

Biren quits as CM of Manipur, assembly session suspended

Singh Gives In After Meeting With HM, Nadda

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Guwahati: Manipur CM N Biren Singh's defiance of repeated resignation calls over his handling of the ethnic conflict raging there since May 2023 ended Sunday when he put in his papers on eve of the assembly's budget session, and a possible no-trust motion by Congress against the BJP-led govt.

FULL COVERAGE: P 9, 10

Governor A K Bhalla accepted Biren's resignation and asked him to continue "till alternative arrangements". Late Sunday, the governor's secretariat notified that its Jan order summoning the assem-

MOVE TO AVOID NO-TRUST MOTION?

- > Resignation sets off speculation on 'why now?' As per watchers, Biren wanted to avoid no-trust motion planned by Cong as he wasn't confident of support of his party legislators
- > However, his exit appeared imminent since A K Bhalla's appointment as gov last Dec

WHO'LL BE CM? Name of ex-speaker Y Khemchand, a vocal critic of Biren, among those doing the rounds



Biren handing his resignation to gov A K Bhalla

“ It has been an honour to serve people of Manipur. I'm grateful to Centre for timely actions, interventions, developmental work... for safeguarding interests of every single Manipuri — **BIREN SINGH**

Mounting public pressure, SC investigation and no-trust motion by Congress have forced a reckoning. But most urgent priority is to restore peace... PM must visit Manipur at once — **RAHUL GANDHI**

bly session stands "null and void" with immediate effect.

The buzz around his resignation grew after Biren flew to Delhi, his second trip in a week, late Saturday. After a lengthy meeting with home mini-

ster Amit Shah on Sunday — BJP chief J P Nadda was also present — he returned to Imphal along with BJP's Northeast coordinator Sambit Patra.

► **Continued on P 18**

Prez rule likely if alternative govt doesn't emerge

Centre is open to exploring all political alternatives in the wake of Biren Singh's exit, including giving opportunity to another state BJP leader to stake claim to the CM's post, sources said. The last option, in the event of no alternative govt formation working out, would be imposition of President's rule, **report Bharti Ja-in & Akhilesh Singh.**

Singh's ouster was driven by the assessment that his own support among MLAs had dwindled. With Singh out, Centre hopes that Kuki representatives will be open to talks for sorting out issues creating mistrust between their community and the Meiteis. **P 9**

Chandrayaan-3 landing site likely to be 3.7bn years old: Scientists

New Delhi: The landing site where India's Chandrayaan-3 spacecraft touched the surface of moon's south pole in 2023 is about 3.7 billion years old, according to Indian scientists. Using high-resolution remote sensing datasets, a team of scientists, including from Isro's electro optics systems lab in Bengaluru, physical research lab in Ahmedabad, and Panjab University in Chandigarh, mapped the Chandrayaan-3 moon landing site, also known as 'Shiv Shakti' point (located at 69.37°S, 32.32°E), reports **Surendra Singh**.

"The geological map reveals the spatial distribution of three distinct terrain types within the landing area that

includes high-relief rugged terrain and smooth plains and low-relief smooth plains," said the team in a paper, published in Science Direct journal. "The crater size-frequency distribution based best-fit ages of these distinct geological units are estimated to be 3.7 Ga (billion years)," the study said.

"It dates back to the same era when the earliest microscopic life forms began emerging on Earth," said scientists in an article published in Nature. Offering new insights into moon's history, the geological map of the landing site reveals that debris from nearby Schomberger crater covers the area.

Mizoram govt bid to hand over airport to IAF stirs political row

HC Vanlalruata | TNN

Aizawl: Mizoram's main opposition, Mizo National Front (MNF), vowed to prevent Lengpui airport in state capital from going into the hands of Indian Air Force even as Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) govt has been making efforts to hand over the lone airport to IAF. A team of MNF legislators, led by opposition leader Lalthandama Ralte, visited the airport on Saturday.

Ralte said both MNF and Congress govts had put lot of efforts in establishing the state's first airport and successive govts ran the airport. "When ZPM assumed office in Dec 2023, one of the first things that CM Lalduhoma did was proposing the handing over of our airport to IAF, which is shameful," he said.

