efforts to restore Outlook services after a widespread global outage were not going as expected on Thursday, with the company seeking alternative solutions to address capacity issues as users continued to report disruptions across its applications.

"We've monitored the status of the changes applied to improve serviceability and confirmed they're not taking as expected. We're identifying alternate workstreams that can be applied to increase capacity in the face of sustained traffic management imbalances," Microsoft said in a post on X.

The hours-long outage affected Outlook, workplace messaging platform Teams, artificial intelligence assistant Copilot and other Microsoft 365 services, disrupting businesses and government operations across several countries.

Nearly 130,000 users reported problems accessing Outlook on outage tracker Downdetector shortly after 1 pm Eastern time. The disruption spread to 74 countries and territories within an hour, according to the platform, with reports from across the Americas, Europe, Asia and Africa. Microsoft initially said it was investigating reports of an outage in the Americas but later confirmed that connectivity issues were affecting Microsoft 365 users across regions. The company attributed the disruption to elevated infrastructure load across multiple regions. It also said several servers had failed during automated health checks and that attempts to bring them back online were not taking effect immediately.

In an update shortly after 6 pm Eastern time (11 pm GMT), Microsoft said it was observing limited recovery as it attempted to redirect user traffic away from affected servers. It said users could experience a gradual restoration as their applications reconnected but did not provide a timeline for full recovery.

The outage also affected government operations. Japan's Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Masanao Ozaki said on Friday that the disruption had affected the government's IT infrastructure. New Zealand's Foreign Ministry said its ability to receive emails had been affected, including at its embassies, consulates and representative offices worldwide.

Microsoft had earlier said Teams services in North America had been restored, although some users continued to report connectivity problems.

Hasina's Return Bid Puts New Delhi in a Diplomatic Bind as Dhaka Intensifies Extradition Demand

Bangladesh wants India to hand over the ousted prime minister under the bilateral extradition treaty, while Hasina seeks fresh travel documents and repeatedly signals her intention to return home. A possible move to a third country could offer New Delhi a way out of an increasingly complicated diplomatic situation.

The prolonged stay of former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in India is becoming an increasingly difficult diplomatic issue for New Delhi, as Dhaka steps up pressure for her extradition while the ousted leader continues to express her desire to return home.

Hasina, who fled Bangladesh on August 5, 2024, following the student-led mass uprising that ended her 15-year rule, has repeatedly spoken about returning to Dhaka in recent interviews with international news agencies. Reports suggesting that she is considering a return by December have added a fresh dimension to the political and diplomatic debate surrounding her future.

However, the Bangladesh government led by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman appears unwilling to facilitate an ordinary return. Its position is that Hasina must be handed over by India under the existing extradition treaty between the two neighbouring countries to face the legal proceedings and punishment imposed on her in Bangladesh.

The distinction is politically and legally significant. While Hasina has indicated that she wants to return to her country, Dhaka insists that she should be brought back through the formal extradition process.

Fresh passport request triggers political backlash

The latest development came when Hasina reportedly approached the Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi through an email, seeking the restoration of her passport and national identity card. Her request was subsequently forwarded to the Bangladesh Foreign Ministry for further instructions.

Both documents had been cancelled by the interim administration headed by Muhammad Yunus after Hasina's departure from Bangladesh. Their absence now complicates any attempt by the former premier to travel internationally.

Her request for fresh travel documents has prompted strong reactions from senior members of the Bangladesh government. Rather than viewing it as a routine administrative matter, several ministers have interpreted the move as an attempt to generate international attention and put pressure on Dhaka.

Bangladesh Law Minister Md Asaduzzaman described Hasina as a "convicted criminal" and reiterated that the government had already requested her repatriation under the India-Bangladesh extradition treaty. He maintained that she should be brought back to face the consequences of the legal proceedings against her rather than being allowed to return through an arrangement of her own choosing.

Deputy Foreign Minister Humaiun Kobir also made Dhaka's position clear, stating that Bangladesh wanted India to hand over Hasina under the existing extradition agreement. He went further by describing the former prime minister as a fugitive terrorist.

Another deputy minister, Yasser Khan Choudhury of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, asked Hasina to return and face trial. Accusing her of fleeing after the killing of protesters, he criticised her social media statements and argued that the people of Bangladesh wanted her to return as soon as possible.

The increasingly sharp language coming from Dhaka suggests that the issue is no longer confined to a legal dispute. Hasina's return has become a politically sensitive question for the new administration, which faces pressure to demonstrate accountability for the violence surrounding the 2024 uprising.

Legal proceedings deepen the confrontation

Hasina faces a death sentence imposed by Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) in connection with crimes against humanity during the 2024 mass agitation. The tribunal had convicted her in absentia over the killings of hundreds of protesters.

The legal proceedings have also extended to other senior Awami League figures. Recently, the ICT sentenced party joint general secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif to death for crimes against humanity.

These trials have taken place in the absence of the accused, who remain outside Bangladesh. A section of the Bangladeshi political establishment and public opinion believes that several wanted Awami League leaders are taking shelter in India.

For the Tarique Rahman government, securing Hasina's return is therefore an important political commitment. The issue also carries considerable symbolic significance for a country still dealing with the consequences of the 2024 upheaval.

