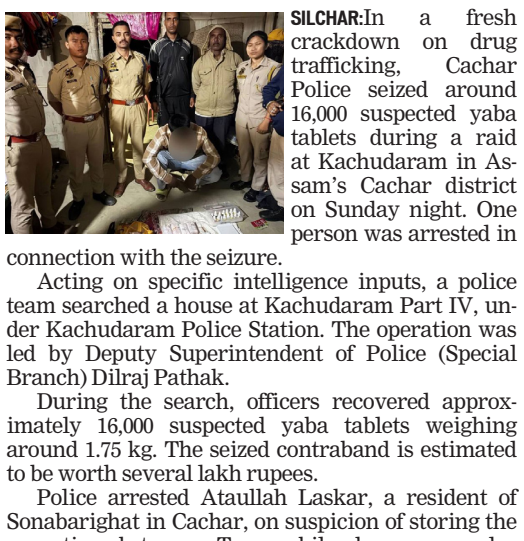


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Centre Boosts Security in Manipur, Deploys Over 1,000 CRPF Personnel



KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

NEW DELHI: The Centre has strengthened its security deployment in Manipur by sending a full battalion of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), comprising more than 1,000 personnel, amid continuing ethnic tensions in the state.

According to officials , the CRPF headquarters ordered the redeployment to reinforce the force's presence in Manipur, where ethnic violence has continued since May 2023.The latest deployment comes months after two battalions of the CRPF's specialised jungle warfare unit, the Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA), were sent to the state. Several regular CRPF units and personnel of the Rapid Action Force (RAF) are also stationed in different parts of Manipur to assist security operations.The induction of another full battalion is expected to strengthen the security forces' operational capacity amid the prolonged unrest. However, the arrival of additional personnel could create logistical challenges, particularly regarding accommodation, transportation and other infrastructure requirements.

Officials said instructions had been issued to ensure adequate arrangements for the incoming personnel.

Meanwhile, the Centre is considering a further restructuring of central paramilitary deployments. According to a senior security official, there is a proposal to withdraw at least three more battalions from Maoist-affected areas and redeploy them either in Manipur or along India's borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh.The latest move underlines the Centre's continued reliance on central security forces to address the prolonged security challenges in Manipur. Since the outbreak of ethnic violence in May 2023, the state has witnessed repeated tensions, displacement and disruptions to normal life, keeping security arrangements under close focus.

The deployment of additional CRPF personnel is expected to reinforce the existing security framework as authorities continue efforts to stabilise the situation.

Manipur Gripped by Shutdown Over Naga Killings, Police Fire Tear Gas at Protesters in Imphal



IMPHAL

Normal life was disrupted across several parts of Manipur on Monday as a 24-hour shutdown called over the killing of four Tangkhul Naga civilians brought protests, road blockades and clashes with security forces.

Tensions escalated at Chingmeirong in Imphal East, where police fired tear gas shells to disperse protesters demonstrating against the November 13 ambush near New Heaven along the Imphal-Ukhrul road.

Shutdown supporters blocked roads, set tyres on fire and staged demonstrations, demanding accountability for the killing and justice for the four victims. Clashes reportedly broke out when security personnel attempted to prevent or clear the road blockades.

The shutdown affected normal activities in several areas, with shops and educational institutions remaining closed and public transport services largely off the roads. Daily movement and business activities were disrupted, leaving residents facing considerable inconvenience.

The 24-hour strike was called by the Native People's Committee, Manipur (NPCM), in coordination with several hill- and valley-based civil society organisations, including the Coordinating Committee of Naga Village Authorities (CCNVA) and other Naga bodies.

The shutdown began at midnight on November 15 and is scheduled to conclude at midnight on November 16.

The protests were triggered by the November 13 ambush near New Heaven along the Imphal-Ukhrul road, in which four Tangkhul Naga civilians were killed. The incident has sparked widespread condemnation and renewed demands for a thorough investigation and accountability.

The latest unrest has once again brought the fragile security situation in Manipur into focus, with tensions rising over the killings and the subsequent shutdown.

PERSPECTIVE

The worst person to be around is someone who complains about everything and appreciates nothing.

Major Drug Bust in Cachar: 16,000 Suspected Yaba Tablets Seized, One Arrested

KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

SILCHAR: In a fresh crackdown on drug trafficking, Cachar Police seized around 16,000 suspected yaba tablets during a raid at Kachudaram in Assam's Cachar district on Sunday night. One person was arrested in connection with the seizure.

Acting on specific intelligence inputs, a police team searched a house at Kachudaram Part IV, under Kachudaram Police Station. The operation was led by Deputy Superintendent of Police (Special Branch) Dilraj Pathak.

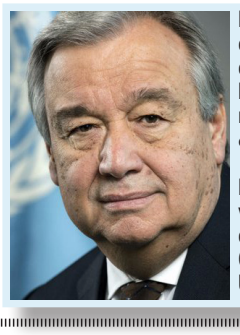
During the search, officers recovered approximately 16,000 suspected yaba tablets weighing around 1.75 kg. The seized contraband is estimated to be worth several lakh rupees.

Police arrested Ataullah Laskar, a resident of Sonabarighat in Cachar, on suspicion of storing the narcotic substances. Two mobile phones were also seized from his possession.

The raid was conducted at the residence of Saidul Haque Laskar as part of the district police's ongoing drive against drug trafficking and storage.

The latest seizure comes amid intensified enforcement efforts by Cachar Police to curb the movement and distribution of narcotic substances in the Barak Valley. Further investigation is underway to establish the source of the suspected drugs and identify possible links in the supply network.

WHO SAID WHAT



Fraud is one of the most rapidly evolving forms of transnational organized crime, generating billions of dollars for criminal networks through online scams & fraudulent schemes.

Let's work together to protect victims, prevent fraud & stop organized crime. ~ Antonio Guterres, Seretary-General, United Nations

Assam Rolls Out 12-Point Road Safety Plan, Himanta Warns of Strict Action Against Traffic Violations



KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

GUWAHATI: In a major push to curb road accidents and fatalities, the Assam government has announced a 12-point action plan aimed at strengthening traffic enforcement, improving road infrastructure and ensuring faster emergency medical assistance.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced the measures following a meeting with senior officials, making it clear that the government would adopt a zero-tolerance approach towards traffic violations.

Under the new plan, district-level road safety task forces will be activated in accordance with Supreme Court directions. Commercial vehicles will be required to install speed-limiting devices, with strict action proposed against those found tampering with the equipment.

The government will intensify enforcement between 3 pm and 9 pm, particularly targeting speeding, reckless driving and driving under the influence of alcohol.

Accident-prone stretches will be identified for targeted infrastructure improvements, including pedestrian crossings, traffic signals, streetlights and repairs to road dividers. The government also plans to tighten driving licence tests to ensure that applicants possess adequate driving skills and awareness of road safety regulations.

In another significant measure, every road accident will be analysed to establish its cause and identify corrective steps to prevent similar incidents. The state will also introduce a 'Zero-Fatality District Programme', under which districts will be assigned specific targets, timelines and accountability mechanisms to reduce road deaths.

The action plan also calls for strict enforcement of helmet regulations, including for women and children travelling as pillion riders. Driving licences of habitual traffic offenders will be suspended in accordance with applicable provisions.

Commercial vehicle operators could face further penalties for repeated violations. The government has proposed cancellation of permits for vehicles found committing 34 or more traffic violations in a year.

Improving post-accident medical care is another key component of the initiative. Hospitals located along highways will be equipped with adequate doctors, medical personnel, medicines and emergency equipment to ensure timely treatment of accident victims.

The government will also train road safety volunteers, including employees of roadside hotels and dhabas, in first aid and emergency response. Their contributions to saving lives during road emergencies will be recognised annually.

