

Manipur again: Three killed, attack triggers protests, revives fears

Jimmy Leivon

Imphal, October 19

THREE MEITEI men were killed and three others injured in an attack by suspected Kuki militants near Nongshum Hills in Imphal East district on Monday, raising fears of renewed violence between the two communities after a brief period of relative calm between them.

The incident occurred around 9 am at Khongban Sunurok, under the jurisdiction of Sagolmang police station. The site of the attack lies along the boundary between Imphal East



Women vendors protest at a market in Imphal, Monday. ANI

and Kuki-dominated Kangpokpi district.

The deceased have been identified as Arubam Ronil, 35,

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Manipur

of Nongshum Mayai Leikai; Lai-renlakpam Inaobi, 44, of Nongshum Awang Leikai; and Kshe-trimayum Sushil, 32, of Uyumpok Mayai Leikai. Sushil reportedly succumbed to injuries while being taken to hospital. The injured have been identified as Meisnam Somen-dro, 55; Bonson Khingdram, 45; and Ngangom Suraj, 19. All three are undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Imphal.

Angered by the killings, residents from the Nongshum area brought two of the bodies to Imphal and placed them in front of the CM's bungalow. Police later retrieved the bodies and sent them to the mortuary of the Regional Institute of Medical

Sciences. Some Meitei civil society organisations also called a 48-hour shutdown, prompting businesses in the heart of the city to close operations.

Ngangom Darasing, father of one of the injured men, Suraj, said his son and other villagers had gone to the nearby hills of Nongshum to collect firewood when they came under attack. He said the villagers reportedly noticed red ribbons tied to the muzzles of the attackers' guns.

Local MLA Thokchom Lokeshor Singh alleged the involvement of Kuki-Zo militants. He also demanded the removal of a Suspension of Operations camp near the site of the attack. Additional DGP (Law and Order), Manipur, Lhari Dorjee Lhatoo said Assam Rifles personnel helped evacuate the injured and the deceased.

Beyond the name: The fault lines in the Centre's Ladakh proposal

Bashaarat Masood
Srinagar, October 19

IN MAY, months after violent protests over statehood left four dead and 44 injured in Ladakh, the Union Home Ministry and a sub-committee negotiating constitutional safeguards appeared to make their first breakthrough — a customised, “first-of-its-kind” body under Article 371. The two sides seemed to be moving towards consensus, with the Centre proposing a unique Union Territory-level body under Article 371(K), requiring Parliament's approval.

But the October 15 meeting in Leh exposed how far apart the two sides remain. After several hours of negotiations, talks appeared to have stalled, with both sides blaming the other for the lack of progress. While Ladakh Chief Secretary Ashish Kundra said the talks were “somewhat stuck on the question of the name”, the region's representatives called the proposal “unsatisfactory and unacceptable”, citing fundamental differences over the proposed body's structure, powers and constitutional safeguards.

The Union Home Ministry's 32-page draft, handed over to Ladakh's leaders on October 15, proposed a Union Territory-level elected body under an arrangement involving Article 371(K), while ruling out a legisla-

ture on the lines of Jammu and Kashmir. The leaders rejected it the following day, citing “significant gaps” between the two sides' positions. Two days later, the Ladakh administration accused the leaders of dismissing the draft as “worthless within two hours”.

“We had provided them with the draft. The expectation was that they would study it and tell us how to proceed. Unfortunately, that is not what happened. The officials come from Delhi. They had worked very hard to prepare these documents over 3-4 weeks, and they had done so in good faith,” Ladakh Chief Secretary Ashish Kundra said. “It was said that nothing had been offered and that there were no provisions for constitutional safeguards.” Ladakh's leaders, however, say Kundra was “confusing their reaction to the presentation with their reaction to the draft proposal”.

“They (Home Ministry) gave a presentation during the meeting. We expressed our dissatisfaction with what was said there,” said Sajad Hussain, co-chairman of the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), which represents Kargil. The Apex Body Leh (ABL) represents Leh. “We got the draft proposal in the night. When the leaders of Leh and Kargil, together with our legal and constitutional experts, studied it, we realised it was un-

acceptable.”