"Previous CMs Lal Thanhawla (Congress) and Zoramthanga (MNF) were able to retain ownership of the



Opposition MNF highlighted adverse consequences — like civilian-military conflict — if Lengpui airport in state capital is handed over to IAF

airport despite financial difficulties. This shows ZPM govt's total financial failure," he said while highlighting adverse consequences — like civilian-military conflict — if the airport is handed over to IAF.

"Across India, 27 IAF-controlled airports have civilian enclaves. These bases often prioritise military operations, including jet fighter and transport plane activities. Locations such as Pune, Tezpur, Bagdogra, and

Srinagar serve as examples. With Mizoram's strategic location near China, it is likely that Lengpui will be developed into a jet fighter base," he said, adding, "Frequent fighter jet sorties and airspace restrictions could limit civilian flight operations, affecting flight frequency and impacting Mizoram's economic progress. Noise pollution from fighter jets would also disrupt nearby areas, including Aizawl."

"Lengpui and its surrounding areas, including Aizawl, could become high-priority targets during conflicts due to the airport's strategic importance as a military installation. People of Mizoram will never allow their beloved airport to go into the hands of IAF," he added.

Ralte said previous MNF govt had already proposed construction of a second runway. The detailed project report of this had already been submitted to Centre.

31 Maoists, two securitymen die in fierce Bastar gunbattle

81 Naxals Killed
In Ops In Just
6 Weeks Of 2025

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LARGE CACHE OF ARMS RECOVERED

➤ Intel reported presence of a large group of Maoists and 'senior commanders' in the jungles of Bijapur district's Indravati National Park

➤ Big contingent of more than 650 security personnel launched a coordinated operation from multiple directions to hem in insurgents in jungles

➤ Toll expected to rise as encounter still on



Security personnel take bodies of Naxals to district HQ in Bijapur

➤ A large cache of weapons seized from Maoists, including AK-47s, SLRs, INSAS and .303 rifles, barrel grenade launchers and explosives

Raipur: At least 31 Maoist insurgents and two security personnel were killed Sunday in a fierce gunfight in the dense forests of Chhattisgarh's Bastar region, one of the last Naxal strongholds in the country. The operation is ongoing and officials expect the Maoist death toll to rise.

This is the second-largest Maoist casualty count in a single security strike, after 38 guerrillas were gunned down in Narayanpur's Thulthuli on Oct 3 last year. Since 2024, more than 280 Maoists have been killed in Bastar. The number of Maoists killed this year has risen to 81 in just six weeks. Major operations include the killing of 16 Naxal fighters in

Gariaband on Jan 21 and eight in Gangaloor on Feb 2. Security forces have also faced fatalities. On Jan 6, eight constables and a driver were killed when Maoists targeted their vehicle with an IED weighing nearly 70kg in Bijapur.

Union home minister Amit Shah praised the security forces for the successful operation. "The nation will always be indebted to these heroes.... I once again reaffirm

that by March 31, 2026, we will eradicate Naxalism from the roots of this country so that no citizen loses their life due to it," he said. The gunfight erupted early Sunday after a contingent of over 650 security personnel launched a coordinated operation from multiple directions to hem in insurgents in the jungles of Bijapur's Indravati National Park.

► **Related report, P 18**

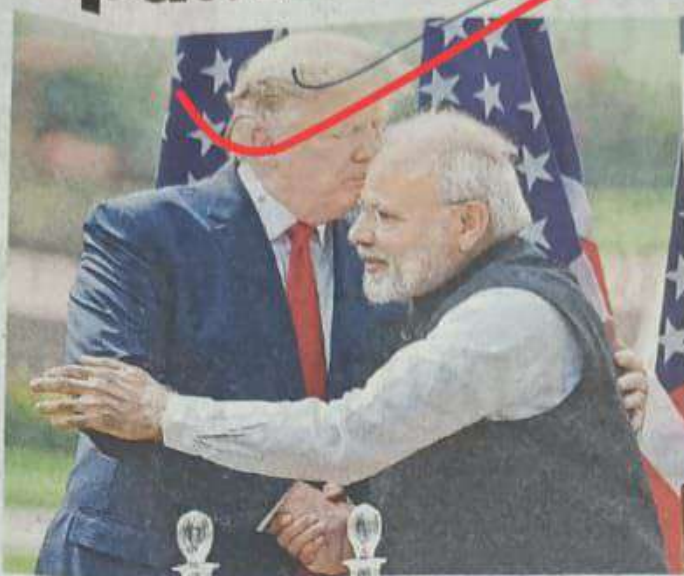
India-US Relationship Status Set For Update With Modi Visit

