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# Kolkata-Sairang Express Derails Near Guwahati, Locomotive and Five Coaches Overturn

## Digaru Train Derailment: Eight Injured Passengers Discharged, NFR Opens Helplines

**GUWAHATI**

Eight passengers sustained minor injuries after the Kolkata-Sairang Express derailed near Digaru railway station in Assam early Wednesday. All the injured passengers were discharged from Sonapur District Hospital after receiving primary treatment, while railway authorities activated helplines at several stations to assist passengers and their families.

The derailment involved five coaches and the locomotive of Train No. 13125. The incident occurred around 6.54 am, when the train was being received at Digaru station, about 44 km from Guwahati, to allow the Jan Shatabdi Express to pass.

According to the Chief Public Relations Officer of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR), the Kolkata-Sairang Express was scheduled to halt at Digaru for the passage of the Jan Shatabdi Express but could not stop



in time."The train couldn't stop in time and five coaches derailed. Luckily, there was no casualty or major injury as the train speed was slow at that time," the CPRO said.

The eight injured passengers were identified as Rambual Saiha Mizo (35), Nitish Kumar Roy (29) and Akshay Chakraborty (33), all from Hojai; Jimi Bermon (28) of Ampara in Kokrajhar district; and Kohinur Mandal (7), Montaj Begum (35), Nujahan Bibi (30) and Kolim Uddin (40), all from Bogibari in Bilasipara.No fatalities or serious injuries were reported. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said all passengers were safe and that the state government was coordinating with the Railway Ministry. He added that stranded passengers had been provided with basic necessities and alternative train arrangements had been made for their onward journeys.

Following the derailment, train movement on both tracks at Digaru was temporarily suspended, leaving several trains stranded at different locations.

Train No. 15769, the Alipurduar Junction-Mariani Junction Intercity Express, was short-terminated at Kamakhya. Two services, Train Nos. 75727 and 75728, operating between Guwahati and Haibargaon, were cancelled.Railway authorities restored movement on the unaffected track around 11 am, nearly four hours after the incident. Trains held up at different locations were then allowed to resume their journeys gradually, while clearance and restoration work continued on the affected track.

NFR activates helplines

Northeast Frontier Railway opened helpline services at several stations to provide information and assistance to passengers and their relatives.

Katihar: 9002041806, 9002041952, 9771441956
Kishanganj: 06456226794, 06456226795
New Jalpaiguri: 6287699880
Guwahati: 03612731621, 2731622, 2731623
Lumding: 03674263858, 265958, 263831
Badarpur: 03843269546, 269548, 268424, 269547
Silchar: 03842245414, 245419, 245423

**PERSPECTIVE**

**You will never truly understand something until it actually happens to you.**

## Hijack Threat Note Found on Air India Flight, Aircraft Shifted to Isolation Bay in Kolkata

**KOLKATA**



A hijack threat note found inside the lavatory of an Air India flight bound for Mumbai triggered a security alert at Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport on Wednesday, prompting authorities to move the aircraft to an isolation bay for detailed inspection.The note, which warned that the aircraft would be hijacked at 11.10 am, was discovered shortly before the flight's scheduled departure at 10.20 am, Kolkata airport director Vikram Singh said.All 105 passengers who had boarded the aircraft were deboarded, following which the plane was moved to the isolation bay as a precautionary measure. Security agencies immediately activated the prescribed protocols and began necessary checks.

In a statement, the airport said the cabin crew found the note at 10.37 am inside the lavatory of Air India flight AI 2772, an Airbus A320 operating on the Kolkata-Mumbai route. The aircraft bears registration number VT-TNH.

"Necessary checks are currently underway by the concerned agencies as per established protocols," the airport statement said.

The aircraft was being thoroughly inspected as part of the security response. Air India had not issued an official statement on the incident at the time of reporting.

**WHO SAID WHAT**



**Mobility has a huge role in transforming lives!**

**We will work to transform India into a global mobility hub.**

**~ Piyush Goyal, Union Minister of Commerce & Industry**

# Hailstorm Covers Shillong in White



**SHILLONG**

Meghalaya's capital Shillong witnessed a dramatic transformation on Wednesday as a spell of heavy rainfall accompanied by a hailstorm covered several parts of the city in white, creating scenes reminiscent of snowfall in Kashmir.

The hailstorm struck between around 11 am and noon, leaving roads, footpaths, open spaces and vehicle rooftops blanketed with layers of white hailstones.

The unusual weather phenomenon caught residents and tourists by surprise, with many stepping out to witness the spectacle and capture the scenes on their mobile phones.

The weather began changing during the morning as dark clouds gathered over the city, followed by heavy rainfall. Soon, hailstones began falling across several localities, gradually covering exposed surfaces with a white layer. In some areas, the accumulation was substantial enough to make roadsides and open spaces appear as though they had received a fresh spell of snowfall.

For a brief period, parts of Shillong presented a striking winter-like landscape, with white patches contrasting against the city's familiar green hills and built-up surroundings. The sight brought back memories of snow-covered destinations in northern India, particularly Kashmir, although the white covering in Shillong was caused by hailstones rather than snowfall.

The spell of rain and hailstorm continued for nearly an hour, bringing down temperatures and introducing a noticeable chill into the atmosphere. The sudden change in weather also added to the city's characteristic cool-weather setting.

Several residents and visitors were seen recording videos and photographs of the unusual scene. The white-covered roads and vehicle rooftops quickly became a talking point, as Shillong experienced a rare weather spectacle in the middle of November.Known for its rolling hills, picturesque landscapes and lush greenery, Shillong is no stranger to sudden weather changes. However, Wednesday's hailstorm gave the city an unusual appearance, briefly transforming familiar streets and neighbourhoods into a snow-like setting.

Although the spectacle did not last long, it offered residents and tourists a memorable glimpse of a Kashmir-like winter landscape in the heart of Meghalaya.

## Manipur fish fair records sales worth over Rs.80 crore, crosses 2 lakh kg

**IMPHAL**

Indigenous and other varieties of fish worth more than ?80 crore, weighing over 2 lakh kg, were sold at Manipur's 47th Annual Fish Fair-cum-Fish Crop Competition 2026, held at Hapta Kangjeibung on Tuesday.

Organised by the state Fisheries Department, the one-day fair was held from 8 am to 4 pm on the eve of Ningol Chakkouba. The event brought together local fish farmers from eight districts, with 150 stalls showcasing indigenous and popular fish varieties.

Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh inaugurated the fair in the presence of Deputy Chief Minister Losii Dikho and MLA H Dingo Singh. Calling for collective efforts, the Chief Minister stressed the need to make Manipur self-reliant in fish production.

Officials said the fair was aimed at strengthening local fish production and reducing the state's dependence on imports. Manipur spends an estimated ?200 crore to ?300 crore annually on fish imports. They also pointed out that around 95 per cent of the state's population identifies as non-vegetarian.