Kundra said Ladakh's representatives had scaled down their demands for Sixth Schedule status and statehood, agreeing instead to constitutional safeguards under Article 371(K) and a Union Territory-level elected body. He ruled out a legislature on the lines of Jammu and Kashmir, making the proposed body's nature and powers a key sticking point.

“Several issues were discussed. The first concerned the name of the proposed body. The Central Government suggested several names, such as ‘Union Territory-level Frontier Agency, along with four or five other possible names. It was also stated that any other name could be suggested. The discussion became somewhat stuck on the question of the name,” Kundra said.

The Ladakh leaders, he said, had suggested calling it a legislature or an assembly. “We said that this matter had already been decided. Ladakh was neither going to become a state nor a Union Territory with a legislature. Instead, a sui generis model was being developed — a unique model suited to Ladakh's aspirations and demands,” he said.

The press conference came amid growing unease in Ladakh

over the talks. “They want to create confusion among the people but they will not succeed because the people don't trust them,” Chering Dorjay Lakrook, chairman of the Apex Body Leh (ABL), said. “They say people are not with us. We have shown several times how many people are with us. The fact is that people are not with them, and that's why they had to get school children and government employees when the Prime Minister had to inaugurate the airport”.

Lakrook says the Centre has backtracked on promises made in May and has not responded positively to any of the several points put forward by the ABL and KDA, including its suggestions for the name of the elected body and its head.

“We had suggested it should be called the Assembly of Ladakh. There could have been a little bargaining, and it could have been called the Assembly of UT Ladakh. Similarly, we had suggested the chief minister's name for the head of the elected body,” Lakrook said.

While Ladakh's leaders want clear constitutional guarantees, Kundra says not everything “can be written in the constitutional amendment” and that a separate regulation will be made under Article 240.

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform the general public that the Minister of Environment

‘No respect for law’: CJP’s Ranka, Das will spend 2 more days in jail

Pragynesh
New Delhi, October 19

COCKROACH JANTA Party’s co-convenors Saurav Das and Ashutosh Ranka are set to spend two more days in Tihar Jail after a Special Executive Magistrate (SEM) court on Monday extended their judicial custody.

The order signed by SEM Ritu Raj, an ACP-rank officer with the Delhi Police, said that Ranka and Das’s conduct doesn’t inspire “confidence”, and that he found that the Ranka and Das have “no respect for law” and have habitually called for protests at de-notified sites.

The hearing at the SEM Court at Mandir Marg police station began at about 2 pm. During the hearing, the SEM also reached the conclusion that the sureties filed by Das and Ranka had a “mismatch” of photographs on the documents. A surety is a person who takes responsibility for an accused to present him in court when asked if they are out on bail.

The order came after the five-day judicial custody of the duo ended on Monday. They were arrested on October 13 for allegedly trespassing in the Jantar Mantar area, which was denotified as a protest site last week, and disturbing peace. One of the two cases filed against them following the arrest last week has now been transferred to the Crime Branch, said officers.

On Monday, the Delhi Police had sought five more days of judicial custody, arguing that they are “apprehensive” that the duo might again give a protest call. An officer told *The Indian Express* that the “apprehension” is specifically heightened considering security concerns around the festive season.

The legal representatives of Ranka and Das, during the hearing, claimed that there have been no fresh protest calls

from their side, so there was no reason to deny them bail.

“It is disappointing. The court has itself said that they don’t deem a person to be sent to judicial custody, and that’s why they ask for judicial custody. They keep rejecting sureties, and today we got sureties from people in Delhi. And now they have said that the photos are not matching, and that’s why they have been sent to judicial custody. They have not given any protest calls...,” advocate Abhik Chimni told reporters.

As per the order, two persons acted as the surety for Ranka and Das. For one person, the SEM court said that the photograph of the person did not match with the Aadhaar card. For the other person, the court said that basic details like parentage were not there.

On October 13, a group of 14 — including Ranka, Das and CJP’s national organisation in-charge Ajinkya Shinde — allegedly came through a narrow lane behind the JD(U) office, climbed over a locked iron gate and entered Jantar Mantar.

They unfurled the Tricolour and raised slogans before being detained, said officers.