The 12-point initiative seeks to combine stricter enforcement, safer road infrastructure and improved emergency response in an effort to reduce accidents and make Assam's roads safer.

China's Mega Dam Pushes India to Reconsider Siang Project as Strategic Priority: Pema Khandu

ITANAGAR

Growing concerns over China's proposed mega hydropower project on the Yarlung Tsangpo river in Tibet have strengthened the strategic case for India's proposed Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP), Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu said on Monday, describing the project as crucial for the country's water security and defence preparedness.

Speaking to journalists on the occasion of National Press Day, Khandu said China's reported plan to build a 60,000-MW hydropower project had raised serious questions about the possibility of large-scale water storage or diversion and its potential consequences for downstream regions.

He said India needed the capacity to regulate river flows and respond to any sudden changes in water discharge.

According to Khandu, the proposed SUMP would have a storage capacity of around 9.2 billion cubic metres (BCM), against the reported 5.2 BCM capacity of the Chinese project. Such infrastructure, he argued, would provide India with greater control over water management in the strategically sensitive Siang basin.The Chief Minister said SUMP was declared a national project in 2008 but remained largely stalled for years. Its progress gathered momentum after the Chinese leadership's visit to the region in 2021 and the subsequent inclusion of the mega dam proposal in China's development plan.

Describing SUMP as one of 16 national projects undertaken since Independence, Khandu said the proposed investment of nearly Rs 2 lakh crore could significantly transform Arunachal Pradesh and the wider Northeast.

Manipur Congress MP Bimol Akoijam Alleges BJP 'Witch Hunt', Says Charges Against Him Are Baseless



KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

IMPHAL :Manipur Congress MP Angomcha Bimol Akoijam has accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of orchestrating a political "witch hunt" against him, alleging that the campaign is intended to divert public attention from issues raised by Congress leader and Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi. Rejecting the allegations against him, Akoijam said the BJP was continuing to circulate what he described as baseless claims despite being aware that they had no substantive foundation.

The Congress MP alleged that the controversy was being deliberately amplified to undermine his political position and shift the focus away from questions raised by the Congress leadership.

"I've been saying that it's been a witch hunt. But the BJP has been continuing to tell lies even today. That's something that we expect from them. They're trying to make an issue out of this, despite knowing very well that there is no substance in these allegations," Akoijam said.

He further claimed that the allegations were part of a broader attempt to divert public attention from Rahul Gandhi's interventions on important political issues.

Defending his position within the Congress, Akoijam said the party's decision to entrust him with responsibilities reflected the leadership's confidence in him.

"The fact that the party has given me responsibility tells you that the party has confidence, and they know very well that these allegations are false and have no substance at all," he said.

His remarks come amid a political controversy over the allegations levelled against him, with the Congress MP maintaining that the charges are politically motivated rather than supported by facts. Akoijam, however, did not elaborate on the specific allegations in his latest remarks. His comments have added another dimension to the ongoing political confrontation between the Congress and the BJP.

Nagaland Faces Call for Green Energy Push, Official Warns Against Fossil Fuel Dependence

Climate change and global energy disruptions underline need for renewable power; Nagaland students to represent state at national energy conservation competition

KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

KOHIMA: Nagaland needs to accelerate its transition towards renewable energy and reduce its dependence on fossil fuels to address climate change and strengthen long-term energy security, Director of New and Renewable Energy James Khala has said.

Addressing the Nagaland State-Level Painting Competition on Energy Conservation 2026 in Kohima, Khala said rising temperatures, flash floods, melting glaciers and changing weather patterns had emerged as serious threats to communities and the environment.

He identified dependence on fossil fuels as a major contributor to global warming and called for greater adoption of solar, wind and hydropower as alternative energy sources.



Khala also emphasised that the transition to clean energy must go hand in hand with responsible consumption. He urged people to adopt energy-efficient appliances, use electric vehicles and public transport, walk or cycle for shorter journeys, reduce waste and conserve water.

Highlighting the need for a broader development strategy, he said progress should not be measured solely through roads and infrastructure. Sustainable agriculture, environmental protection and the use of locally available renewable energy resources must also become development priorities.

Referring to geopolitical conflicts and disruptions in international energy supplies, Khala said recent developments had exposed the risks of excessive dependence on imported fossil fuels. He stressed that energy security needed to be strengthened at every level, from villages and states to the Northeast and the country as a whole.

Additional Director of School Education Deenabandhu Panda said India imported nearly 80 per cent of its crude oil requirements, making energy conservation and alternative fuels important for economic stability.

He pointed to the potential of ethanol and biogas produced from agricultural residues and waste, along with rooftop solar installations and electric vehicles, in reducing dependence on imported energy.Panda also encouraged consumers to choose electrical appliances with higher Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) star ratings, noting that energy-efficient products could reduce electricity consumption and household expenses.NEEPCO General Manager N. Khogendra Meitei said the national painting competition had been organised since 2005 to encourage energy conservation awareness among schoolchildren. More than 80 lakh students from around 1.1 lakh schools participated in the competition last year, he said.The event was organised by North Eastern Electric Power Corporation Limited (NEEPCO), Doyang Power Station, Nagaland, under the aegis of the Bureau of Energy Efficiency under the Union Ministry of Power.

A total of 1,860 students from 56 schools across Nagaland participated in the preliminary round, with 100 shortlisted for the state-level contest.

Issina Rangkau of Little Star Higher Secondary School and Anamika Ghose of Chitrakala School of Fine Arts secured first positions in Group A (Classes 5 to 7) and Group B (Classes 8 to 10), respectively.

Jasper Varay of EMBER Art Academy and Smiti Debnath of PM Shri Kendriya Vidyalaya won second prizes, while Hardik Khemani of Holy Cross Higher Secondary School and Lhuvese Medeo of Government High School secured third positions in their respective categories.

The winners will represent Nagaland at the national-level competition scheduled to be held in New Delhi on December 11.

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INDIA-PAKISTAN ENGAGEMENT

New Delhi's decision to host Pakistan at an SCO forum reflects the complexities of multilateral diplomacy, but it also tests India's ability to maintain a firm position on cross-border terrorism while keeping regional engagement alive.

The proposed visit of a Pakistani minister to New Delhi after a prolonged diplomatic freeze presents an important moment for India's foreign policy. From November 20 to 22, Pakistan's Climate Minister Musadik Masood Malik is scheduled to visit the Indian capital to attend the inaugural Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Civilisational Dialogue Forum at the historic Purana Qila. It will be the first visit by a Pakistani minister to India in more than three years and the first such high-level engagement since the military confrontation that followed Operation Sindoor in 2025.

The significance of the visit, however, lies less in the presence of a Pakistani minister in New Delhi than in the diplomatic circumstances surrounding it. India and Pakistan have repeatedly maintained that their bilateral relationship remains frozen, with New Delhi insisting that meaningful dialogue cannot resume without an end to cross-border terrorism. Yet both countries continue to participate in the same multilateral institutions. This apparent contradiction is, in reality, a reflection of the difficult balance that regional diplomacy often demands.

India has made it clear that Malik's visit is strictly within the framework of the SCO and should not be interpreted as a bilateral diplomatic opening. The invitation was extended to all 10 member countries, along with observers and dialogue partners, in keeping with the organisation's established procedures. The forum itself is an Indian initiative, proposed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the 2025 SCO summit in Tianjin, with the stated objective of promoting civilisational heritage, cultural understanding and people-to-people exchanges.

Such distinctions are important. Multilateral participation does not automatically signify a willingness to normalise bilateral relations. India cannot afford to abandon important regional platforms simply because its relationship with one member country remains deeply troubled. Nor should participation in these institutions be mistaken for a retreat from its stated position on terrorism.