Among the varieties displayed and sold at the fair were Meitei Sareng, Pengba, Khabak, Ngaton, Rohu and Common Carp. The Fisheries Department introduced a prescribed price list based on weight categories to ensure that consumers could buy fish at regulated rates.

Meitei Sareng was priced between ?1,050 and ?1,450 per kg, depending on its weight, while Ngakra was fixed at ?795 per kg. Pengba and Khabak were priced between ?445 and ?545 per kg, and Ngaton was available at ?445 per kg.



## Two Abducted Kuki Youths Found Murdered in Manipur; NIA Probe Proposal Nears Final Stage




**IMPHAL**

Manipur Police has confirmed that two Kuki youths who were allegedly abducted from Senapati district were murdered, with their bodies subsequently recovered from a forested area along the Senapati-Paibung Road. The state government's proposal to hand over the investigation to the National Investigation Agency (NIA) is at an advanced stage, police said.

The victims, Paoginlal Hangsing and Tinginlun Chongloi, were residents of Taphou Kuki village in Senapati district. Addressing the media on November 10, ADGP (Law and Order) Lhari Dorjee Lhatoo said the two men were last seen near Maranmai village before they went missing.

Following the incident, police registered an FIR, examined witnesses and questioned several people. Intensive search operations were subsequently launched under the supervision of senior officers, involving joint teams of Manipur Police, CRPF, CoBRA, BSF, Assam Rifles and the Army.

"The bodies of the two deceased were recovered from a forested area along Senapati-Paibung Road, approximately 14 kilometres east of National Highway 2," Lhatoo said.

He said search and investigation operations were continuing on a daily basis to identify and apprehend those responsible for the killings.

According to the ADGP, intelligence inputs, physical evidence and detailed technical analysis have helped investigators identify individuals suspected to be involved in the crime.

"The culprits will definitely be caught," he said.

Lhatoo further stated that the Manipur government's proposal to transfer the case to the NIA had reached an advanced stage. The necessary orders are awaited before the central agency formally takes over the investigation.

# SMC Oath Ceremony Row: Dipayan Chakraborty Questions Exclusion of Former MLAs



**SILCHAR**

Former Silchar MLA Dipayan Chakraborty has criticised the decision to exclude former legislators from the dais during the oath-taking ceremony of the first Silchar Municipal Corporation (SMC), describing the move as a reflection of a "narrow-minded mentality".

In a Facebook post, Chakraborty said the decision would remain recorded in history. He expressed disappointment, arguing that providing seats to the three former legislators - former Silchar MLAs Dilip Paul and Dipayan Chakraborty, and former Udharbond MLA Mihir Kanti Shome - would have sent a positive message.

He stressed that involving everyone was essential for the growth and development of a political party.

Chakraborty also defended the development initiatives undertaken by the previous municipality, claiming that several major projects had been completed despite the absence of an elected board for years. He maintained that the municipality had witnessed significant development during this period, although some tasks remained unfinished.

He expressed confidence that the newly elected civic body would take forward the pending work.

Highlighting what he described as inadequate recognition of the previous municipality's achievements, Chakraborty cited improvements at the Meherpur dumping ground, which had remained a longstanding civic concern.

According to him, measures had been taken to improve transportation facilities to the dumping ground, helping reduce garbage accumulation. However, he claimed that the waste accumulation problem had once again returned to its earlier condition.

In August 2025, reports indicated that nearly two lakh metric tonnes of legacy waste had accumulated at the Meherpur dumping ground over seven decades. A Rs 22-crore waste remediation and recovery project was subsequently undertaken, with around 20 per cent of the accumulated waste reportedly processed at the time.

Chakraborty maintained that the previous municipality had undertaken several significant development initiatives, but their contributions had not received adequate recognition. He also expressed willingness to participate in an open discussion or public debate on the development work carried out during the previous administration.

The first Silchar Municipal Corporation oath-taking ceremony was held at Rajiv Bhavan on November 5, 2026, with all 42 newly elected councillors taking their oaths.

## Assam Cabinet Approves Rs 200 Crore for Ayushman Asom, Raises Samagra Shiksha Death Benefit to Rs 7.5 Lakh

**GUWAHATI**

The Assam Cabinet approved a series of welfare measures, including an allocation of Rs 200 crore for the Mukhyamantri Ayushman Asom Yojana, an increase in the one-time financial assistance for Samagra Shiksha employees who die in service from Rs 5 lakh to Rs 7.5 lakh, and Rs 108.81 crore to reimburse colleges for admission fee waivers.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced the decisions following the Cabinet meeting, stating that the Rs 200-crore allocation would ensure the continuation of healthcare coverage under the Mukhyamantri Ayushman Asom Yojana, which caters to more than 40 lakh families in the state.Explaining the funding arrangement, Sarma said the Centre provides financial assistance under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana for around 30 lakh families, while the state government bears the expenditure for the remaining beneficiaries.

"Under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, we get funds for 30 lakh families, while for the remaining 40 lakh or so families, the state government bears the cost. The Assam Cabinet today, thus, allocated its share of Rs 200 crore," the Chief Minister said.

In another significant decision, the Cabinet approved an enhancement of the one-time ex-gratia assistance for officials, employees and teachers associated with Samagra Shiksha who die while in service. The amount has been increased from Rs 5 lakh to Rs 7.5 lakh.Sarma said the enhancement had been announced in the state budget and received formal Cabinet approval on Tuesday. The financial assistance will cover deaths due to various reasons, including illness.The Cabinet also sanctioned Rs 108.81 crore for the 2026-27 academic year to reimburse colleges for admission fees waived under the government's Pragyan Bharati Scheme.

According to the Chief Minister, the allocation is expected to benefit more than 1.5 lakh first-year undergraduate students belonging to eligible income groups. The government reimburses colleges for the admission fees waived for students under the scheme.

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# DIGITAL DECEPTION

The digital world has made it easier than ever to cross geographical boundaries, but it has also created new opportunities to distort reality. Reports that Chinese vloggers and livestreamers have been filming in impoverished neighbourhoods of Dhaka and presenting them as parts of New Delhi raise serious questions about the deliberate manipulation of online content and its potential consequences for a country's international image.

The issue goes beyond misleading captions or inaccurate geographical references. According to reports, several Chinese content creators have been broadcasting from localities such as Tekpara and Uttara in Dhaka, while describing the surroundings as Indian neighbourhoods. Their commentary allegedly focuses on poverty, poor sanitation, unhygienic living conditions and local food habits, creating an impression that these conditions are representative of urban India.

One reported incident on November 1 involved a Chinese livestreamer identified as Mianmian, who was broadcasting from beside a canal in Sector 12 of Uttara. She reportedly introduced the location as New Delhi and made disparaging remarks about the neighbourhood. In another instance, a Chinese content creator allegedly made an offensive remark about tea consumed by residents of Tekpara, claiming that it was prepared using cow urine.

