

Three killed as Kuki-Naga conflict rages in Manipur

The Hindu Bureau

GUWAHATI

The ongoing conflict between the Kuki and Naga communities in Manipur escalated on Friday, leaving three people dead and several others injured.

Two of those killed in the State's Ukhrul district were Kukis, while the third was a Tangkhul Naga. Tangkhuls are the dominant community in the district.

Organisations of the two communities accused each other of attacking first. The Kuki Organisation for Human Rights (KOHUR) claimed armed Tangkhul Naga men attacked Mullam and Shongphal Kuki villages at 5.30 a.m. when "unarmed civilians were asleep in their homes".

Condemning the attack, the organisation said the assailants fatally shot two Kuki "village volunteers". It said several others, including women and children, were injured, and more than a dozen houses were torched.

The deceased were identified as 43-year-old Letlal and 19-year-old Pao-minlun Haolai. "The villagers, exercising their lawful right to self-defence with licensed hunting arms, repulsed the attack and neutralised one of the armed assailants in the process," the KOHUR said.



Mounting tension: Security personnel patrol the Kangleitongbi area in Imphal West district of Manipur on Thursday. PTI

The Naga Village Guard (NVG), Central Command, trashed the KOHUR claim and said armed Kuki extremists opened fire at some of its members on patrol duty between Sirakhong and Sinakeithei villages.

In a statement, the NVG said Naga villagers have been patrolling their villages because of "repeated attacks on Sinakeithei village and reports of constant tactical movement in the peripheries by the Kuki armed cadres under the Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement".

Some 25 armed Kuki groups signed the SoO, a ceasefire pact, with the Indian government in 2008.

Retaliatory attack

The Naga Village Guard said the armed Kuki extremists shot dead 29-year-old Horshokmi Jamang, a Naga "village volunteer", and injured four others. A retaliatory attack followed.

The Working Committee of Tangkhul Naga Long, the apex body of the tribe, said the Kuki extremists ambushed the NVG members.

An assault case on February 7 triggered the chain of conflict between the Kukis and the Nagas in Ukhrul district, signalling a shift of violence from the Meitei-dominated Imphal Valley to the hills. Before Friday's gunfight, at least four people were killed in Ukhrul district since the first week of February. Two of them, including a retired Indian Army soldier, were travelling on the Imphal-Ukhrul highway when unidentified gunmen fired indiscriminately at a convoy of civilian vehicles.

Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh recently visited various villages in the district to try to reduce the trust deficit between the Kuki and Tangkhul Naga communities.

Opposition parties move fresh motion in Rajya Sabha seeking removal of CEC

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Opposition parties moved a fresh notice in the Rajya Sabha on Friday seeking the removal of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar, accusing him of acting in a partisan manner.

The 13-page notice, which was submitted by senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh and Trinamool Congress member Sagarika Ghose to the Rajya Sabha Secretary-General, was signed by 73 Opposition members of the Upper House.

Citing examples from West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Uttar Pradesh, the MPs levelled nine charges against him. Accusing the CEC of “asymmetrical enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct”, they said the poll body ignored the violation by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who used the public broadcaster to de-



Gyanesh Kumar

announce the Opposition through his address to the nation.

They also flagged an EC post on X against the Trinamool Congress ahead of the election in West Bengal; the spat between Mr. Kumar and a Trinamool Congress delegation during a recent meeting at EC headquarters in Delhi; “mass disenfranchisement” in West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, ignoring complaints filed by the Opposition parties; and the “illegal abuse” of power by transferring and posting of bureaucrats in Tamil Nadu. They also criticised the EC’s “institutional proximi-

ty” to the BJP, pointing to an incident in Kerala where an official election document reportedly carried the seal of a BJP State unit.

The notice, addressed to the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, was moved under Article 324(5) of the Constitution, read with Article 124(4), Section 11(2) of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023, and the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968.

If the Rajya Sabha Chairman accepts the notice, he will order a probe. The MPs demanded that Mr. Kumar, pending the inquiry, recuse himself from poll-related functions in States where elections are under way. According to the signatories, Friday’s motion pertains exclusively to Mr. Kumar’s actions after March 15 and is distinct from an earlier notice submitted on March 12, which was rejected by the chair of both Houses.