PM Narendra Modi will visit the US on Feb 12-13 at the invitation of President Donald Trump. This will be the first meeting between the two leaders after Trump assumed office for his second term. Modi will be the fourth global leader to visit the US since Trump's inauguration.

On the agenda

To build on the strong India-US Global Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and set an ambitious agenda for a mutually beneficial and trusted relationship across all sectors. Focus likely on enhancing cooperation in trade, nuclear energy, defence, critical and emerging technologies, counter-terrorism and Indo-Pacific.

Also on the agenda are differences over trade or what Trump calls need for fair trade, illegal migration and visa delays. India will seek Trump's cooperation in carrying forward recent landmark initiatives like iCET and IMEEC, both launched under the Biden administration. Even as Trump threatens to slap higher tariffs on India and others, the Modi govt will hope to restart discussions for a mini, if not comprehensive, trade deal that can restore India's benefits under the GSP that were revoked in 2019, while allowing the US greater market access. Meeting with business leaders, talks with Elon Musk not ruled out.



PREVIOUS INTERACTIONS

- Modi visited US in June 2017 and hosted Trump for a state visit in Feb 2020
- The two leaders have also spoken on the phone twice since Nov 2024 (Nov 6, 2024, and Jan 27, 2025)
- In early engagement with the new administration, foreign minister S Jaishankar represented the PM at Trump's inauguration. During the visit, Jaishankar met secretary of state Marco Rubio and participated in the Quad foreign ministers' meeting in Jan

AREAS OF ENGAGEMENT

1 Bilateral Ties

- India and the US launched a 'strategic partnership' in 2005
- India-US ties were elevated to Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership during Trump's visit to India in Feb 2020
- During the first Trump administration, the Indo-Pacific region gained significant attention as a key strategic area in US foreign policy
- In concert with Japan, Australia, the US and India reinvigorated the Quadri-lateral Dialogue. Trump administration took the lead in promoting Quad from a senior-official level dialogue to a ministerial-level dialogue. Under the Biden administration, Quad was elevated to a leaders summit



2 Trade and Investment

- The US is one of the largest trading partners of India with overall bilateral trade in goods and services of \$190 billion in 2023. India has a trade surplus of over \$36 billion
- During FY 2023-24, US was the third largest source of FDI into India with inflows of almost \$5 billion

3 Energy Partnership

- The US is India's sixth largest energy trade partner and India's hydrocarbon trade with the US was \$13.6 billion in FY 2023-24

4 Education and Cultural Cooperation

- India, US signed the first ever 'Cultural Property Agreement' in 2024 to prevent and curb the illicit trafficking of antiquities. US has returned 578 antiquities to India since 2016
- US is one of the most favoured destinations for Indian students for higher education

5 Defence Cooperation

- India-US defence cooperation is based on 'New Framework for India-US Defence Cooperation' which was renewed for 10 years in 2015
- In 2016, the defence relationship was designated as a Major Defence Partnership
- The apex dialogue mechanism is the 2+2 ministerial dialogue. It provides guidance on political, military and strategic issues
- India is one of the largest military exercise partners for the US
- India has contracted for more than \$20 billion US-origin defence articles since 2008, including C-130J, C-17 and Apache

6 S&T and Space Cooperation

- The Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement was renewed in Sept 2019 for 10 years
- Isro and Nasa are developing a microwave remote sensing satellite for earth observation: Nasa-Isro Synthetic Aperture Radar
- In Jan 2024, Nasa and Isro signed a Joint Statement of Intent to mount a joint effort to the International Space Station
- Isro has nominated two Indian astronauts on the Axiom-4 mission to the International Space Station



International Space Station, who are currently being trained in the US

- India and US have strong cooperation in critical and emerging technologies. Initiative for Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) was launched by the NSAs in Washington in Jan 2023



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Inflation picks up in China

China's consumer inflation accelerated for the first time since Aug, caused by a burst of household spending around the Lunar New Year holiday even as deflationary pressures persist.