Two separate cases were registered against the group. One was filed at Connaught Place police station under sections of disobedience of an order given by a public servant, house trespass, and criminal conspiracy. The second was registered at Parliament Street. The first one, filed on the basis of a complaint by representatives of the JDU office at Jantar Mantar protest site at CP police station, has been transferred to the Crime Branch.

A police officer said that it is “unprecedented” that a case of trespass has been transferred to a high-profile investigative agency like the Crime Branch.

“But maybe it’s because it happened in a high security area,” said the officer.

Neha Bora moves High Court against peace bond notice, says bid to suppress dissent

Sohini Ghosh
New Delhi, October 19

NEHA BORA, president of the All India Students’ Association (AISA), moved the Delhi High Court on Monday, challenging a notice by the Special Executive Magistrate (SEM) asking her to show cause why she should not execute a peace bond given the likelihood of her indulging in “breach of peace”.

In her plea, Neha described the police notice and the direction to execute a peace bond as a “colourable exercise of preventive powers to suppress peaceful dissent”, based on “vague and factually incorrect” material.

On October 16, Neha was detained at Mandi House while on her way to the “Lehra Do Tiranga” march at Connaught Place. She was released on October 17 after completing formalities related to her detention under Section 65 of the Delhi Police Act, 1978, which allows police to remove someone who refuses to comply with their “reasonable directions”. Dipke too was produced before the SEM at Mandir Marg and released later on Saturday after signing a peace bond.

On October 17, SEM Mahesh Kumar Meena issued a notice directing Neha to appear before the SEM, New Delhi district, on October 19. The notice accused Bora of creating “nuisance by shouting loudly in protest” at the Mandi House roundabout and of previously being “involved in repeated protest-related activity in and around Jantar Mantar, New Delhi, despite prohibitory orders 163 BNSS”. It also claimed she “instigated people to participate in unauthorised demon-



CJP leaders Saurav Das, Ashutosh Ranka and AISA’s Neha Bora have been protesting against alleged irregularities in SIR. FILE

stration at Central Park, CP, which is not a designated protest site, and hoist the national flag without obtaining valid permission”. Based on these, the notice ruled that “there is every likelihood of apprehension of breach of public peace and tranquility”.

Key grounds

Neha, represented by advocates Abhik Chimni and Pranjali Abrol, flagged that the notice does not justify the “likelihood” of breach of peace and does not even disclose a period, occasion, or event in relation to which breach of peace is being apprehended by the Delhi Police. In fact, she argued, the allegation that she “created a nuisance by shouting loudly in protest describes, at its highest, the exercise of the freedom of speech and assembly” and “discloses no likelihood of a breach of the peace”. Emphasising that the provisions under which the notice has been issued is preventive and looks only to the future, “it cannot be used to punish a person for past protest or bind her down because she may protest again”.

The plea also termed the police’s allegation that Neha in-

stigated people to participate in the demonstration at Central Park as “incorrect”, stating that she called for a peaceful gathering at Mandi House at 5 pm on October 16, which was separate from the Central Park call.

She also relied on the SC’s October 9 order dealing with protest-related curbs, flagging that the top court directed that there shall be no detention, save by procedure established by law, particularly of peaceful assembly. “A bond whose object is to restrain the petitioner from protesting would operate as a prior restraint on her fundamental rights,” her plea argued.

Neha’s plea also argued that with “routine deployment” of prohibitive orders being issued “against every call of protest”, such powers cannot be a “preventive administrative shortcut to be used whenever protest is anticipated”. She also highlighted powers for issuing orders prohibiting assembly is “meant for...immediate emergency” but “has become the standing response to dissent, amounting to deliberate use of provision to curb the rights guaranteed under Articles 19(1)(a) and 19(1)(b) (right to peaceful protest and assembly)

Internet access fundamental right for kids: What SC ruled



APURVA VISHWANATH

THE SUPREME COURT on October 15 held that "the right to access and use the internet is a fundamental right of every individual." A bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and K V Chandran added that children, "irrespective of their age, enjoy the same rights" and that "the safety of our children and their freedom are not at odds with each other. Our children are entitled to both."

How did the question reach the Supreme Court?

In 2024, a two-judge Bench of the Supreme Court comprising Justices D Y Chandrachud and J B Pardiwala held that viewing, possessing, and not reporting the possession of any child pornographic material constitute offences under the stringent Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and the Information Technology (IT) Act, even if this is not disseminated further.