7 AAP Rajya Sabha MPs quit party, set to merge with BJP

Devesh K. Pandey

NEW DELHI

In a massive setback to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), seven of its 10 Rajya Sabha members on Friday broke away and are set to join the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), marking a significant political realignment in the Upper House. The AAP accused the BJP of running “Operation Lotus” to break and poach MPs.

MPs Raghav Chadha, Sandeep Pathak, and Ashok Kumar Mittal met BJP president Nitin Nabin at the party’s headquarters in the evening. The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance currently has a strength of 141 in the Upper House.

At a press conference, Mr. Chadha said that more than two-thirds of the AAP



Fresh ties: Rajya Sabha MPs Sandeep Pathak, Ashok Mittal, and Raghav Chadha calling on BJP national president Nitin Nabin (centre) at the party headquarters in New Delhi on Friday. ANI

MPs had quit the party and would merge with the BJP by exercising the provisions of the Constitution. “Seven MPs have signed the document, which was submitted to the Honourable Chairman of the Rajya Sabha,” he said.

Mr. Chadha said the sig-

natories included former cricketer Harbhajan Singh, Rajendra Gupta, Vikramjit Singh Sahney, and Swati Maliwal.

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India among countries where Meta 'automatically' blocks flagged content

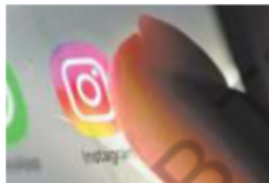
Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

India is now among a set of "limited countries" where Facebook and Instagram "automatically restrict content, at scale and based on local law requirements," a company source told *The Hindu*.

Meta, the parent firm of both social media platforms, has complied with censorship orders on a large scale in recent weeks, as the firm has been hit with a barrage of takedown notices from State police authorities as well as the Union government. Precise numbers of local law-

Limited access

Meta has complied with censorship orders after a barrage of takedown notices from the Centre and State police



■ India is now among a set of "limited countries" where Facebook and Instagram 'automatically restrict content, at scale, based on local law requirements'

■ The Sahyog portal works as a centralised platform for issuing takedown orders to internet intermediaries, including social media platforms

■ The portal operates under section 79(3)(b) of the IT Act, which has provisions to take away 'safe harbour' for platforms for non-compliance with notices

related takedowns on the platforms will only be published by the firm in the second half of 2026.

The Sahyog portal,

which provides a web link for authorised police officials to send takedown notices to social media platforms, operates under

Section 79(3)(b) of the Information Technology Act, under which social media platforms could lose "safe harbour" for content posted by users, and end up in court alongside the people whose content has been targeted by authorities.

Meta did not provide written responses to questions from *The Hindu*. The firm's receptivity to non-binding takedown notices appears to have increased since the IT Ministry in February reduced timelines from 36 hours to three hours.

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Meta to 'automatically' block flagged content

Non-compliance within this timeline would lead to a loss of safe harbour. Meta did not respond to a question on whether it conducts human rights evaluations on such takedowns. The help documentation on its site says it does such evaluations.

X, formerly Twitter, has challenged the Sahyog portal in the Karnataka High Court, and does not comply with police takedown notices when it believes the content they target is lawful. Meta's response, however, is to instantaneously restrict access in response to content that has been sent through this mechanism, giving police authorities wide powers of immediate and lasting censorship that they can exercise by merely filling out an online form.

“Various apparatuses of the government have been issuing notices (not orders) providing ‘actual knowledge’ of violations of Indian law to platforms under Section 79(3)(b), most of which, when scrutinised, do not actually disclose any violation of any Indian law by the users,” Pranesh Prakash, co-founder of the Centre for Internet and Society, who is now a tech law and policy consultant, told *The Hindu*. Mr. Prakash said that users are seldom acted against personally in court, with the matter ending in the content takedown, which “show[s] ... that the platforms would not be held liable either.”

“Yet, instead of fighting for their users, Meta is unthinkingly removing content it is legally not even required to remove,” Mr. Prakash said.

Govt. clears ₹30 billion withdrawal for Maldives

Press Trust of India

MALE

India has approved the first withdrawal of ₹30 billion under its continuing economic and financial assistance to Maldives, according to the Indian High Commission here.

The funds are being released under the first draw-down of the SAARC Currency Swap Framework, the Indian mission said in a statement on Thursday.

The withdrawal under the framework was signed between RBI and the Maldives government during President Mohamed Muiz-zu's State visit to New Delhi in October 2024, it added.