The SCO occupies a significant place in the geopolitical landscape of Eurasia. Its membership includes China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Iran and several Central Asian countries. For New Delhi, the organisation offers an important diplomatic space to engage with major regional powers, protect strategic interests and contribute to discussions on security, connectivity, trade and regional stability. Walking away from such a platform would mean surrendering valuable diplomatic ground to other powers, particularly China.

India's continued participation in SCO engagements, even when Pakistan is involved, therefore reflects strategic pragmatism rather than diplomatic accommodation. This is also evident from India's decision to attend SCO meetings hosted by Pakistan. In late September, Additional Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs Alok Dimri travelled to Islamabad for a meeting of the Council of National Coordinators. It was the first official Indian delegation visit to Pakistan following Operation Sindoor.

The contrast with the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is equally instructive. India has stayed away from SAARC summits hosted by Pakistan since 2016, effectively bringing the regional grouping's summit process to a standstill. The SCO, however, operates within a much wider strategic framework. Its importance extends beyond South Asia, making disengagement far more costly for India.

Nevertheless, diplomatic pragmatism must not become an excuse for ambiguity. Pakistan's participation in an international forum in New Delhi should not dilute the urgency of India's concerns over terrorism, terror financing and the infrastructure that enables militant organisations to operate. The distinction between multilateral engagement and bilateral normalisation must remain clear, not merely in official statements but also in diplomatic practice.

India has consistently attempted to place terrorism at the centre of the SCO's security agenda. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh recently called on member states to reject double standards on terrorism and dismantle terror financing networks and safe havens. His remarks, made at an SCO meeting attended by Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, underline India's effort to turn the organisation into a platform for collective accountability.

The challenge is that the SCO itself brings together countries with sharply differing strategic interests and approaches to terrorism. China and Pakistan share a close strategic partnership, while Russia maintains its own regional priorities. Achieving a common position on terrorism will therefore require sustained diplomatic effort rather than declarations alone. India must continue to insist that security concerns cannot be selectively acknowledged depending on political convenience.

There is also a larger question about the purpose of the Civilisational Dialogue Forum. Cultural exchanges and historical conversations can create opportunities for mutual understanding, but they cannot independently resolve deep political and security disputes. Civilisational connections should not be used to obscure contemporary realities. A meaningful dialogue requires mutual respect, honesty and a willingness to confront difficult questions.

For New Delhi, the forthcoming meeting is an opportunity to demonstrate that it can remain engaged with the wider Eurasian region without compromising its core security interests. It must resist both extremes: allowing hostility with Pakistan to undermine India's participation in important international institutions, or allowing multilateral engagement to create the impression that the underlying bilateral problems have been set aside.

Ultimately, diplomacy is not simply the art of talking to friends and avoiding adversaries. It is the ability to protect national interests while operating in an increasingly interconnected world. India's participation in the SCO is strategically necessary, but its credibility will depend on the consistency of its position. Engagement with Pakistan at a multilateral forum may be unavoidable; normalisation of bilateral ties, however, must rest on a very different set of conditions.

The message from New Delhi should therefore remain unequivocal: India is prepared to engage with the world, including within institutions where Pakistan is a member, but it will not allow the language of regional cooperation to overshadow the imperative of accountability on terrorism. That is not a contradiction. It is the essence of a mature and principled foreign policy.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"It is no longer a choice, my friends, between violence and nonviolence. It is either nonviolence or nonexistence." – Martin Luther King Jr

OMAN EMERGES AS A NEW GATEWAY TO THE GULF AMID HORMUZ CRISIS



KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

For decades, Oman's geographical location has been viewed as both an opportunity and a limitation. While its coastline along the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean offers direct access to international shipping routes, the country has remained on the margins of the Gulf's economic expansion, dominated by larger neighbours such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The ongoing Iran war, however, has changed the strategic significance of that geography. With shipping through the Strait of Hormuz severely disrupted, Oman's ports are emerging as increasingly important alternatives for moving goods and energy in and out of the Gulf. What was once considered a peripheral location is now attracting greater attention from regional powers and major Asian economies.

The ports of Sohar, Duqm and Salalah are at the centre of this shift. Although they cannot match the cargo-handling capacity or commercial networks of established regional hubs such as Dubai's Jebel Ali, they offer something that has become particularly valuable during the crisis: access to the Gulf region without depending entirely on the Strait of Hormuz.

Shipping data underline the scale of the disruption. On October 6, only seven commodity vessels reportedly transited the strait. Meanwhile, oil exports through the Gulf of Oman and the Red Sea more than doubled compared with pre-war levels. The situation remains uncertain, with Iran's security chief declaring on November 11 that the strait would remain closed.

For Oman, the crisis presents an opportunity to convert geographical advantage into long-term economic influence.

Ports gain strategic importance

Oman has spent years developing its maritime infrastructure as part of a broader effort to diversify its economy beyond oil and gas. Its ambition is to become one of the world's leading logistics centres by 2040.

Duqm occupies a particularly important position in this strategy. Located along Oman's Arabian Sea coastline, outside the Strait of Hormuz, the port has deep-water facilities capable of accommodating very large vessels. It is also linked to a special economic zone intended to attract industrial, manufacturing and logistics investments.

The war has not created this infrastructure, but it has changed the commercial calculations surrounding it. When traditional shipping routes become unreliable, ports located beyond vulnerable maritime chokepoints acquire additional value.

Sohar also offers access outside Hormuz, although it is geographically closer to the strait. Salalah, meanwhile, is strategically positioned on the Arabian Sea but remains exposed to instability around the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the Red Sea.

However, geographical advantage alone cannot make Oman a substitute for the region's established logistics centres. Sustained growth will require regular shipping services, warehouses, road connectivity, efficient customs procedures, industrial customers and reliable links to inland markets. Businesses will continue using alternative ports only if they offer competitive costs, sufficient capacity and dependable operations.

Oman is already attempting to build these connections. In early September, a Saudi delegation visited Sohar, Duqm and Salalah to assess their capabilities and explore investment and logistics cooperation. Saudi crude is also moving through Omani waters, with Saudi Aramco offering additional cargo loadings to Asian refiners from Sohar.

Muscat has also held discussions with Egypt on a proposed direct shipping route connecting Duqm and Salalah with Egyptian ports. The initiative is intended to strengthen industrial supply chains and improve access to African and Asian markets. However, the participating operators and the launch schedule have yet to be announced.

China's growing interest in Omani connectivity

China has a particular interest in the changing maritime geography of the Gulf. Over the past two decades, Beijing has expanded its economic presence across the region through investments in energy, infrastructure, manufacturing, technology and logistics.

This growing involvement has also increased China's exposure to regional instability. The Middle East accounted for roughly half of China's crude oil imports in 2025, making the security of maritime supply routes a major economic concern.

The Iran war has highlighted the risks of this dependence. Chinese state-controlled shipping companies, including COSCO Shipping Energy Transportation and China Merchants Energy Shipping, have kept their tankers away from Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb since late July. Before the conflict, the two companies handled approximately half of China's crude imports from the Middle East.

At the same time, ship-to-ship transfers involving Chinese- and Hong Kong-owned vessels in the Gulf of Oman exceeded 600,000 barrels per day during June and July. Similar arrangements have continued into the autumn. Saudi Aramco also invited Chinese refiners to bid for late-October crude cargoes through ship-to-ship transfers near Sohar.These developments suggest that China is seeking greater flexibility in accessing Gulf energy supplies. Stronger commercial links with Omani ports and logistics networks could help Beijing diversify its routes without taking on a larger military responsibility for protecting the region's maritime infrastructure.

Oman is already an important energy supplier to China, accounting for around 6 per cent of its crude oil imports in 2025.

The relationship received a significant diplomatic boost during Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's visit to Beijing in early November. It was the first visit to China by an Omani head of state since diplomatic relations were established in 1978.