The consumer price index rose 0.5% in Jan from a year earlier, the National Bureau of Statistics said Sunday, compared with a 0.1%

gain in the previous month.

A temporary spending boom during the eight-day break briefly masked the extent of the deflationary challenge facing the world's second-biggest economy. The price of services increased 0.9%, accounting for more than 50% of the total rise in CPI, according to the statistics bureau.

China's factory deflation

extended into a 28th month with a 2.3% decline, flat with the index's contraction in Dec. Analysts at Nomura Holdings estimate that China's CPI could have been distorted by around 0.4 percentage point last month, as some prices gained when consumers ramped up purchases ahead of the festival that ran from Jan 28 to Feb 4 this year. BLOOMBERG

The Offshore Future of Indian Aircraft

India is building its indigenous defence equipment manufacturing capabilities. Aircraft undertaking multiple roles is one of them. Some of these may even serve in foreign colours



LIGHTWEIGHT FIGHTER

The push to accelerate the production of a light combat aircraft is gaining momentum, with key suppliers ensuring timely engine deliveries that are crucial for completing the aircraft. Significant advancements have been made in the aircraft's design, including the successful integration of advanced electronic warfare systems and sophisticated radar technologies. Testing is underway for an indigenous air-to-air missile, marking an important milestone as preparations are made for deliveries to the air force.

The aircraft is part of a contract covering multiple units, including both fighter and trainer variants. The initial batch is anticipated soon, as the manufacturer works to fulfil commitments despite previous delays. Additionally, plans for further acquisitions of this aircraft type are in progress.

COMBAT CHOPPER

Designed for a wide range of operations, these helicopters can target enemy air defences, engage slow-moving and remotely piloted aircraft, neutralise high-altitude bunkers, conduct counter-insurgency missions in various environments, and provide vital support to ground forces. Their versatility makes them invaluable assets in modern warfare, capable of operating effectively in diverse terrains and under challenging conditions.

Equipped with advanced avionics and weapon systems, these combat choppers can conduct precision strikes while maintaining a low radar profile to evade detection. Features such as enhanced situational awareness, targeting systems, and advanced weaponry, including guided missiles and machine guns, ensure that they can engage threats swiftly and efficiently.

MULTI-ROLE UTILITY

The advanced light helicopter is an indigenously developed twin-engine utility aircraft designed for multi-role and multi-mission capabilities. Its development began several decades ago with initial assistance from a foreign partner. The helicopter has since undergone rigorous testing and certification for both military and civilian operations.

Available in multiple variants, this helicopter serves diverse operational needs. The program for a multi-role helicopter was initiated years ago, reflecting a commitment to developing indigenous capabilities in aviation technology.

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LIGHT COMBAT AIRCRAFT (LCA) TEJAS

An order for 97 Tejas Mk-1A fighters, worth ₹67,000 crore, is in progress.



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LIGHT COMBAT HELICOPTER (LCH)

The LCH currently features 45 per cent indigenous content by value.



India is steadily advancing its indigenous defence manufacturing capabilities, aiming to reduce dependence on imports and establish itself as a global supplier of military equipment. This push for self-reliance spans across land, air, and naval platforms, with a particular focus on developing advanced combat aircraft and helicopters.

A significant aspect of this effort is the creation of multi-role aircraft that can serve in diverse operational scenarios, from air superiority missions to ground support and naval operations. Notably, some of these domestically developed aircraft may even be exported, reflecting India's growing footprint in the global defence market.

This ambition is exemplified by the development of a slew of homegrown fighter jets designed to enhance the Indian Air Force's (IAF) fleet while also presenting an attractive option for international buyers.

Furthermore, the integration of cutting-edge technologies, such as artificial intelligence and advanced materials, is enhancing the performance and capabilities of these aircraft. Collaborations between public and private sectors are fostering innovation and efficiency in production processes.

As India continues to invest in research and development, its defence industry is poised to play a crucial role in securing national interests and contributing to global peacekeeping efforts.