If these reports are accurate, the incidents represent more than irresponsible content creation. They point to the deliberate use of geographical misrepresentation to shape perceptions among audiences who may have little opportunity to verify what they are watching.

What makes the reports particularly concerning is the alleged continuity of the activity. Chinese nationals have reportedly been filming in economically disadvantaged areas of Dhaka since May 2026. Around 150 individuals are said to have been involved in filming and livestreaming in parts of the city, with some reportedly operating from early morning until late at night.

There are also indications of local commercial involvement. A Bangladeshi guide, Ritu Akhter, reportedly disclosed that she received between Tk 700 and Tk 800 a day for assisting the visitors. Other local women were allegedly engaged in similar activities. Such accounts suggest that the filming may have developed into a paid arrangement involving local assistance, audience engagement and possibly product promotion.

The use of platforms such as Douyin and WeChat, which have substantial audiences in China, adds another dimension. Content circulated within relatively closed or language-specific digital ecosystems can be difficult for outsiders to monitor, even when it has implications for the international reputation of another country.

However, the scale, coordination and underlying purpose of the activity need to be established through credible investigation. Repeated incidents and similar patterns may raise legitimate suspicions, but they do not, by themselves, establish that the content is part of an organised state-sponsored campaign.

There is an important distinction between documenting poverty and manufacturing a false narrative around it. No country is free from economic inequality, inadequate housing or sanitation problems. India, like other developing nations, has its share of urban challenges. These realities must be acknowledged rather than concealed.

But presenting one country's neighbourhoods as belonging to another, while attaching derogatory commentary to the footage, is a fundamentally different matter. It misleads viewers and undermines the credibility of digital journalism and independent content creation.

The people living in these neighbourhoods are also entitled to dignity and privacy. Their economic circumstances should not become a convenient backdrop for sensational entertainment or online commercial activity. Filming vulnerable communities without meaningful consent, particularly when their surroundings are deliberately misrepresented, raises ethical questions that deserve attention.

The episode also exposes the limitations of existing mechanisms to counter online misinformation. Social media platforms have developed increasingly sophisticated systems to identify manipulated content, but misleading geographical claims and contextual distortions remain difficult to detect. A video may be genuine in its visual content and still be profoundly deceptive in the way it is presented.

Platforms must therefore strengthen mechanisms for reporting and reviewing content that deliberately misidentifies locations or targets communities through fabricated narratives. Greater transparency about the origin and context of viral footage would also help audiences distinguish documentation from manipulation.

India, meanwhile, should respond through evidence-based monitoring, timely public communication and diplomatic engagement where necessary. Official agencies and Indian diplomatic missions should seek to establish the facts, preserve relevant digital evidence and raise the matter with the appropriate Bangladeshi authorities and platform operators if the allegations are substantiated.

At the same time, the response must avoid turning an allegation against particular content creators into hostility towards Chinese citizens or any wider community. Accountability should be based on evidence and individual responsibility.

The larger lesson is that a country's international image can no longer be shaped exclusively through diplomacy, traditional media or official statements. Millions of viewers now form impressions through short videos, livestreams and influencer-generated content. In this environment, a misleading broadcast can travel across borders and acquire credibility simply through repetition.

India cannot afford to ignore such attempts at digital misrepresentation. But neither can it respond by dismissing every unflattering portrayal as hostile propaganda. The most effective defence is transparency, credible information and the ability to expose falsehoods with verifiable evidence.

Poverty is not India's exclusive identity, just as it is not Bangladesh's. Nor should the struggles of ordinary people in either country be exploited to manufacture national stereotypes. If neighbourhoods in Dhaka are indeed being passed off as New Delhi to mislead audiences, the matter deserves investigation and accountability.

In the digital age, the battle is not merely over images but over the truth behind them. And when geography itself becomes a tool of deception, verifying what the camera shows-and what the narrator claims-becomes an essential public responsibility.

"It is foolish to make predictions, especially about human beings."

~ Agatha Christie

# Trump Takes a Political Hit, India Faces a Delicate Diplomatic Balancing Act

## From Manipur to trade, tariffs and oil, Washington's changing political landscape presents both opportunities and challenges for New Delhi



SHIVAJI SARKAR

A political shift is becoming increasingly evident in the United States. The Democratic Party's strong performance in the Senate and House of Representatives midterm elections, being described as a 'blue wave' or 'Bluenami', has opened the door to a significant change in Washington's political equations. The results amount to a clear electoral message. Democrats made gains even in constituencies where defeating Republican candidates, particularly those backed by President Donald Trump, had once appeared almost impossible.

In the United States, the composition of Congress is determined through ballots. In India, meanwhile, questions surrounding electronic voting machines and uncertainties over the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls have kept electoral transparency under public scrutiny. Setting aside these institutional differences, however, the two countries share several similarities in the political and economic concerns confronting ordinary voters.

In the United States, rising sandwich prices have become a symbol of household anxiety. In India, it is the increasing cost of pav bhaji, snacks and everyday refreshments. Prices of breakfast and street food have reportedly risen by as much as 40 per cent. American households, too, are struggling with higher food prices and the rising cost of essential commodities. For ordinary citizens, the cost of living often matters more than political rhetoric. When prices rise beyond their means, people are forced either to pay more for basic necessities or to compromise on consumption.

India may take some satisfaction from the fact that 28 people of Indian origin have entered the US Congress. But will their presence alter American foreign policy or Washington's approach towards New Delhi? Probably not to any substantial extent. Whatever their ancestry, they are American citizens, and their primary responsibility remains to the interests of the United States, irrespective of whether Trump or another political leader occupies the White House.

The re-election of Indian-origin lawmakers such as Ami Bera, Ro Khanna, Pramila Jayapal and Suhas Subramanyam strengthens the political representation of the Indian-American community in Washington. Its significance for India, however, is largely symbolic. At the same time, the electoral gains made by Black, Latino and Indigenous candidates reflect the continuing expansion of political representation and inclusiveness in American society.

Those expecting a more accommodating American approach towards India, or an immediate easing of restrictions on Russian oil supplies, may have to temper their expectations. Reversing the policies pursued under Trump's highly personalised and unpredictable style of governance will not be easy. India may have to renegotiate several arrangements under the emerging political circumstances. Much will depend on New Delhi's diplomatic skills and its ability to convert political changes in Washington into tangible national gains.

What relief has the political shift brought?

The United States has traditionally sought to maintain a relatively affordable standard of living for its citizens, with wages broadly aligned with income levels and access to goods and services at manageable costs. That arrangement, despite its limitations, has come under pressure during Trump's confrontational and unpredictable presidency.

Wars, rising fuel prices and controversial American interventions abroad, including alleged attempts to seize control of petroleum and mineral resources in different regions, have added to economic uncertainty. The controversy surrounding Venezuela and the broader struggle for control over strategic resources have further complicated the international environment.