However, the circumstances surrounding the trials and the sentences imposed in absentia have added complexity to India's position. New Delhi must consider not only the bilateral extradition framework but also the wider diplomatic and legal implications of any decision concerning Hasina.



Hasina's political strategy under scrutiny

The request for a new passport and national identity card has also raised questions about Hasina's actual plans.

ICT Chief Prosecutor Aminul Islam dismissed the move as a political stunt, questioning whether the former prime minister genuinely intended to return to Bangladesh.

He suggested that Hasina was attempting to attract international attention and shift the responsibility for her continued absence onto the Bangladesh government by portraying Dhaka as unwilling to allow her homecoming.

Islam also indicated that the former prime minister might be exploring the possibility of obtaining refuge in a third country. Such an arrangement, if it materialises, could potentially provide an alternative to her return to Bangladesh while also easing the diplomatic pressure on India.

For Hasina, a third-country destination could offer an opportunity to move beyond the uncertainty surrounding her prolonged stay in New Delhi. For India, it could provide a way to reduce the political complications without directly surrendering her to Dhaka.

Nevertheless, no confirmed arrangement for such a relocation has emerged.

Garment industry unrest adds another dimension

The Hasina controversy is unfolding against the backdrop of domestic political and economic challenges in Bangladesh.

Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed recently alleged that individuals across the border, referring to Hasina and her Awami League associates, were attempting to incite violence in Bangladesh amid continuing agitation in the garment industry.

The garment sector is one of the country's most important economic pillars, employing approximately four million workers and contributing substantially to export earnings. Any prolonged industrial unrest could have serious consequences for employment, production and Bangladesh's economic stability.

The government's allegations indicate that the Awami League leadership continues to be viewed as a potential political and security challenge even after its removal from power.

For the Rahman administration, the possibility of political mobilisation by Hasina's supporters from outside Bangladesh adds to the sensitivity surrounding her presence in India.

India-Bangladesh relations caught in the Hasina shadow

The prolonged presence of Hasina in India has become a major irritant in bilateral relations, which were already strained following the political transition in Bangladesh.

New Delhi has traditionally maintained close relations with Dhaka, particularly during Hasina's tenure. Cooperation between the two countries expanded across security, connectivity, trade, energy and regional infrastructure.

Her departure from power, however, fundamentally altered the political environment. The new administration's demand for her extradition has placed India in a difficult position, forcing it to balance its longstanding strategic interests with the political expectations of the current Bangladeshi leadership.

The Hasina factor has also affected high-level diplomatic engagement.

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has yet to undertake his first official visit to India, despite repeated invitations from New Delhi. Instead, Malaysia and China have featured among his overseas destinations.

Rahman also stayed away from the 18th BRICS outreach session held in New Delhi on September 12-13, despite Bangladesh holding the chairmanship of BIMSTEC at the time. Hasina's presence in India has been viewed as one of the factors complicating his potential participation.

The absence of regular high-level engagement is particularly significant given the geographical proximity and mutual dependence of the two countries.India and Bangladesh share a long international border and have extensive interests in cross-border trade, transport connectivity, energy cooperation, river-water management and regional security. Any prolonged diplomatic disagreement could affect cooperation in these areas.India's position is complicated by the fact that Hasina is not merely a former political leader seeking temporary refuge. She is a former head of government with whom New Delhi had developed close strategic relations over many years.

At the same time, Bangladesh is an important neighbour whose political stability and cooperation are essential to India's interests in the Northeast and the wider eastern region.

A decision to hand over Hasina could have serious political and diplomatic consequences, while refusing Dhaka's demand for an indefinite period could further weaken bilateral confidence.

The extradition treaty provides a formal framework for cooperation between the two countries, but the political circumstances surrounding Hasina's case make the issue considerably more complicated than an ordinary extradition request.

New Delhi must also weigh the potential consequences for its regional standing, particularly at a time when China is seeking to expand its influence across South Asia.

Bangladesh's future diplomatic orientation will matter considerably to India's connectivity and security interests, including access to the Northeast through regional transport and trade networks.

Against this background, Hasina's possible relocation to a third country has emerged as one potential way of reducing the immediate tension.

If she leaves India for another destination, New Delhi may be able to ease a major source of friction with Dhaka without directly agreeing to the extradition demand. Such a development could create space for the two governments to restore diplomatic engagement.However, the question of whether a third country would be willing to provide her political refuge remains unanswered. Her legal status, the death sentence imposed by the ICT and Bangladesh's continuing demand for extradition would all complicate any such arrangement.

Moreover, her departure from India would not automatically resolve every disagreement between the two neighbours. Issues concerning political security, minority protection, border management, trade, water-sharing and regional connectivity would continue to require sustained diplomatic attention.For now, Hasina's future remains uncertain, and her request for fresh travel documents has brought the issue back into sharp focus.The central challenge for New Delhi is to prevent a politically sensitive individual case from becoming a long-term obstacle to an otherwise important bilateral relationship. For Dhaka, bringing Hasina back remains a matter of legal accountability and domestic political legitimacy.Whether the former prime minister eventually returns to Bangladesh, moves to a third country or continues her stay in India, the decision will have implications far beyond her personal political future.

Ultimately, a resolution of the Hasina issue could provide both New Delhi and Dhaka with an opportunity to move away from confrontation and rebuild a relationship that remains vital to the interests of millions of people on both sides of the border.



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