It overturned a Madras High Court order that had quashed the chargesheet against an accused, holding that downloading and privately viewing such material, without publishing or transmitting it, was not an offence. Just Rights for Children Alliance, a coalition of NGOs, challenged the Madras HC order before the court and sought directions to intermediaries on reporting such material.

The Supreme Court in later orders noted platforms' lapses in complying with those directions, and that news reports showed paid promotion of child sexual exploitation and abuse material (CSEAM) through redirect links.

While ruling on compliance with its earlier rulings, the court considered a trend "across the globe" of limiting children's access to social media "in the name of their safety". The Bench said it "decided conclusively not to endorse the same."

What did the court hold on



ILLUSTRATION: VIKAS AGARWAL

Internet access?

The court cited jurisprudence recognising the right to access the internet as a fundamental right. In *Anuradha Bhasin v Union of India* (2020), a three-judge bench held that freedom of speech and expression, and the freedom to carry on trade or business through the internet are protected under Articles 19(1)(a) and 19(1)(g).

In another ruling, *Pragya Prasad v Union of India* (2025), a two-judge Bench held that excluding persons with disabilities from digital KYC violated Article 21 and that "the right to digital access is an intrinsic component of the right to life".

It also cited *Cricknet Association of Bengal* (1995), which held that Article 19(1)(a) includes "the right to know and to receive and impart information and ideas".

Last week's ruling said that "for many children, particularly in remote areas" internet is often "the only source of learning and information".

The court's reading of the right to access the internet as a fundamental right under-

The test

Any restriction on a fundamental right has to pass a three-pronged test.

It must be through a duly passed legislation, there must be a legitimate state interest, and the encroachment on rights must be proportional to the object sought.

• The court's suggestions

- The court suggested greater emphasis on parental consent, guidance and oversight and a 'child mode' with accounts private by default, restrictions on contacts and messages from unknown adults, and moderation of advertising and content. It left the modalities "to the wisdom of the Union of India".
- The Union can also restrict access to content "inherently harmful to them, such as adult content websites." Among the court's directions to the Union is the creation of a National Hash & URL List Database for child sexual exploitation and abuse material (CSEAM), with entries requiring confirmation by "at least three trained human analysts".
- For other CSEAM, removals must be reported "within two hours from such removal", and complaints acknowledged "within twenty-four hours from receipt".
- The court also directed that the Union must consider exemplary monetary fines, and that revenue from CSEAM offered through paywalls should be forfeited and disgorged.

pins its rejection of blanket bans or disproportionate restrictions on children's internet access.

"All that we are trying to say is that any blanket restriction on the access of internet by children is nothing more than unproven measures of proven disproportionality. No jurisdiction has, so far, been able to demonstrate that children are any safer on account of such measures," the court said.

This is because any restriction on a fundamental right has to pass the three-pronged test laid down by the court. First, the restriction must be through duly enacted legislation; second, the law must demonstrate a legitimate state interest that has a nexus with the objective sought to be achieved by Parliament; and third, and most crucially, the encroachment on fundamental rights must be proportionate to that objective.

What restrictions did the court decline?

The Bench accepted that "the internet,

The court held that safety measures should target harmful material and those responsible for it, not children's access

as it exists today, is far from safe for our children". But it said, "any measure for the safety of children must be directed at the harmful material and those responsible for the same, and not at the children themselves". Keeping children off the internet because of such failures "would be to mistake the victim for the problem".

The ruling also said that age-based limits require identifying every user's age and "continuous collection and monitoring of sensitive data", creating "an overall disproportionate risk of misuse and surveillance".

The court also questioned the effectiveness of such measures. "Children do not cease to use the internet merely because the law prohibits them from doing so," and that they "move to other platforms and websites that are unregulated and even more unsafe," the court said.

What is the key takeaway?

The Supreme Court has held that the right to access and use the internet is a fundamental right that extends to children. It did not rule out safeguards: it left the Union to design a parental-consent and "child mode" framework, and said the Union can restrict categories of content that are inherently harmful. The Union must frame guidelines, amend the IT Rules where needed and file an affidavit before the next hearing on December 10, 2026. States enacting laws on screen time curbs for minors will have to ensure these restrictions remain within constitutionally permissible limits.