The midterm results suggest that a substantial section of the American electorate is dissatisfied with these policies. Public opinion has once again demonstrated its ability to influence political power. Indian consumers, too, may find some relief if international energy prices soften. Lower crude oil prices can benefit both the American and Indian economies by reducing pressure on fuel costs and inflation.

The American electoral outcome also coincided with a recovery in Indian stock markets, which had been experiencing sustained weakness. Indian equities recorded gains over six consecutive trading sessions. However, it remains uncertain whether this recovery will prove durable or merely represent a temporary market reaction.

Meanwhile, Union Minister for Panchayati Raj, Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying Rajiv Ranjan Singh, popularly known as Lalan Singh, has announced a proposal to link voter identity cards (EPIC) with biometric authentication for identifying beneficiaries and facilitating payments under welfare schemes, instead of relying exclusively on the Aadhaar-based system.

The proposal raises important questions at a time when millions of names are reportedly being removed from electoral rolls. If electoral registration becomes closely linked to access to welfare benefits, people excluded from voter lists could face additional difficulties in accessing government assistance. The larger concern is whether exclusion from the electoral process could indirectly translate into exclusion from essential entitlements.

Such developments could have consequences beyond electoral administration. They may affect economic security and deepen social discontent. The sustainability of the recent stock market rally therefore remains uncertain. There is no straightforward answer. Indeed, some of the economic and social problems that American voters are attempting to address could assume more serious proportions in India.

India's corporate sector is also passing through a period of uncertainty. The internal management dispute within the Tata Group appears to be acquiring wider political dimensions, potentially carrying significant long-term implications. The proposed sale of IDBI Bank is another issue attracting attention. Turbulence within major institutions can have consequences for investor confidence and the broader economy.

The real test of the pre-Diwali market recovery will come after the festival. Sustained gains in share prices and continued foreign portfolio investment will be necessary before the recent rally can be considered a sign of lasting economic confidence.

India certainly expects a more constructive relationship with the United States, particularly on tariffs, technology transfers and trade conditions. American industries and institutions have benefited considerably from Indian talent. Washington is also expected to address visa-related concerns affecting nearly three lakh Indian workers and students.

However, it would be premature to assume that Democrats will completely reverse existing immigration policies. Some improvement may be possible, but immigration is likely to remain a politically sensitive issue in the United States.

The legislative scrutiny proposed by Democrats could also delay the India-US Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Differences over labour rights, environmental standards and regulatory conditions may complicate negotiations. Democratic control of both chambers of Congress could strengthen legislative oversight of executive decisions. This may create opportunities for a more structured and transparent dialogue between New Delhi and Washington. A delayed agreement, after all, is preferable to an agreement that fails to materialise altogether. For now, however, the United States remains absorbed in domestic political contestation, and India will have to wait and negotiate carefully.

The horrors of war and genocide

The devastation in Gaza has also emerged as a major factor influencing American public opinion. The destruction of hospitals and schools, children buried under rubble, the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, attacks on Lebanon and confrontations involving Houthi forces have shaken international opinion. Trump's reported demand for the live broadcast of an execution further intensified concerns about his political judgement and approach to power.

The election results reflected public unease with militarism and the normalisation of violence. American society has a history of challenging the excesses of its government. During the Vietnam War, public opposition played a significant role in forcing a reassessment of the military campaign, including the use of devastating weapons such as napalm.

India's people, too, are not necessarily supporters of aggressive nationalism. The economic, social and military costs of extreme nationalism can be enormous. Yet appeals to patriotism and national security sometimes make citizens reluctant to question government policies, even when those policies demand greater public scrutiny.

Manipur continues to bear the consequences of prolonged violence. Since May 3, 2023, the state has witnessed ethnic clashes, killings and displacement. Citizens have repeatedly protested against the continuing crisis, but their voices have not received the attention they deserve. The violence has severely affected the economy, social relations and everyday life in Manipur and other parts of the Northeast. Yet the response of the administrative machinery has often appeared inadequate.

There has also been limited public mobilisation around the need for better relations with neighbouring countries. Efforts to strengthen cooperation among South Asian nations and revitalise regional platforms such as SAARC have remained largely stalled. At the same time, American citizens can also be criticised for their silence over military actions against Venezuela. The civilisational and humanitarian costs of such selective responses to violence are considerable.

At the 18th SAARC Summit in Kathmandu in November 2014, member states had expressed an ambition to move towards an integrated South Asian Economic Union. However, growing political tensions between India and Pakistan, alongside recurring cross-border security concerns, eventually brought the initiative to a standstill. More than a decade later, the proposed regional economic framework remains largely unrealised.

Hopes remain, but the risks are real

A divided government in Washington may constrain President Trump's domestic agenda, but the consequences for India could be mixed.

The political developments in the United States coincided with a strengthening of the Indian rupee, which opened at Rs 94.35 against the US dollar, its highest level in two weeks. Softer crude oil prices provided support to the currency. At the same time, uncertainty surrounding American technology stocks reportedly encouraged investors to move more than $2 billion into Indian equities.

From West Asia and the Arab world to Iran, Ukraine and Europe, geopolitical equations are changing rapidly. India's central challenge is to safeguard its energy security, commercial interests and strategic autonomy amid these shifting global power dynamics.

A Democratic victory does not guarantee an early India-US trade agreement, nor does it automatically promise relief from American pressure over India's purchase of Russian oil. Significant risks remain. India's energy imports, including those from Russia, continue to face geopolitical and economic pressure.

New Delhi must therefore pursue an independent course based on its national interests. It needs to engage Washington constructively without compromising its strategic autonomy or allowing external political developments to dictate its economic

## DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

**The Hindus who stayed behind in Bangladesh during the partition had fought for an independent undivided India, not for an independent Pakistan. Yet today, those are the very Hindus being oppressed and humiliated there.**
**Incidents like temple vandalism, atrocities against women, forced conversions, forced marriages, rape, desecration of deity idols and even obscene gestures standing in front of Durga Puja pandals are taking place in Bangladesh. All such incidents must be stopped immediately!**
**~ Samik Bhattacharya, State President, BJP, West Bengal**



# NIA drops UAPA charges against seven foreigners in Mizoram-Manipur border case



**IMPHAL**

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has dropped anti-terror provisions under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) against seven foreign nationals arrested in a case involving alleged smuggling of drone warfare equipment through the Mizoram-Manipur border region.

American filmmaker-turned-military trainer Matthew VanDyke and six Ukrainian nationals were released from New Delhi's Tihar Jail on Monday after the agency omitted the UAPA charges from its final chargesheet. The prosecution will now pursue alleged immigration and visa violations, paving the way for a Delhi court to grant them default bail.