The two countries signed 14 cooperation agreements covering areas such as artificial intelligence, green energy and supply chains, alongside a currency swap agreement. A further 23 commercial and investment agreements were also concluded.

The agreements covered space, navigation, digital currencies and industrial supply chains. Notably, they did not include defence or maritime security arrangements. The joint statement instead called for the restoration of safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz and renewed negotiations between Washington and Tehran.

This reflects China's broader approach to the Gulf: expand economic influence while avoiding the military commitments associated with the United States' security role in the region. Oman's growing importance could help Beijing reduce some of its commercial vulnerabilities without fundamentally changing that approach.

India, Japan and South Korea also have stakes

China is not the only Asian economy that stands to benefit from stronger Omani connectivity. India has substantial economic and strategic interests in the country's ports and maritime infrastructure.

The India-Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement came into force in June, providing a framework for expanding bilateral trade and investment. Oman's ports also offer important links between India, the Gulf and East Africa. Shipping networks connect Sohar, Duqm and Salalah with Indian ports such as Mundra, Nhava Sheva and Hazira.

For India, these links are relevant not only to energy security but also to the movement of manufactured goods, industrial inputs and other commodities. Greater use of Omani ports could strengthen India's access to regional markets and reduce dependence on vulnerable maritime routes.

Japan and South Korea have equally strong reasons to diversify their energy supply channels. The Middle East accounted for 94 per cent of Japan's crude oil imports and 69 per cent of South Korea's in 2025.

The need for alternative routes is already visible. In October, two Qatari liquefied natural gas cargoes that had exited Hormuz conducted ship-to-ship transfers off Sohar. One was bound for South Korea and the other for Pakistan.

The growing interest from Asian economies could provide Oman with a broader commercial base. It would also strengthen Muscat's long-standing policy of maintaining diplomatic and economic relationships with countries that often have competing interests, including Iran, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the United States, India and China.

Security and infrastructure remain major challenges

Despite the opportunity, Oman faces significant obstacles in turning its ports into permanent alternatives to established Gulf logistics hubs.

The first challenge is capacity. Duqm, in particular, needs a stronger industrial base and a more consistent flow of cargo to justify large-scale investment. Without regular commercial activity, the cost of maintaining and expanding infrastructure could become a burden.

Security is another concern. In March, drones struck fuel storage facilities at Duqm and Salalah, forcing a temporary suspension of operations at the latter. Iran denied involvement in the attack on Salalah.

Although Salalah's location on the Arabian Sea offers an advantage over ports inside the Gulf, it remains vulnerable to instability around the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb. Duqm is outside the immediate reach of the Hormuz disruption, but the wider maritime environment remains exposed to military escalation.

An incident on November 7, when US forces disabled a St Kitts-flagged cargo vessel in the Gulf of Oman, further demonstrated that insecurity can extend beyond the Strait of Hormuz. US Central Command said the vessel had attempted to breach the blockade of Iran.

Oman's diplomatic position is also becoming more complicated. Muscat has been involved in discussions with Tehran on a joint mechanism to manage shipping through Hormuz. On November 5, the foreign ministers of the two countries stressed the need for practical arrangements and technical mechanisms to restore normal maritime movement.

Iran has reportedly made US recognition of a bilateral Iran-Oman arrangement for Hormuz one of its conditions for normalising transit. At the same time, US President Donald Trump has threatened military action against Oman if it obstructs a US-Iran agreement. These pressures place Muscat's diplomatic balancing strategy under considerable strain.

Pipelines could reshape the energy map

The possibility of new energy infrastructure could further strengthen Oman's position. A pipeline connecting Gulf oil-producing regions to Duqm would provide an additional route to the Indian Ocean, potentially reducing dependence on Hormuz.

In late September, the chief executive of TotalEnergies said Saudi Arabia had begun work on a pipeline to Duqm. However, Rystad Energy has indicated that the project remains at the feasibility stage, while Aramco has declined to comment.

Oman's state-owned energy company, OQ, meanwhile, plans to double its onshore oil storage capacity at Duqm to 10 million barrels within three years.

Such projects could enhance Oman's role in regional energy logistics, but they would require substantial investment. Pipelines and storage facilities would also create fixed infrastructure that could become targets during a future conflict.

Other Gulf producers are pursuing alternative routes as well. The UAE has said that a second bypass pipeline to Fujairah is nearly half complete. The project would build on existing infrastructure that already allows some Emirati oil exports to avoid Hormuz.

For Asian energy importers, diversification is therefore likely to become a long-term priority, extending beyond the current conflict. Their strategy could involve a combination of pipelines, Omani ports, Indian Ocean shipping routes, Red Sea corridors and overland connections.

A strategic opportunity beyond the war

The Gulf's established logistics centres are unlikely to lose their dominance overnight, and the Strait of Hormuz will remain indispensable to regional trade. Yet the current crisis has demonstrated the economic risks of depending too heavily on a single maritime corridor.

Oman's significance lies in offering an additional point of access to a region that remains central to global energy supplies and international commerce. Its ports cannot replace Hormuz or match the scale of the UAE's logistics infrastructure, but they can provide shipping companies and trading partners with more choices during periods of disruption.

For China, India, Japan and South Korea, that flexibility has growing strategic value. For Oman, the challenge is to turn temporary demand for alternative routes into lasting investment, regular shipping traffic and deeper commercial partnerships.

The country has spent years trying to transform its geographical position into an economic advantage. The Iran war has given that ambition a new urgency. Whether Oman can emerge as a durable gateway to the Gulf will depend not simply on where its ports are located, but on how effectively it builds the infrastructure, commercial networks and diplomatic relationships needed to make them indispensable.

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

The display of a Pakistani flag within an educational institution in Kolkata is a serious matter that cannot be brushed aside. Political rights cannot justify disrespect towards national symbols. No individual or institution is above the law.

India's sovereignty is non-negotiable. National dignity must be upheld, without compromise.

#JanjatiyaGauravDiwas

~ Samik Bhattacharya, MP & State President, BJP West Bengal



Six Naga Civilians' Bodies Handed Over After 187 Days; Families Continue to Seek Justice

KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

IMPHAL: After 187 days in the mortuary, the bodies of six Naga civilians allegedly abducted and killed in Manipur's Kangpokpi district on May 13 were handed over to their families on Monday morning. The bodies were taken out of the Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences (JNIMS) mortuary in Imphal at around 8 am and placed in ambulances for transportation to Naga Martyrs' Park at Konsakhul village, where the final funeral and burial ceremonies are scheduled to take place. The handover was marked by scenes of intense grief at the hospital campus. Relatives broke down as the coffins were brought out, while mothers held their children close. Several of the children had lost their fathers in the incident. The deceased have been identified as Phenrongwi Thiumai, Rev. Dr. Pastor Manu Thiumai, Pastor Kepibou Chawang, Dilip Thiumai, Phenrilung Chawang and Kaliwangbou Abonmai. Kachiaklungliu Thiumai, wife of Rev. Dr. Pastor Manu Thiumai, said her family had endured immense emotional pain during the prolonged wait but continued to draw strength from their faith.



"We still want justice from the government. We cannot say that we have received justice," she said after receiving her husband's body. The couple have two daughters. She appealed to the government to ensure accountability for the killings.

The 187-day wait was accompanied by sustained expressions of solidarity at the JNIMS mortuary. Naga women regularly visited the campus to pray for the deceased and support the bereaved families. Mass prayers, mourning gatherings and collective prayer sessions became a recurring feature during the period.

The Joint Tribe Council (JTC), in coordination with the United Naga Council (UNC) and a dedicated Burial Committee, has organised the final farewell programme. Civil society organisations, church leaders, student unions, women's groups and youth bodies from different communities have been invited to pay their respects. The programme includes prayers, floral tributes, wreath-laying and condolence messages, followed by the burial service at Naga Martyrs' Park.