The earlier \$400 million withdrawal, availed by the Maldives under this framework in October 2024, matured on Thursday, the Indian High Commission said.

In a statement on Thursday, the Maldives Foreign Ministry said the settlement of the \$400 million facility reflects the government's commitment to meeting its financial obligations, *Sun Online* reported.

'Constructive' trade deal talks held with U.S.: India

This was the first in-person meeting between the two since October 2025; an Interim Agreement was delayed after the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated reciprocal tariffs Trump had levied on India

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

The negotiating teams of India and the U.S. held "constructive" and "forward-looking" talks on a trade deal, the Indian government said following the conclusion of the talks, which took place in Washington on April 20-23.

India and the U.S. on February 7 issued a joint statement agreeing on a framework for an Interim Agreement pertaining to reciprocal tariffs and mutually beneficial trade.

That Interim Agreement was to be signed in March, but was delayed after the Supreme Court of the U.S. invalidated the reciprocal tariffs U.S. President Donald Trump had levied on other countries, including India.

The framework agreed to in February also reaffirmed the two countries' commitment towards achieving a broader Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA). "In pursuance thereof, the Indian side visited Washington D.C. for an in-person round of meetings



The talks covered multiple areas like market access, technical barriers to trade, customs and trade facilitation. REUTERS

with their U.S. counterparts to finalise the details of the Interim Agreement and take forward the negotiations under the broader BTA," the Ministry of Commerce and Industry said in a short statement on Friday.

It added that the talks covered multiple areas such as market access, non-tariff measures, technical barriers to trade, customs and trade facilitation, investment promotion, economic security alignment, and digital trade.

The statement, however, fell short of stating a deadline by which the Interim Agreement or the BTA

would be finalised, or when the next round of talks would be held. This round was the first time the two teams had met in person since October 2025.

'Shaky wicket'

Speaking at the Hudson Institute Seminar in Washington, senior BJP leader Ram Madhav, however, voiced confidence that the deal would be signed soon.

"[India-U.S.] is a very important relationship that we have built over last two decades. That's on a very shaky wicket," Mr. Madhav said, speaking at a session with former U.S.

Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell and think tank Stimson Centre's South Asia Director Elizabeth Threlkeld, where he said tariffs and economic issues over the past year had raised problems.

"We are looking forward to the trade deal which is expected to be concluded in less than a month now. We are hoping that when [U.S. Secretary of State Marco] Rubio visits India next month we will finally have closed the deal that is a very important because we are hoping that we will have a better tariff regime," he said, quoting information received from the government.

Previously, officials in the Ministry of Commerce – including Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal – have said that a deal would be signed only after the U.S. finalises the tariffs it plans to levy on India and its competitors.

"The meetings were conducted in a constructive and positive spirit with meaningful and forward-looking discussions enabling progress on key matters," the Indian government's statement added.

Israel-Lebanon ceasefire extended by three weeks

Donald Trump says U.S. will help Lebanon protect itself from Hezbollah after talks; a Hezbollah lawmaker cites continued Israeli 'assassinations, shelling and gunfire' and vows to confront them

Stanly Johny

Israel and Lebanon have extended their fragile ceasefire by three weeks, U.S. President Donald Trump announced on Friday after meeting representatives from both countries in Washington.

"The Meeting went very well! The U.S. is going to work with Lebanon in order to help it protect itself from Hezbollah. The Ceasfire between Israel and Lebanon will be extended by three weeks," Mr. Trump wrote in a social media post.

Vice-President J.D. Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, U.S. Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee and Ambassador to Lebanon Michel Issa were present at the meeting in the Oval Office.



War zone: An Israeli armoured vehicle seen inside Lebanon as the ceasefire was extended on Friday. REUTERS

The latest round of war between Israel and Hezbollah, a Lebanese Shia militant group and political party, broke out on March 2, three days after the U.S. and Israel launched strikes on Iran, killing Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. When Mr. Trump announced the U.S.-Iran

ceasefire on April 8, Tehran said Lebanon was part of the agreement. Israel initially rejected this claim but agreed to a 10-day ceasefire in Lebanon last week. Mr. Trump then said Israel was "prohibited" from bombing Lebanon any longer. However, limited Israeli attacks conti-

Iran FM Araghchi travelling to Pak. for ceasefire talks

ISLAMABAD

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi heads to Pakistan as officials push the U.S. and Iran to convene a second round of ceasefire talks. His trip covers Oman and Russia, focusing on bilateral matters and regional developments. » **PAGE 14**

nued in Lebanon.