The group had been in custody since March. Investigators had alleged that the accused used border areas in Mizoram and Manipur to smuggle drone warfare technology, assembly equipment and communication jammers during the ethnic conflict in the region.

Indian investigators had also alleged that the group travelled to Myanmar to provide tactical combat training to ethnic insurgent organisations, including the Chin National Front and the Kachin Independence Army.

Following his return to the United States, VanDyke alleged that his six-month imprisonment was part of a geopolitical operation involving Russian interests linked to the war in Ukraine. He also claimed that external interference played a role in the arrests of the seven foreign nationals and said he would disclose further details.

The case had also drawn attention to the accused's prison conditions. Defence lawyers told a Delhi court that VanDyke had suffered significant weight loss and gastrointestinal problems because he could not tolerate the food served in prison.

The defence's request for permission to arrange private cooking facilities inside the jail was, however, unsuccessful.

According to the report, VanDyke's travel clearance has been extended until late February 2027.

## Byrnihat Records AQI of 80 After Anti-Pollution Drive, Says Meghalaya Pollution Board



**SHILLONG**

Air quality in Byrnihat, one of the Northeast's major industrial hubs, has shown improvement, with the Air Quality Index (AQI) recorded at 80, falling in the moderate category, Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board Chairman R Nainamalai said on Wednesday.

Attributing the improvement to coordinated anti-pollution measures, Nainamalai said the authorities had issued directions to industries and concerned departments to strengthen pollution control mechanisms and address environmental concerns in the industrial belt.

"We have given directions to the authorities concerned to take action to mitigate the concerns related to pollution. We insisted that polluting industries use proper pollution control devices. We have given directions to comply," he said.

He added that initiatives were also being undertaken under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), with funds allocated to the concerned departments to tackle different sources of pollution, including road dust.

The latest AQI reading follows joint efforts by various authorities to improve air quality in Byrnihat, an industrial area that has faced concerns over pollution from industrial activities.

Officials, however, emphasised that sustained monitoring and strict compliance with pollution-control norms by industries would be essential to maintain the improvement.

## Guwahati records Rs.3.9 crore liquor sales over two days during Diwali



**GUWAHATI**

Liquor sales worth approximately ?3.9 crore were recorded in Guwahati over two days during the Diwali festivities, according to data from the Assam Excise Department.

The sales were registered on November 8 and 9, reflecting substantial liquor purchases across the city during the festive period.

Department figures indicate that sales on November 7 were higher than those recorded on November 8. However, the exact amount for November 7 was not immediately available.

The latest figures are lower than the corresponding Diwali-period sales reported in previous years. Guwahati recorded liquor sales worth ?6.20 crore in 2023 and ?4.80 crore in 2024.

No comparable figures for 2025 are available, making a year-on-year comparison with the latest festive period difficult.

The data cover liquor sales across Guwahati on the specified dates, as reported by the Excise Department.

## Nagaland Steps Up Hornbill Festival 2026 Preparations, Rio Puts Tourist Safety in Focus

**KOHIMA**

Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio on Tuesday reviewed preparations for the Hornbill Festival 2026, directing departments to prioritise tourist safety, infrastructure development, sanitation and the promotion of locally manufactured products.

Rio chaired a meeting of the High-Powered Committee (HPC) and senior officials from various departments at his Residential Complex in Kohima to assess arrangements for the annual cultural festival.

The meeting reviewed several key issues, including the Protected Area Permit (PAP) requirements, selection of the chief guest for the inaugural programme and logistical preparations at the Naga Heritage Village in Kisama, the main festival venue.

Commissioner and Secretary of Tourism Kovi Meyase briefed the committee on preparations at Kisama. Discussions focused on waste management, hygienic food stalls and awareness programmes for stall operators to maintain cleanliness throughout the festival.



The proposed barbecue zone at the amphitheatre also came up for discussion. The committee emphasised the promotion of locally manufactured products, directing that coffee, tea and other refreshments served at the venue should preferably be sourced from within Nagaland.

The Public Health Engineering Department informed the meeting that restoration work on water supply pipelines was underway. The Power Department also presented an update on the installation of solar lighting at the festival venue.

Preparations for the traditional stone-pulling ceremony, one of the festival's major attractions, were also reviewed.

Emphasising visitor safety and convenience, Rio directed the concerned departments to ensure adequate signboards, zebra crossings and other essential facilities at Kisama and tourist destinations across the state.

The Chief Minister also highlighted the state-wide mass social work scheduled for November 13 and called for participation from all sections of society. Departments concerned were asked to ensure wide publicity for the initiative.

The meeting was attended by Cabinet members, senior government officials and representatives of various departments.

The Hornbill Festival, Nagaland's flagship cultural event, brings together the state's indigenous communities to showcase their traditions, music, crafts, heritage and cultural practices. The annual festival attracts visitors from across India and abroad.

## Tripura CM Manik Saha Calls for BJP-TIPRA Motha-IPFT Unity, Signals New Political Understanding

**AGARTALA**

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha has called for closer political coordination among the BJP, TIPRA Motha and the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT), saying the three parties should work together to accelerate development and improve the welfare of people across the state.

Speaking on Monday about relations between the state government and the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC), Saha said there were no fundamental differences between the two institutions and stressed the need for coordinated efforts, particularly on issues concerning tribal communities.

"We are together, and we want the Government of Tripura and TTAADC to work jointly for the welfare of the poor and the development of all people," the Chief Minister said.

He maintained that disagreements should be addressed through discussions rather than confrontation, adding that every problem could be resolved through dialogue.



Referring to the appointment of a BJP leader as an Executive Member (EM) in the TTAADC, Saha said another BJP Member of District Council (MDC) would be given an important responsibility in the council in the coming days.

Describing these developments as the beginning of a new understanding between the BJP and TIPRA Motha, the Chief Minister also expressed his intention to bring the IPFT into the proposed political arrangement.

The three of us will work together to build a new Tripura," Saha said, indicating his preference for cooperation among the three parties. Invoking Prime Minister Narendra Modi's slogan of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas and Sabka Prayas', Saha urged political stakeholders to work collectively towards inclusive development.

His remarks signal an effort to improve coordination between the BJP-led state government and the tribal-based political parties, particularly in the functioning of the TTAADC.

## Manipur Police Plans Crackdown on Illegal Poppy Cultivation in 516 Villages Across 10 Districts

**IMPHAL**

Manipur Police has finalised a plan to destroy illegal poppy plantations across 516 villages in 10 districts of the state, with the assistance of other security forces, a senior police officer said on Tuesday.

Addressing a press briefing on November 10, ADGP (Law and Order) Lhari Dorjee Lhatoo said the police expected public cooperation in the proposed campaign against illegal poppy cultivation.

He said such cultivation was linked to environmental degradation, public health concerns, criminal activities and the financing of conflict.

"A plan has been finalised by Manipur Police to destroy illegal poppy plantations across 516 villages spread over 10 districts of the state with the help of security forces. Anyone involved in the practice will face serious consequences as per the law," Lhatoo said.