The bodies had remained at the JNIMS mortuary since the killings, as Naga civil society organisations, including the UNC, initially refused to claim them until those responsible were arrested.

The way was cleared for the families to receive the bodies following tripartite talks in Guwahati on September 26 involving the UNC, the Manipur government and the Union Ministry of Home Affairs. The agreement allowed the families to conduct the final rites while the National Investigation Agency's (NIA) investigation and prosecution continued.

The NIA, which took over the probe into the abduction and killings, has so far arrested four accused in joint operations with Manipur Police and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF).

In a second phase of arrests on July 18, an NIA-Police-CRPF team apprehended two suspects from the Leimakhong area of Kangpokpi district. They were identified as Lungoulal Vaiphei of Leilon Vaiphei village and Lunminthang Sitlhou alias Jack of Molhoi village.

In September, State Home Minister Govindas Konthoujam informed the Manipur Assembly that four suspects had been arrested and that investigators had identified additional suspects based on emerging leads. Efforts were underway to trace and apprehend them.

The handover has ended the families' long wait to perform the last rites, but their demand for justice remains unresolved. As the six civilians are laid to rest, the focus now turns to the ongoing investigation and whether those responsible will be brought to justice.

Asam Sahitya Sabha Begins Election Process, Ballot Dispatch to Districts From November 17

KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

GUWAHATI : The Asam Sahitya Sabha has announced the commencement of its ballot distribution process for the organisation's 2027-29 term, with dispatch to district units scheduled to begin on November 17 and conclude on November 19.

The election schedule was announced at a press conference held at the Sabha's office in Guwahati, outlining a three-phase distribution programme covering its branches across Assam.

According to the schedule, the first phase will begin on November 17, with ballot papers being dispatched from Cachar to around 11 to 12 districts, including Bongaigaon. The remaining districts will receive their ballot papers on November 18.

The final phase is scheduled for November 19, when ballot papers will be dispatched from Chandrakanta Handique Bhawan in Jorhat.

The Sabha has also introduced specific arrangements for its inactive branches. Presidents and secretaries of these branches have been instructed to collect ballot papers personally rather than wait for them to be dispatched. Under the election guidelines, at least 50 per cent of the members of each branch committee must remain present on polling day. Completed ballot papers will have to be returned through speed post as part of the prescribed voting procedure.

The organisation has also provided an opportunity for inactive branches to raise objections or complaints regarding the election process. Such grievances can be submitted to the election committee.

With the ballot distribution schedule now in place, the Asam Sahitya Sabha has formally moved into the preparatory phase of its election for the 2027-29 term.

frontation between Mizo and Chakma residents.

Imphal-Silchar Flights to Resume on November 24



KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

SILCHAR: Air connectivity between Imphal and Silchar is set to receive a boost with Alliance Air scheduled to resume flight operations on the route from November 24.

According to an airport official, flights will operate twice a week, every Tuesday and Thursday, under the Centre's Viability Gap Funding (VGF) facility.

The resumption is expected to make travel between Manipur's capital and Silchar, the principal urban centre of Assam's Barak Valley, more convenient for passengers. The service is likely to benefit business travellers, tourists, students and people travelling for urgent purposes.

The route is being supported under the Centre's Regional Connectivity Scheme, UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik), which seeks to improve air connectivity to underserved and unserved airports across the country.

Under the VGF mechanism, airlines receive financial support to operate regional routes that may not initially be commercially viable. The assistance is intended to encourage airlines to maintain services while helping build sustainable regional air connectivity.

Launched in October 2016, the UDAN scheme aims to make air travel more affordable and expand connectivity, particularly to smaller cities and remote regions.

The resumption of the Imphal-Silchar service is expected to strengthen air links between Assam and Manipur and provide passengers with an additional travel option between the two important northeastern cities.

Manipur MLA RK Imo Singh Calls for 'Operation Manipur' to End Violence, Recover Illegal Arms

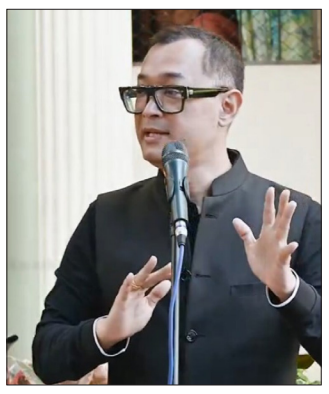
KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

IMPHAL : Amid continuing concerns over violence in Manipur, MLA RK Imo Singh has urged the state government to launch an initiative titled 'Operation Manipur', calling for immediate intervention to restore peace and recover unauthorised firearms from all communities.

Warning against further delays, Singh said the government must act before more innocent lives are lost and stressed that lasting development would remain difficult without peace and stability.

He made the appeal on November 15 while addressing the inauguration of the Young Social Service Union Multipurpose Community Hall at Sagolband Moirang Leirak in Imphal West.

Expressing concern over the prevailing situation, the MLA said the impact of the ongoing conflict was being felt across multiple



sectors of the state, with conditions showing little improvement.

Singh said he had urged both the Governor and the Chief Minister to initiate 'Operation Manipur' as part of efforts to bring the situation under control and prevent further casualties.

He also called for the recovery of all unauthorised firearms from every community, describing the exercise as an important step towards ending violence and restoring normalcy.

"Peace and stability are essential for development. The government must take action before the situation deteriorates further," he said, emphasising the need for an effective response to the continuing crisis.

The MLA also referred to the upcoming Manipur Assembly elections, describing them as crucial for the state's future. He urged voters to carefully assess candidates and elect representatives committed to public welfare rather than personal interests.

Clarifying that he was not campaigning for himself, Singh said his appeal was for people to support candidates capable of working in the larger interests of Manipur.

Highlighting his work in the Sagolband constituency, Singh said efforts had been made to ensure that eligible residents received the benefits of government welfare schemes. Outreach programmes had been organised across the constituency to take public services directly to beneficiaries.

Drawing a parallel with the state government's 'Go to Hills' and 'Go to Village' initiatives, he said similar efforts in Sagolband had helped residents access welfare benefits.

Singh also reiterated his commitment to remaining accessible to constituents, adding that he had no intention of occupying the official accommodation allotted to MLAs. He assured residents that efforts to improve infrastructure and development in Sagolband would continue.

His call for 'Operation Manipur' comes amid continuing demands for effective measures to restore security, recover illegal weapons and create conditions for lasting peace in the state.

Gaurav Gogoi Seeks FIR Against Himanta Biswa Sarma Over Kaziranga Tragedy, Flags Healthcare Gaps



KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

JORHAT: Assam Pradesh Congress Committee president and Jorhat MP Gaurav Gogoi has demanded that an FIR be registered against Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma over the Kaziranga road accident, alleging that inadequate healthcare infrastructure and administrative failures compounded the suffering of the victims.

Gogoi made the demand on Sunday after visiting Jorhat Medical College and Hospital (JMCH), where he met injured passengers undergoing treatment and relatives of those killed in the accident.

Questioning the government's emergency response arrangements, the Congress leader said the incident had exposed serious shortcomings in healthcare facilities near Kaziranga, one of Assam's most prominent tourist destinations.

He alleged that although a hospital was located close to the accident site, it could not adequately serve the injured passengers during the emergency. According to Gogoi, police personnel deployed for the security of an under-construction resort were occupying the hospital premises, raising questions about the availability and functioning of the facility.

Gogoi argued that accountability for the tragedy should not rest solely with the owner of the private traveller involved in the crash. "If the owner of the private traveller can be held responsible and arrested, then the government is equally, or even more, responsible," he said. In a pointed attack on the Chief Minister, Gogoi added that Sarma should also face an FIR over what he described as the extremely poor condition of healthcare facilities.