"I look forward to hosting the Prime Minister of Israel, Bibi Netanyahu, and the President of Lebanon, Joseph Aoun, in the near future," Mr. Trump said on Friday.

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Israel extends fragile ceasefire with Lebanon

A Hezbollah lawmaker said the extension of the truce was meaningless as long as Israel continued its “hostile actions”. Israel is continuing “assassinations, shelling and gunfire and its destructive campaign against Lebanese border villages and towns”, said Ali Fayyad, member of the Loyalty to Resistance parliamentary bloc. “In practice, this pushes the Lebanese side towards adhering to the ceasefire, while imposing no obligations, not even minimal ones, on the Israeli side. This is something the resistance [Hezbollah] cannot accept. On the contrary, it affirms its rejection of it and its determination to confront it,” he said, according to Hezbollah’s Al Manar TV.

On Friday, Lebanon’s National News agency reported that Israel carried out three air strikes in the town of Deir Aames, after issuing an evacuation order. The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) said it issued the evacuation order from the southern Lebanese village after Hezbollah launched rockets from the area.

Israel has said it is observing the ceasefire but ruled out withdrawing from the south Lebanese territory it has captured since the ground invasion began in mid-March. Hezbollah, on the other side, demands a full Israeli withdrawal. The Lebanese government, which was not involved in the war, says it would push for the Israeli withdrawal diplomatically.

Araghchi travelling to Pak. for ceasefire talks with U.S.

Tehran says the Minister will go to Pakistan, Oman and Russia to discuss 'bilateral matters and regional developments; Iran has an important choice, a chance to make a deal, says Pentagon chief

Associated Press

ISLAMABAD

Iran's top diplomat was heading on Friday to Pakistan, where officials have been trying to get the U.S. and Iran to convene for a second round of ceasefire negotiations.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi wrote on X that he was on his way to Pakistan, Oman and Russia on a trip focused on "bilateral matters and regional developments".

The trip comes as much of the world has been on edge over a war that has snarled crucial energy exports through the Strait of Hormuz, clouded the global economic picture, and left thousands dead across West Asia.

U.S. envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner will head Saturday to Pakistan for a new round of talks with Iran on ending the war, the White House said.

"I can confirm Special Envoy Witkoff and Jared Kushner will be off to Pakistan again tomorrow morning to engage in talks," White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt told Fox News on Friday.

Earlier, two Pakistani officials said Mr. Araghchi was heading to Pakistan with a small government delegation. Islamabad has sought to reinject momen-



Pakistan Army tightens security ahead of the expected U.S.-Iran peace talks in Islamabad. Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said he would travel to Pakistan on Friday. AFP

tum into the negotiations between Iran and the U.S., which had been set to resume this week but did not materialise.

Separately Friday, the White House said President Donald Trump issued a 90-day extension to the Jones Act waiver, making it easier for non-American vessels to transport oil and natural gas in the wake of the war. Mr. Trump first announced a 60-day waiver in mid-March, a move seen as helping to stabilise energy prices and making it easier for more ships to travel to the U.S. following the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

The post on social media by a White House press aide said: "New data compiled since the initial waiver was issued revealed that significantly more supply was able to reach U.S. ports faster." Pakistan has been trying to get U.S. and Iranian officials back to the table after Mr. Trump this week announced an indefinite extension of the ceasefire with Iran, honouring Islamabad's request for more time for diplomatic outreach.

Tensions in the strait

That hasn't lowered tensions in the strait the strategic waterway through

which a fifth of the world's oil and natural gas is shipped during peacetime.

Iran has kept its stranglehold on traffic through the strait, attacking three ships earlier this week, while the U.S. has maintained its blockade of Iranian ports and ordered the military to "shoot and kill" small boats that could be placing mines.

"Iran has an important choice, a chance to make a deal, a good deal, a wise deal," Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth told reporters on Friday. He said a second U.S. aircraft carrier will join the blockade in a few days.

China targets European firms over Taiwan sales

Agence France-Presse

BEIJING

China has imposed restrictions on seven European entities related to the defence sector, Beijing said Friday, citing their involvement in alleged arms sales or “collusion” with Taiwan.

The measures, which took effect immediately, are needed “to safeguard

national security and fulfill international obligations such as non-proliferation”, the Commerce Ministry said in a statement.