On the recent killing of two Kuki youths from Taphou Kuki village in Senapati district, the ADGP said the state government's proposal to transfer the investigation to the National Investigation Agency (NIA) had reached an advanced stage. Police are awaiting the necessary orders.

He said an FIR had been registered, witnesses examined and several people questioned following the incident. Joint search operations involving Manipur Police, CRPF, CoBRA, BSF, Assam Rifles and the Army were conducted under the supervision of senior officers.

The bodies of the two youths were recovered from a forested area in Senapati district, around 14 km from the national highway. Operations are continuing to identify and apprehend those responsible, he added.

Lhatoo also said additional CRPF personnel had been requisitioned from the Centre and were expected to arrive in Manipur shortly. Their deployment is expected to strengthen security in vulnerable areas, including Govajang. The CRPF has also moved into the Chalwa area, he added.

On alleged extortion along National Highway 37, the ADGP said police and security forces were making continuous efforts to ensure the safe movement of convoys.

He appealed to the public not to obstruct security personnel during operations against extortion activities.

# IIT Guwahati develops four-in-one machine to reduce handloom weavers' workload

**GUWAHATI**

In a significant technological intervention for the traditional handloom sector, the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Guwahati has developed a four-in-one yarn-winding machine designed to reduce manual labour, ease physical strain and improve productivity among weavers.

Developed by the institute's Rural Technology Action Group (RuTAG), the machine integrates four yarn-preparation operations into a single unit. The innovation seeks to simplify one of the most time-consuming stages of handloom weaving, which is still largely carried out manually in rural households.

Yarn winding involves transferring yarn from hanks, cones or other packages onto bobbins and pirns before it is used on looms. Conventional manually operated charkhas can process only around one to two kilograms of yarn a day, depending on working conditions.

The repetitive nature of the task also forces weavers to maintain uncomfortable postures for prolonged periods, often leading to body pain and physical discomfort.



The new machine combines hank-to-bobbin winding, bobbin-to-pirn winding, yarn doubling and cone-to-bobbin winding. It enables weavers to perform all four operations using a single machine, reducing the need for separate equipment and repeated manual effort.The technology has been tested at several weaving locations across Assam and Meghalaya. Feedback from participating weavers has been taken into account to assess its convenience and efficiency.

Prof Sashindra K Kakoty, coordinator of RuTAG at IIT Guwahati, said the team had initially developed separate machines for hank-to-bobbin and pirn winding before exploring the possibility of integrating the operations into a single unit.

The team later incorporated yarn doubling, which involves combining two or more strands into a single package, along with a facility to wind yarn directly from cones or reels onto smaller bobbins.

Kakoty said the initiative was intended to increase productivity and improve profitability in the weaving sector while reducing the physical burden of manual winding. The machine could also benefit powerloom operators by cutting down the time required for yarn preparation, he added.

Commercialisation of the technology is currently underway. Interested weavers can contact RuTAG at IIT Guwahati for procurement details and demonstrations.

The development is part of IIT Guwahati's efforts to create practical technological solutions for traditional crafts and rural livelihoods, particularly in the Northeast, where handloom weaving remains an important source of employment and income.

**Quest!**

**The brain treats rejection like physical pain, according to scientists.**



# NATIONAL

## EC extends Model Code restrictions on serving govt employees to retired officials engaged by states




**NEW DELHI**

The Election Commission (EC) has extended the restrictions and prohibitions applicable to serving government employees during the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) period to retired government officials and others attached, engaged, employed or re-employed by state and Union Territory governments, amid complaints that some were allegedly using their positions to convene meetings with the election machinery and potentially influence poll-related functioning.

In a letter dated November 9 to the chief secretaries and chief electoral officers of Goa, Manipur, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, the EC said there were no specific guidelines governing the political neutrality and conduct of such individuals during the MCC period. It directed that all restrictions applicable to government servants during the period should equally apply to them. The Commission recalled that it had previously issued instructions on the conduct of government employees, stating they were not expected to participate in election campaigns or canvassing and must take scrupulous care not to lend their names, official positions or authority to assist one individual, political party or group at the expense of another.

Under the latest directions, retired officials and other persons covered by the order must refrain from election campaigning and canvassing and must not use their names, official positions or authority to favour any individual, political party or group. They have also been barred from summoning any election-related officer of a constituency where polls have been announced for official discussions, or holding video conferences or meetings with any such officer. "Any omission or commission of any act in contravention of Commission's directions shall be viewed seriously," the letter said.

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## Delhi's extreme pollution readings fall outside CPCB's 2015 data validation framework



**NEW DELHI**

The data gaps reported at several air quality monitoring stations in Delhi during the post-Diwali pollution spike have brought renewed scrutiny to India's decade-old air pollution monitoring methodology, with Environment Ministry sources telling news agency that the data-validation framework needs to be revised despite upgrades to monitoring instruments.

The particulate matter analysers deployed when the National Air Quality Index (NAQI) was introduced in 2015 were calibrated to measure concentrations between 0 and 1,000 micrograms per cubic metre (μg/m³), according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

In an 11-point statement issued on November 10, the board said its automated data-validation system classifies hourly readings beyond the calibrated range as out-of-range and excludes them from AQI calculations.

The board said that during extreme pollution episodes, such as Diwali firecracker bursting, this could appear as a data gap at an individual monitoring station because the affected hourly readings are not included in the 24-hour average for the pollutant concerned.

However, Environment Ministry sources told ANI that while monitoring instruments have been upgraded over the years, the methodology governing data validation has remained unchanged.

"However, over the years, the instruments have been upgraded, but the methodology has remained the same," a source told ANI.

The issue came into focus amid reports that 45 of Delhi's 59 monitoring stations recorded missing hourly readings for at least one pollutant, with experts flagging data gaps as PM2.5 concentrations approached 1,000 μg/m³.

Explaining the apparent data gaps, a Ministry source told ANI that the readings were available but were not being used in the AQI calculation.

"It is not that the data is missing. We have the data. However, that data is not used in the calculation," the source said.

"Those data missing bands that you see on CPCB, we have the complete data. However, that data is not used in the calculation," the source added.

On the need to revise the methodology, another source told ANI that internal discussions were underway, with two or three scientists already examining the issue. However, no external expert group had officially been constituted to review the framework.

"What I know is that internally, two-three scientists are already working on this," the source said.

"Officially, as of now, no external expert group, like the one formed in 2015, has been constituted," the source added, arguing that an expert group should be set up to examine the issue.

"It is the right time, rather high time. It is a late thing. This should have been revised two-three years ago. If they had revised it and incorporated everything properly, these issues would not have arisen," the source said.

The source also questioned the continued use of the old methodology despite investments in monitoring infrastructure.