On one hand, there is value in recognising a right as a fundamental right. Take the right to privacy for instance. However, there are questions about the practical effect of the Supreme Court's steady widening of fundamental rights. Experts believe that the bouquet of fundamental rights can often outpace the state's ability or willingness to deliver what those rights promise. Court rulings, some argue, can be seen as doctrinal attempts that are overlooked in practice, especially when governments rarely face consequences for not providing the infrastructure those rights presuppose.

For example, the *Anuradha Bhasin* ruling on internet curbs is routinely invoked in breach of its guidelines.

Parental consent makes right to internet conditional



VIKRAM RAJ

A consent regime makes the father the platform's compliance officer. For a girl in a conservative home, a queer teenager, a child being abused by the very adult who holds the Aadhaar, 'parental oversight' is not a safeguard

THE SUPREME Court's October 15 order has been read, rightly, as a defeat for the social media ban. Justices J B Pardiwala and K Vinod Chandran held that access to the internet is a fundamental right that children share "irrespective of their age", that a blanket restriction is no answer, and that keeping children offline because platforms fail to remove abuse material "would be to mistake the victim for the problem". Having spent months arguing against Karnataka's under-16 proposal, we can take the win. But look at what the order, and everything around it, quietly agrees on.

On September 28, a bench led by the CJI heard a second petition by the same alliance. It asked the Centre to examine whether anyone under 18 should need a parent's consent to open an account, and the Solicitor General said the Data Protection law's parental-consent model could be adopted in some other law to do it. The Pardiwala bench recommended "parental consent, guidance and oversight" with a dedicated child mode. The petitioner wants it, the government wants it, both benches want it.

The Data Protection Rules say a platform may not process a child's data without verifiable consent from a parent, and that it must confirm the parent is an adult using "reliable details of identity and age", with a government-notified digital locker as one route. For every user who is a child, an adult must then produce government-grade proof of who they are and how old they are. The platform keeps enough to prove it did this, and the child's account is tethered to a named adult's identity record for good.

Read the Pardiwala order's own warning against that. Age-based restrictions, the bench wrote, "inevitably, always require identifying and ascertaining the age of each and every user, continuous collection and monitoring of sensitive data and an overall disproportionate risk of misuse and surveillance". Every word applies to parental consent as the Rules define it. The only difference from a ban is that the child gets in, once an adult has been identified on her behalf. Family mediation deepens inequalities where the household already controls the device, and ASER 2024 shows rural girls of 14 to 16 already own fewer phones and use social media less than boys. A consent regime makes the father the platform's compliance officer. For a girl in a conservative home, a queer teenager, a child being abused by the very adult who holds the Aadhaar, "parental oversight" is not a safeguard. It is the problem with a legal mandate behind it. Platforms can live with this, and the state gets a verified identity layer without ever having to pass a law that says so. And the people it costs, children and the adults tied to their accounts, were never in the room.

The order leaves a harder route open, which is why nobody has taken it. The bench named it in passing, accounts private by default, no contact from unknown adults, controls on advertising to children. These are obligations on the platform, which the Centre can impose under the IT Rules. Where age must be known at all, the check can return one bit, over or under, and nothing else. And the court has asked the Centre to report on what tools platforms actually use to detect and remove abuse material. That report is the test. If the answer is thin, the remedy is penalties for the platform, not papers from the parent.

U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE'S VISIT COMES AMID TENSION IN TIES OVER VISA RESTRICTIONS, TARIFF THREATS

Eve of visit, Rubio links pause on Russia sanctions to India-US deal

'Trying to finalise a trade deal with India right now... we are very close'

Ravi Dutta Mishra
New Delhi, October 19

DAYS AFTER the US signed a diesel purchase deal with Russia and announced a pause on the Lindsey O Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026, United States Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Monday said the decision to waive Russia oil sanctions also took into account the India-US trade deal, which is close to conclusion.

Rubio's comments come



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio at Registan Square in Samarkand, Uzbekistan on Monday. AP

ahead of his scheduled visit to Mumbai on Tuesday, where he will be holding talks with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar.