The Congress president expressed concern over the condition of several injured passengers, some of whom remain critical. He called for strengthening emergency medical services, particularly along major highways and around tourist destinations that attract large numbers of domestic and international visitors. Beyond demanding accountability, Gogoi also called for financial rehabilitation of the affected families. He proposed that the government provide employment to at least one member of every family affected by the accident, including households that lost a relative and those whose family members remain under treatment.

He said such assistance would help families cope with the financial uncertainty arising from the tragedy.

Gogoi also criticised the Chief Minister over what he termed misplaced priorities and questioned the government's sensitivity towards the victims and their families. In a sarcastic political remark, he referred to Sarma's alleged interest in resorts and casinos and suggested that someone else should take charge of governing Assam.

The Congress leader's intervention has brought the spotlight back on two critical questions surrounding the Kaziranga accident: the adequacy of emergency healthcare infrastructure in the region and the accountability of the authorities responsible for ensuring timely medical assistance.

The allegations regarding the use of the hospital premises and the government's response have not been independently established in the information provided.

Assam Plans Spoken Sanskrit Courses at Nalbari University, Targets 3,000 Students



KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

NALBARI: The Assam government is considering short-term courses in spoken Sanskrit at Kumar Bhaskar Varma Sanskrit and Ancient Studies University in Nalbari, with Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma calling for the language to move beyond classrooms and become part of students' everyday communication.

Addressing the university's third convocation on Sunday, Sarma proposed a three-month course to help students develop conversational skills in Sanskrit. He said the language was not difficult to learn and cited a village in Sribhumi where residents reportedly communicate in Sanskrit. "If something similar can be done here, it would be good," the Chief Minister said, stressing that regular interaction in the language could help make it a living part of campus life rather than confining it to academic study. Sarma also outlined the State government's support for strengthening the university through financial assistance, infrastructure development and expansion of academic resources.

The government has recently announced the merger of Krishna Kanta Handique Sanskrit College with the university as a constituent college, a move expected to strengthen its faculty and academic capacity.

The Chief Minister said the university could expand its enrolment to 3,000 students with government assistance. The institution currently has 1,753 students enrolled in the 2026-27 academic session, while another 215 scholars are pursuing research across various disciplines.

"If the principal thinks that with government support the student strength can rise to 3,000, we can do it," Sarma said. Established to promote Indian civilisation and culture and impart knowledge of the Vedas and epics, the university awarded certificates to students who completed their degrees in different disciplines at the convocation. Vice-Chancellor Dr Prahlad Joshi delivered the welcome address, highlighting the financial assistance extended to the institution and the State government's role in its development. Nalbari MLA and Cabinet Minister Jayanta Mallabaruah and District Commissioner Nibedan Das Patowary were also present at the event.

Ropuiliani's Resistance Gets a Permanent Tribute as Mizoram Opens Tribal Freedom Fighters Museum



KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

AIZAWL: Mizoram has added a new landmark to its cultural and historical landscape with the inauguration of a museum dedicated to Ropuiliani, the 19th-century Mizo chieftainess who defied British colonial expansion.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi virtually inaugurated the Ropuiliani Tribal Freedom Fighters Museum in Aizawl on November 15, coinciding with Janjatiya Gaurav Diwas, observed to mark the birth anniversary of tribal freedom fighter Birsa Munda.

The occasion also saw the inauguration of an Eklavya Model Residential School at Zawlnuam in Mamit district and the laying of the foundation stone for another residential school at Pangzawl South in Hnahthial district.

Addressing the national programme virtually from Gadchiroli in Maharashtra, Modi paid tribute to tribal leaders who challenged British rule and highlighted the contribution of indigenous communities to India's freedom struggle and development.

Among those remembered were Khasi resistance leader Tirot Sing, Santhal rebellion figures Sidho and Kanho, Govind Guru, Rani Gaidinliu, Tantya Bhil, Alluri Sitarama Raju and Rani Durgavati.

In Mizoram, Chief Minister Lalduhoma unveiled a statue of Ropuiliani at Kelsih, highlighting the contribution of lesser-known regional figures to the history of resistance against colonial rule.

Describing Ropuiliani's sacrifice as a matter of pride for the Mizo people, the Chief Minister called upon younger generations to learn about their history and protect their cultural identity. He said the museum would serve as an important platform for preserving and showcasing Mizo heritage.Ropuiliani, a prominent Mizo woman leader of the 19th century, is remembered for resisting British efforts to establish colonial control over the region. Her story represents an important chapter in the history of indigenous resistance in Northeast India.

The museum complex has been developed as more than a memorial. It also features an open-air theatre, a Birsa Munda Tribal Pride Garden, a cafeteria and staff quarters.

The initiative seeks to bring the region's lesser-known freedom fighters into wider public recognition while creating a space for future generations to engage with Mizoram's history, traditions and indigenous identity.

Quest!
Albert Einstein didn't speak in full sentences until the age of 9.



NATIONAL

Crucial bills lined up for winter session in December first week

NEW DELHI

The government is likely to convene Parliament's winter session in the first week of December, sources said, even as the monsoon session remains unprorogued and speculation mounts over a renewed push for the delimitation-linked women's reservation bill. The session is expected to be stormy, with the government appearing keen to push through the proposed constitutional amendment amid Opposition protests against the SIR of electoral rolls and demands for Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar's resignation.

The government's decision to keep the monsoon session alive without proroguing it has fuelled speculation about an extended or special sitting to take up the proposed constitutional amendment at a short notice. An extended sitting of the existing session requires at least two days' notice, while convening a fresh session requires at least 14 days' notice.

The proposed legislation seeks to increase the Lok Sabha's strength from 543 to a maximum of 850 through delimitation, paving the way for implementing 33% reservation for women in the Lower House and assemblies ahead of the 2029 general elections. A government functionary said the bill would clear the House with a margin of 15 to 18 votes. While the government failed to muster the required two-thirds majority to clear the bill on April 17, sources said there is a proposal to increase the number of Lok Sabha seats for all states by 50% to address southern states' concerns.

BJP sources say they are confident of support from parties such as the DMK and NCP (SP) beyond the alliance. If the Centre secures the special majority for delimitation, it may seek to take up the simultaneous polls legislation as well, a source said. The Joint Parliamentary Committee examining the proposal is expected to submit its report during the winter session.



Ram temple donation theft: Congress seeks new SIT reporting exclusively to Supreme Court

NEW DELHI



Escalating its attack on the BJP over the Ram temple donation theft case, the Congress on Monday demanded a new, independent SIT reporting directly to the Supreme Court to investigate all aspects of the matter.

The opposition party also said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "silence" on the issue was "deeply troubling" and asserted that those who had betrayed people's faith must be held accountable.

In a post in Hindi on X, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said, "Chanda Chori Aastha Dhokha. As the saying goes, theft never remains hidden; sooner or later, it is bound to be exposed."

New revelations emerging daily regarding the theft of offerings at the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya are exposing the attempts by the Central and Uttar Pradesh governments to shield individuals associated with the BJP, RSS, and VHP, Ramesh claimed.

"The matter is no longer just about theft. The question now arises: were both the public and the Supreme Court misled in the name of an investigation? It is evident that two SITs (Special Investigation Teams) were constituted -- one to pull the wool over the public's eyes, and the other over the Court," Ramesh said.

On July 20, the government informed the Supreme Court that the first team was not conducting an investigation and yet, on August 4, why did the chief minister, while speaking in the Legislative Assembly, cite the preliminary investigation conducted by that very same team, he asked.

On what basis was this done, and was the House provided with incorrect information, or was the Supreme Court misled, Ramesh questioned.