"They are increasing the number of instruments, replacing the instruments, but the actual methodology is still the same old outdated methodology. The instruments have changed, but the methodology has not changed," the source said.

CPCB, in its November 10 statement, said it was keeping the methodology under review in light of advances in monitoring technology and international practices. It confirmed that internal deliberations and consultations were underway on processing readings beyond the system's designed measurement range.

The board said the country's network of Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Stations (CAAQMS) had expanded from 30 in 2014-15 to 634, while Delhi's network had grown from 10 to 59 stations over the same period.

CPCB defended the use of a 24-hour running average under the NAQI, saying prolonged exposure to pollutants, rather than momentary spikes, was more relevant to assessing potential health impacts. The index uses sub-indices for eight pollutants — PM2.5, PM10, carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide, ammonia, ozone and lead — and takes the highest sub-index as the AQI for a given hour.

The calculation uses the preceding 24 hours of data, with at least 16 hours of available readings required to generate a sub-index, except for carbon monoxide and ozone.

The board also defended the AQI ceiling of 500, saying it represents the highest level of health concern and that readings beyond it would remain in the 'Severe' category. It said extending the index would not alter the assigned health impact category.

On differences between government and private air quality platforms, CPCB attributed variations to differences in measurement techniques, averaging periods and methodologies. It said some platforms use instantaneous hourly readings and low-cost sensors, which may have calibration and data-quality limitations.

CPCB said the NAQI is computed through an automated system without human intervention, while individual pollutant concentrations recorded at monitoring stations are also made available in the public domain.

# INTERNATIONAL

## Spain's first general strike in 14 years brings clashing social and political desires to the fore

**BARCELONA**

Millions of Spain's workers are striking Wednesday to demand that the government remedy the nation's housing crisis less than three weeks before a national election that could catapult the far right to power.

Spain's first general strike in 14 years is expected to cause delays to the widely used public transport system and lead to the slowdown or shuttering of businesses, factories and shops across the eurozone's fourth largest economy.

Between workers, activists, politicians and ordinary Spaniards, the groups have very different interests in Wednesday's walkout.

The average rent for Spain has almost doubled in the last 10 years, eating into household budgets and angering voters.

Public anger over housing reached a boiling point following the nationally televised eviction of an 87-year-old woman from her home in Madrid last month. The subsequent death of Maricarmen, as the woman became known, caused even more indignation and solidified her as a symbol of Spaniards who feel they pay too much on rent and can't even dream of homeownership.

Housing activists leveraged the uproar over Maricarmen's eviction to call for the general strike. They soon won the backing of Spain's two main unions, UGT and CCOO.

The housing activists want several measures, including the elimination of tourist apartments, a crackdown on real estate speculation and protection for renters in the form of automatic renewals of leases.

The UGT and CCOO unions are demanding more government intervention in the housing market and a new minimum wage agreement through talks with the business owners' association.

The strike's official slogan is "Salaries. Housing. Prices."



The nationwide protests over the eviction of Maricarmen propelled Spain's government to push through emergency measures to limit evictions and help tenants, but right-wing parties in the Parliament refused to ratify them on the grounds they would provoke a flight of properties from the rental market.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez responded by doubling down politically and called the election on Oct. 5, hoping to earn four more years in power for his left-wing coalition.

But then came a brutal high-speed train collision — Spain's second deadly rail disaster of the year. That collision, which killed 69 people, has dominated Spanish news and created a drag on Sánchez's campaign just when he had hoped to build momentum.

The strike, says analyst Oriol Bartomeus, is an opportunity for Sánchez's Socialists and the other parties on the Left that he will need to remain in power.

"The Socialists need for the strike to be a success and for there not to be any violence so that the election campaign can swing back to being about housing, back in the framework of Maricarmen," Bartomeus, a professor of political science at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, told The Associated Press.

On Thursday, the government will again try to have a reduced interim Parliament ratify the two housing decrees that the full lower chamber rejected last month.

Sánchez posted a long video on social media this week, in which he lauded the prior social policies like the 40-hour work week and national health insurance that were the fruit of the workers' movement and the right to strike.

"It wasn't easy, but they changed Spain," Sánchez said, while warning that right-wing parties would bring austerity and underfunded social services.

Verónica Martínez, spokesperson for Sumar, the junior member of the government, separately said "the Left needs the workers of this country to mobilize. Rights are first won on the streets and then later in the institution."

The traditional conservative Popular Party and the far-right Vox are against any government intervention in the housing market other than incentivizing construction of new homes.

They also both argue that the unions are playing politics and trying to help Sánchez stay in office, with months of polling showing voters leaning toward the Right.

"This strike is not a general strike; it is an electoral strike," Popular Party spokesperson Miguel Tellado said Tuesday. "It is not against the government in power, but rather against the government to be."

But the right-wing parties, which already have joined forces to govern in some Spanish regions, could benefit from the strike if it descends into street violence, according to Bartomeus.

Strikes can result in hardcore union members pressuring shops and offices into closing. Spain, like other European countries, often has peaceful public protests that radical groups take advantage of to clash with police and destroy property. "The Popular Party and Vox both want the strike to be a flop and to end in scenes of burning dumpsters and shattered shop windows," Bartomeus said. "That way the next morning they can say, 'This is chaos and we are coming to establish order.'"

## Pope says age, ill health cannot 'extinguish' his zeal



**BUENOS AIRES**

Pope Leo XIV vowed not to let illness or old age affect his zeal Tuesday, urging Argentines to "go forth and be saints!" and warning the young not to obsess over looks, money or popularity.

The 71-year-old leader of the Catholic Church is on an ambitious 12-day Latin America tour less than a month after he underwent surgery for lung cancer.

"Neither age nor physical limitations can extinguish our zeal," he said in a rousing speech to Catholic clergy in the northern city of Cordoba.

"Our strength may run out, but God's power never will!" he said.

The US-born pope had refused to reschedule the trip to Uruguay, Argentina and Peru, despite having the lower part of his right lung removed to extract a cancerous tumor.

With apparently boundless energy, he returned to Buenos Aires Tuesday for a candlelit youth vigil that drew 1.3 million people and featured a show with tango dancers and Argentine singers.

Leo warned against being obsessed with looks or lying on social media to win popularity or approval from others.

"Idols arise and demand our worship: success at any cost, money, an obsession with appearance, popularity or the unrestrained pursuit of pleasure," he said.

They must "stand firm" in the face of pleasures "that ultimately enslave us, such as pornography" and drugs, he said.

The message hit home with a crowd that has largely grown up with social media.

Jose Morando, a 19-year-old architecture student, told AFP that there was a "great deal of obsession" with image, with people "criticized for their bodies."

The South America trip is being seen as a double homecoming of sorts -- taking Leo back to Peru, where he spent almost two decades as a missionary, and bringing him to Argentina, birthplace of his predecessor Francis.

Leo has repeatedly evoked Francis, who disappointed many by never returning home as pope.