The curbs apply to firms including Belgian guns manufacturer FN Herstal and German defence electronics firm Hensoldt, as well as the national aerospace research and development centre in the Czech Republic, VZLU Aerospace.

They prohibit exports of “dual-use items” to the seven named entities or transfers of such items that originated in China by “foreign organisations and individuals”, the statement said. Applications could be submitted to the Commerce Ministry “in special circumstances where export is truly necessary”, it added.

In a separate statement,

an unnamed Commerce Ministry spokesperson said that the measures target “only a small number of EU entities involved in military-related activities, specifically those that have participated in arms sales to Taiwan or engaged in collusion with Taiwan”. “Law-abiding and trustworthy EU entities have absolutely no cause for concern,” it added.

Rupee ends 15 paise weaker at 94.16 against U.S. dollar

The rupee extended its losing streak for the fifth day in a row, depreciating 15 paise to close at 94.16 against the U.S. dollar on Friday due to higher crude oil prices and strengthening American currency, with prospects of West Asia peace talks hanging in the balance. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 94.25 and stayed range-bound throughout the session, hitting the day's high of 94.18 and low of 94.31 against the greenback. PTI

Net FDI hits 45-month high in Feb., breaks six-month 'jinx'

Inflows exceeded outflows of direct investment by \$4.6 bn; gross FDI grew 61.6% to a seven-month high of nearly \$9 bn; India remains an attractive destination for greenfield FDI projects, says RBI

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan

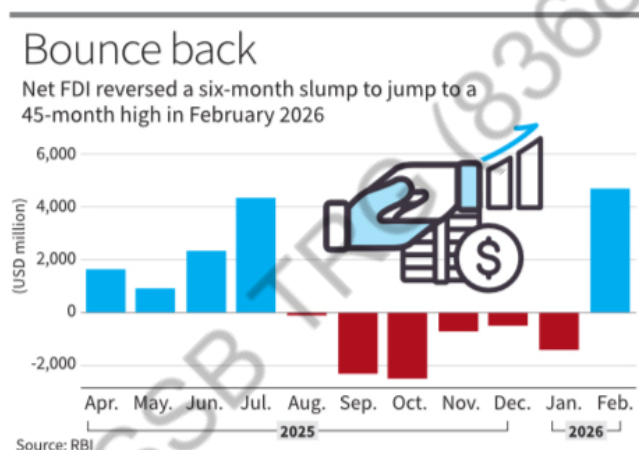
NEW DELHI

Net foreign direct investment (FDI) into India turned positive in February 2026 after six months of being in the negative, latest Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data show. In February, the inflows exceeded outflows of direct investment by \$4.6 billion, the highest in nearly four years.

The main reason for this was a simultaneous increase in inward FDI to multi-month highs while the quantum of money that left the country fell to multi-year lows.

Gross FDI in February 2026, or the total amount of money coming in as direct investment, grew 61.6% to a seven-month high of nearly \$9 billion.

Over the course of the first 11 months of this financial year, gross FDI stood at \$88.3 billion, a growth of



18.1% over the same period of the previous financial year. "Manufacturing, computer services, financial services, business services, and communication services accounted for more than two-thirds of total equity inflows during 2025-26 so far [up to February]," the RBI said.

"Furthermore, Singapore, the U.S., Mauritius, Japan, and the Netherlands were the major source countries of inward FDI to India, accounting for

around three-fourth of the total inflows."

The RBI also asserted that India remains an "attractive destination for greenfield FDI projects". However, the data it provided from the global greenfield FDI database fDi Markets, shows that greenfield project announcements to India fell 11% in April-January 2026 to \$65 billion as compared with the same period of the previous year. Total outflows of direct in-

vestment, on the other hand, fell to their lowest level in 27 months, of \$4.4 billion.

The main reason for this was a sharp decrease in the amount of money sent out of the country by foreign companies in the form of repatriation and disinvestment. The amount fell to \$1.7 billion in February 2026, about 30% lower than it was in February 2025 and about one-third of the amount sent out in January this year.

The other component of outflows – outward investments by Indian companies – also contracted sharply, by 30.4%, in February 2026. According to the RBI, around 75% of the outward FDI flows in February went to Singapore, the UAE, and the UK.

As a result of all of this, net FDI in February 2026 stood at \$4.6 billion, the highest it has been since May 2022.