"If no investigation had taken place, then on the basis of which interim report did the Trust grant a 'clean chit' to Champat Rai on July 6?" he said.

"There is another serious question. IG Kiran S was part of the first team and also became the head of the SIT constituted following the Supreme Court's order. If the first team was not conducting an investigation, what was his role within it? Furthermore, if that team – or its officers – submitted a report to the Trust, under what authority and by whose order did they do so? If the first SIT (of which he was a member) submitted a report to the Trust, and the Trust used it to grant a clean chit to its own office-bearers, then what is the purpose of a second report? It can be assumed that its conclusions have already been predetermined," he said.

The Supreme Court's order dated August 17 clearly states that the SIT, working alongside a forensic auditor, was investigating offences related to the functioning of the Trust, he said.

The order also mandates that a status report be submitted to the Court in a sealed cover and in this context, if reports that an SIT report was submitted to the Trust on August 17 are accurate, then under whose orders did this happen, Ramesh asked.

Was the Supreme Court informed, and was its permission obtained, he further asked.

"Was the Supreme Court made aware that the same senior IPS officer was included in both SITs, and why this double standard -- a confidential report for the Court, yet an accessible one for the Trust?" Ramesh said.

How did the charge sheet filed on September 23 come to be limited only to eight employees at the counting centre, he further asked.

"And why, despite the Supreme Court's clear directives, did it fail to address offences related to the Trust's functioning or the roles of the responsible office-bearers?" Ramesh said.

If a report from an investigation -- conducted by the very same officials – was handed over to the Trust, while the report submitted to the Supreme Court was in a sealed cover, it naturally raises serious questions about the impartiality and independence of that investigation, Ramesh said.

Can the nation and the Supreme Court place their trust in such an inquiry, he asked. The Congress party's demand has been clear from the outset that a new, independent SIT should be constituted under the supervision of the Supreme Court, reporting directly to it.

The scope of the investigation must not be confined merely to the counting centre; it should encompass the Trust's operations and the roles of every individual held responsible, Ramesh said.

"We have three demands: The notification regarding the formation of the first SIT – cited by the chief minister in the Legislative Assembly – along with its terms of reference, must be made public. Both the interim and final reports of the first team must be made public. Furthermore, it must be disclosed under what authority these reports were handed over to the Trust," Ramesh said.

He also demanded that a new, independent SIT should be constituted, reporting exclusively and directly to the Supreme Court, with a mandate to investigate all aspects, including the functioning of the Trust.

"The Ram Mandir is a symbol of faith for crores of Indians; it is not the private fiefdom of any Trust or individual. Every single rupee offered in the name of Lord Ram must be accounted for. No one can be permitted to evade accountability in the name of faith," he asserted. "Prime Minister, your silence is deeply troubling to the nation. The truth about the theft of religious offerings must come to light. Those who betrayed people's faith must be held accountable," Ramesh said.

INTERNATIONAL

Pope in Peruvian rainforest demands justice for environmental defenders killed for protecting Amazon

PUCALLPA

Pope Leo XIV on Sunday demanded justice for environmental defenders killed for protecting the Amazon and backed efforts by Indigenous peoples to stop their lands from being ravaged by logging, illegal mining and the "insatiable thirst for domination."

On the penultimate day of his South American odyssey, Leo traveled into the Peruvian Amazon and channeled one of Pope Francis ' core teachings that links care for the most vulnerable with care for God's creation.

"The cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are inseparable," Leo told Indigenous representatives and missionaries gathered along the Ucayali River in the northeastern city of Pucallpa.

He said he came to Pucallpa to support them in their search for justice and peace and referred to what environmental groups estimate have been 57 murders of environmental defenders between 2010-2024.

"The blood of these brothers cries out to God and demands justice," Leo said to applause from the crowd, many of whom were wearing traditional feathered headwear and face markings of the region.

In addition to the decades-long problem of deforestation, illegal gold mining has become an increasingly lucrative business in the Amazon, devastating forests and polluting rivers. Miners use makeshift suction dredges and mercury, a toxic metal, to extract gold.

Raphael Hoetmer, Western Amazon program director at Amazon Watch, said wars and conflicts around the world have driven up the price of gold, increasing demand that in turn is resulting in more extraction from the Amazon.

"It's causing pollution, health issues, and environmental degradation," he said. Illegal mining and coca production also drive deforestation and encroach on Indigenous territories, threatening ancestral lands and exposing communities to violence and organized crime.

Leo addressed the combination of threats in one of his most forceful speeches to date, drawing on his years of experience as a Peruvian bishop and Francis' constant preaching about the environment and the plight of Indigenous groups.

During the encounter and a subsequent Mass in Pucallpa, he demanded a different model of economic development that respects the Earth and the Indigenous who care for it rather than the "irresponsible exploitation" by outside actors.

"Very little has been done — and very slowly at that — while the means to exploit and pollute creation have accelerated," he said at Mass. "In the face of these evils, let us not bury the Lord's gifts, for he gives us the strength to repair and heal the suffering caused by an insatiable thirst for domination."

In Peru, most murders of environmental defenders go unpunished; only a few have resulted in convictions. In 2025, the Peruvian courts upheld a 28-year prison sentence for four timber merchants for the murder of four Indigenous people who opposed logging, following a trial that lasted a decade.

The most recent conviction came in the case of Kichwa leader Quinto Inuma Alvarado, who was murdered in 2023 when he was ambushed by hitmen on a river in the San Martín region, the Amazonian territory he was defending. In August, a court sentenced four people to up to 35 years in prison. The court found that Inuma had filed a complaint against the defendants to prevent deforestation and other crimes such as drug trafficking, and that those convicted plotted his death because he had spoken out against the crimes.

Leo also referred to a notorious rise in sexual violence against Indigenous Awajún and Wampis schoolgirls in Condorcanqui province in the northern Amazon, and blasted the "complicity," "impunity" and "corruption" surrounding them. The Awajún and Wampis Women's Council, or Comuawuy, has recorded 370 cases of sexual violence in the province between January and July alone.

Following the women's persistent demands for justice, specialized prosecutors' offices were created, and the government launched a prevention plan. In January, the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations announced a 32-year prison sentence for a man accused of sexual violence against a 14-year-old girl. Leo said the church was "deeply concerned" by the suffering endured by the victims and called for healing, consolation and reparation. "Such abuse leaves deep wounds, often compounded by complicity and impunity," he said.

"Corruption and arbitrary practices undermine the trust in the basic goodness of others." Leo's last full day in Peru was also his most ambitious, crisscrossing the nation to minister to communities high in the Andes mountains before he arrived in Pucallpa in the rainforest. His first stop was the mountain city of Cusco, the former capital of the Inca empire. There, Leo praised the traditional expression of popular piety, such as processions and religious festivals, as effective ways of forging community and transmitting the faith, especially to young people.

Huge crowds lined Cusco's cobblestoned streets and packed its central Plaza de Armas, an imposing square decorated with a blend of Inca and Spanish colonial buildings. Many people wore the traditional Andean hats and colorful wool vests typical of the region, while others wore plastic ponchos to guard against a drizzling morning rain.

"It is all worth it," said Margarida Salomon, 63, who said she came from Sucre in Bolivia to see the pontiff, spending about $500 to take a bus, sleep in a tent and eat Peruvian food from stalls. "I am still getting to know this pope, but the fact he is here in the Andes means a lot." The visit to Cusco, 3,400 meters (more than 11,000 feet) above sea level, tested Leo's stamina as he continues recovering from lung cancer surgery last month. Leo sat in the chair of his popemobile during part of the ride around Cusco, but it wasn't clear if that was to preserve his energy or to steady himself on the uneven streets. In general, the 71-year-old Leo has seemed unfazed by the toll of the three-nation South American trip, the longest of his pontificate. While others traveling on the papal plane have fallen ill, Leo has shown no sign of weakness or fatigue since the trip began Nov. 6, and in fact seemed energized, especially from the days spent in his former diocese of Chiclayo seeing old friends.