In a speech to the clergy in Cordoba Tuesday, Leo said Argentine priests could honor their compatriot by continuing to "make noise" and creating vibrant communities of faith, as the number of Catholics wanes in Argentina.

Some 56 percent of Argentine adults identify as Catholic, according to the Pew Research Center, down from 71 percent just over a decade ago.

At an earlier mass in the city, which drew 650,000 pilgrims, the pope called on the country's citizens to follow the example of a litany of Argentine saints.

Throughout his three days in Argentina, the pontiff has frequently challenged the country's rightist leader Javier Milei to make the economy more inclusive and stop funding cuts that hurt the poor, elderly and those with disabilities.

In Argentina's saints, Leo said, there is "a unity between passion for the Gospel and commitment to building a fraternal and caring nation."

Giant screens had broadcast images of the pope's arrival in Cordoba, sparking cheers from the crowd as his plane touched down.

The gathering reflected the broad appeal Leo has enjoyed in Argentina, extending beyond regular churchgoers.

Like many young Argentines, Joaquin Assad, 24, said he was drawn by the pope's recent comments about artificial intelligence.

"I've brought personal problems to ChatGPT," Assad said with a sheepish smile.

Others said they were encouraged by the pope's criticism of an economic model they believe has left many Argentines behind.

Laura Sosa, 49, who works on maintenance of Hercules aircraft at the state-owned aviation company Fadea, said workers there had endured delayed wage payments and periods of reduced activity.

"There are a lot of people on the streets and people eating out of the garbage because their subsidies were taken away," she said, describing what she sees as rising poverty in Cordoba. Pensioner Carlos Rubio said he hoped Leo would continue speaking out on social issues. "There is no social justice," Rubio said. "I hope the pope's message on that is clear for our president."

On Wednesday, Leo will visit a prison in Buenos Aires and hold a final mass before heading to Peru for the final leg of his South America trip.

# NINGOL CHAKOUBA: The Festival of Family Reunion That Celebrates the Unbreakable Bond Between Brothers and Sisters



Beyond a traditional Manipuri feast, Ningol Chakouba is a celebration of love, belonging and the enduring relationship between married daughters and their parental homes. It brings families together, renews childhood memories and keeps alive a cultural tradition rooted in the values of respect, affection and togetherness.

In Manipur, festivals are not merely occasions for celebration; they are also expressions of identity, tradition and social relationships. Among the many festivals that define the cultural life of the state, Ningol Chakouba holds a special place. Celebrated with warmth and enthusiasm, it is a festival that brings married daughters back to their parental homes, where brothers and other family members welcome them with affection, gifts and a traditional feast.

The word Ningol refers to a daughter or a woman born into a family, while Chakouba is associated with inviting someone for a meal. Together, the words capture the essence of the occasion: a special invitation extended to married daughters by their brothers and parental families.

Observed on the second lunar day of the Manipuri month of Hiyangei, which generally falls in October or November, Ningol Chakouba is one of the most cherished social and cultural celebrations among the Meitei community of Manipur. Although its roots lie in Meitei tradition, the festival has increasingly become an occasion through which the wider Manipuri community celebrates family bonds and cultural identity.

A day when daughters return home

The most distinctive feature of Ningol Chakouba is the return of married daughters to their parental homes. On this day, brothers invite their sisters and their families to visit their childhood homes. The occasion is marked by heartfelt greetings, conversations, laughter and the sharing of a special meal.For many women, the visit is much more than a festive lunch. Marriage often means moving away from the parental home and taking on new responsibilities within another household. Ningol Chakouba provides an opportunity to reconnect with the family in which they grew up, meet parents and siblings, and revisit memories of childhood.

The emotional significance of the day is reflected in the way families prepare for the occasion. Brothers and other family members make arrangements to welcome their sisters, while parents eagerly look forward to seeing their daughters and grandchildren. Traditional food, gifts and affectionate exchanges turn an ordinary family gathering into a memorable celebration.

Food at the heart of the celebration

A traditional feast is central to Ningol Chakouba. Families prepare an elaborate spread featuring some of Manipur's best-known dishes. Fish, vegetables and other traditional delicacies occupy an important place on the dining table.

The meal is not simply about food. It represents hospitality, generosity and the desire to make daughters feel valued and welcomed. The family sits together, shares stories and enjoys the occasion, strengthening relationships that may have become distant because of geographical separation or the pressures of everyday life.

For younger generations, the festival is also an opportunity to experience traditional Manipuri cuisine and understand the customs that have been passed down through families.

More than a brother-sister festival

Although the relationship between brothers and sisters is at the centre of Ningol Chakouba, its significance extends beyond sibling affection. The festival reinforces the relationship between a married woman and her parental family, reminding everyone that marriage does not weaken the emotional ties connecting a daughter to her birthplace.

It also highlights the importance of daughters within the family and society. In a culture where marriage traditionally involves a woman moving to her husband's household, Ningol Chakouba creates a dedicated occasion for her parental family to express that she continues to occupy an important place in their lives.The presence of grandchildren adds another dimension to the celebration. They reconnect with their maternal grandparents, develop relationships with relatives and become familiar with family traditions. In this way, the festival also helps transmit cultural values from one generation to the next.

Keeping traditions alive in a changing world

Modern lifestyles, migration, employment opportunities and the growing distance between families have changed the way people celebrate traditional occasions. Many Manipuris now live outside the state or in different parts of the country and the world. Yet Ningol Chakouba continues to hold emotional importance for the community.

For families separated by distance, the festival becomes a reason to travel home, arrange reunions or connect through phone and video calls. Social media has also given the celebration a wider presence, with families sharing photographs, greetings and glimpses of traditional feasts.

The celebration has also acquired wider cultural recognition beyond Manipur. It offers an opportunity for people from other communities to understand the social values and customs that make Manipuri culture distinctive.

However, preserving the deeper meaning of the festival requires more than organising a feast or exchanging gifts. It means maintaining relationships, respecting daughters and ensuring that family affection remains part of everyday life rather than being confined to one special occasion.

A celebration of belonging

At its heart, Ningol Chakouba is about the simple but powerful idea that family ties do not end when a daughter gets married or leaves her parental home. The festival reminds brothers that their sisters remain an integral part of their lives and reminds daughters that the doors of their childhood homes are always open.

In an age when busy schedules and changing social structures often leave little time for family gatherings, Ningol Chakouba carries a message that goes beyond its cultural boundaries: relationships need time, affection and conscious effort to remain strong.

That is why the festival is more than a traditional family reunion. It is a celebration of love, identity, respect and belonging — a reminder that no matter how far life takes someone, the bond with one's family and roots remains enduring.For Manipur, Ningol Chakouba is not just a day of feasting. It is a reaffirmation of family, a celebration of daughters and a living expression of a cultural tradition that continues to bring generations together.

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