The Rev. Peter Hughes, an 84-year-old Irish priest who has lived in Peru for more than six decades, said Leo's itinerary reflected the church's concern for the poor.

"In Latin American terms, the Indigenous peoples, or what is left of them, are the most important collective representing the truly poor," he said. "That is what makes leaders like Pope Francis and Pope Leo speak the language of the Gospel in very human terms, putting a premium on justice and peace."

Ex-Bangladesh PM Hasina to return home despite 'threat of death'



NEW DELHI

Ousted Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina, sentenced to capital punishment after she was toppled in 2024, told AFP on Monday she would return home in December despite "the threat of death".

Hasina fled to India in August 2024 after a student-led uprising ended her iron-fisted 15-year rule, and has remained in hiding ever since.

She was sentenced to death in absentia last year after a Bangladeshi court convicted her of crimes against humanity over a deadly crackdown on protesters.

"I am fully aware of the risks I face if I return," she told AFP in an email interview.

"But I have made my decision, and no threat of death will keep me away from my own country."

Her insistence on going back comes days after Bangladesh said she would face execution if she returned, adding that she has no further legal recourse after missing the deadline to appeal against her conviction.

The 79-year-old has repeatedly rejected the legitimacy of the trial. Dhaka has sought her extradition from India, which says the request is under legal review. Hasina said the stance was "contradictory".

"For months, they have demanded my return. Yet now that I am taking practical steps to come home, they appear to be more interested in threatening me... than actually allowing it to happen," she said.

"Frankly, I find these contradictory statements from the Bangladeshi authorities rather revealing."

Hasina fled to India in August 2024 after a student-led uprising ended her iron-fisted 15-year rule, and has remained in hiding ever since.

Violent protests erupt in Hasina's hometown as tensions rise over her proposed return to Bangladesh

- 'If death is the price' -

Analysts suggest her promise to return is an attempt to remain politically relevant, retain the loyalty of supporters and keep alive a party that once dominated Bangladesh but whose activities are now banned.

She may also be counting on the possibility that the government would find it difficult to execute the daughter of Bangladesh's founding leader, despite her death sentence.

Hasina denied that her Awami League party was involved in a recent spate of petrol bomb attacks in Bangladesh, as authorities have alleged.

She said she had no intention of seeking India's assistance to arrange her return.

"Why would I ask another country to extradite me, when I have already decided to return voluntarily?" she said.

"Extradition is a matter between two sovereign states. India will make its own decisions according to its laws, policies and national interests," she said.

Hasina also faces a string of other charges, including corruption allegations.

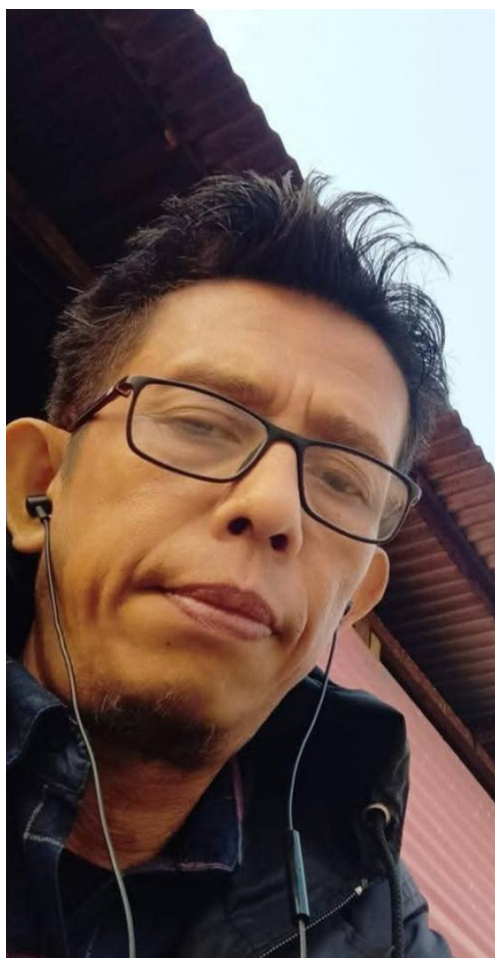
"More than 600 false cases have been filed against me," she said.

Her lawyers had applied for a Bangladeshi passport and national identity card through the country's high commission in New Delhi, she said. "I am already making preparations to return to Bangladesh in December," she said.

"I do not wish to die. I want to live and continue serving my country. But if death is the price I must pay for returning home, I am prepared to face it."

Who Are the Common People, and Who Really Speaks for Them?

An observation on public opinion, representation and the convenience of speaking on behalf of others



MAISNAMPUSHPAKANTALUWANG

The phrase "common people" has increasingly become a familiar expression in public discussions, particularly among individuals who are widely recognised, influential or considered knowledgeable in society. It is frequently invoked to support arguments, validate personal interpretations and reinforce opinions on various issues affecting the public.

However, something about this repeated use of the phrase has increasingly made me question its actual meaning and credibility. Whenever someone speaks about the common people, I find myself asking a few fundamental questions.

Are these individuals genuinely making an effort to collect opinions, observations, concerns, suggestions and ideas from people across different sections of society? Are they engaging with people from different backgrounds, communities, professions, age groups and circumstances to understand what they actually think?

Or are they relying on a relatively small and familiar circle of individuals whose opinions, perspectives and interests happen to correspond with their own?

If the latter is the case, how can the opinions of a selected few be presented as the collective thinking of the common people?

This is not an attempt to discredit anyone's knowledge, experience, intellectual capacity or right to express an opinion. Everyone has that right. However, there is a significant difference between expressing one's personal understanding of an issue and claiming, directly or indirectly, that such an understanding represents the wider public.

I have repeatedly witnessed discussions, meetings, public conversations and gatherings organised around various subjects and issues. These platforms often bring together individuals who share their observations, interpretations and conclusions.

Such engagements can certainly contribute to public awareness and meaningful debate.Nevertheless, an important question remains: How representative are these discussions of the people whose interests they claim to address?

Have the voices of those who disagree been heard? Have the concerns of people outside those familiar circles been considered? Have the opinions of ordinary individuals, particularly those who may not have access to influential platforms, been given equal consideration?



Or are we gradually creating an environment where a few familiar voices become the accepted interpreters of what everyone else supposedly thinks?

There is also a danger in repeatedly using the phrase "common people" without establishing whose opinions are being represented, how those opinions were gathered and whether they genuinely reflect the wider public's thinking.Public opinion cannot simply be assumed, manufactured or selectively interpreted to strengthen an existing argument. It requires genuine engagement, openness to disagreement and a willingness to listen beyond one's immediate circle.

Being well-known does not automatically make someone a representative of the public. Being intellectually recognised does not necessarily mean having a complete understanding of people's everyday realities. Similarly, conducting discussions and participating in numerous meetings do not, by themselves, establish that the voices of the wider population have been adequately represented. Speaking about the common people and genuinely listening to the common people are two entirely different responsibilities.

Perhaps it is time we became more critical, not necessarily of those who express opinions, but of the manner in which those opinions are presented as collective public sentiment.

The common people are not a convenient reference point to validate someone's personal thinking.

They are individuals with different experiences, expectations, concerns, disagreements and aspirations. Their voices deserve to be heard on their own terms, not selectively interpreted to fit a predetermined narrative.Ultimately, the question is not simply who speaks about the common people. The more important question is:

Who has genuinely listened to them, and on what basis do they claim to speak for them?

MaisnamPushpakantaLuwang
An Advocate for the unheard

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