"We have had to waive sanctions over the past months,

looking at the global supplies, looking at global prices, and the impact it was having on other countries. I know diesel prices are high in the United States,

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Energy, trade, tech on table at meeting with Jaishankar today

Shubhajit Roy
Mumbai, October 19

US SECRETARY of State Marco Rubio's visit to India comes amid the tension in relations between the two countries over visa restrictions and tariff threats.

His meeting with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar in Mumbai on Tuesday afternoon is being seen as an attempt to repair ties. Indian officials said the two sides are expected to discuss "energy, trade and investment, defence, critical and

emerging technologies".

With Prime Minister Narendra Modi expected to travel to the US for the G20 leaders summit in December, the meeting will also lay the groundwork for his visit.

The choice of venue is being seen as an outreach to India's business elite, which is based in Mumbai. Returning to India after less than five months, Rubio will not be going to Delhi. He will, instead, head to Jamnagar on Wednesday.

According to the Ministry of
»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Rubio

but they're really, really high in a bunch of other countries around the world, and then we have to manage all of these things. We're trying to finalise a trade deal with India right now. We're very close to doing that. So that's one of the things we've taken into consideration," Rubio said at a press conference in Uzbekistan.

The Lindsey O Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act gave US President Donald Trump the power to target countries importing Russian oil and gas with up to 100% tariffs.

Rubio said that every country has a complex set of factors that they have to take into account, and that for some countries, it's difficult to acquire energy from alternative sources. "That's not an excuse, but all that has to be balanced when you make foreign policy," he said, while responding to a question on the waiver and its impact on

the Russia-Ukraine war.

"The foreign policy of the United States, of course, takes into account what's happening with the war between Russia and Ukraine, but it is not solely dominated by that. It hasn't taken into account a variety of other factors, including our bilateral relationships with other countries, and what they realistically are capable of being able to do in terms of their own energy supplies. You also can't unravel the economy of other countries because of one central issue. So that's the complex part of having to balance all this," Rubio said.

Earlier, speaking in Washington over the weekend, Rubio had said: "These sanctions were not just sanctions on Russia. They include tariffs on a number of countries -- India, for example, and others. And so I think the President wants to take the 60-day period of time to sort of analyse what imposing both sanctions and tariffs will mean to the global economy and even

to the US economy."

"Then you've got countries like India, for example, that have voluntarily diversified their energy portfolio, but are still getting a substantial amount of energy from Russia because it's hard to pivot from one day to the next. But they're also an important ally and partner of the United States. So we need that period of time to sort of study all this and figure out what the right combination is," he said.

With the threat of 100% US tariffs eased, India and the US could manage to sign a deal as both countries seem to have reached a broad alignment on other issues. Both the Section 301 investigation on New Delhi and the trade deal have resulted in a convergence between the countries. The major point of difference remained on the use of tariffs over India's purchase of Russian oil. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) had said that the government remains committed to ensuring the nation's energy security "through

diversified sourcing and based on evolving market dynamics". It had said that the proposed legislation's implications for the India-US relationship as well as the global energy market had been flagged in discussions with US representatives.

While Delhi had already banned imports of goods using forced labour following the first US Section 301 investigation, India, along with other G20 countries, released a joint statement earlier this month committing to take action against structural overcapacity in certain geographies, particularly in sectors like automobiles, electric vehicle, batteries, chemicals, foundational semiconductors and solar panels. As per the Council on Foreign Relations, diesel prices in the US averaged \$6.18 per gallon as of October 12, up from \$3.48 at the start of this year, according to the US Energy Information Administration, and higher fuel costs have passed through to US consumers.

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Energy, trade, tech

External Affairs (MEA), Rubio will land in Mumbai on Tuesday afternoon around 2.15 pm, and will meet Jaishankar around 4 pm. He will also pay tribute to the 26/11 memorial at Taj Palace hotel and attend the US @250 event.

The visit to Jamnagar, the seat of Reliance's refinery, is significant since US billionaire Elon Musk, a strong partner of US President Donald Trump's administration, had alleged that the launch of his satellite communications company, Starlink, was being delayed in India due to "certain oligarchs... to maintain their monopolistic chokehold". "Is Ambani the real boss of India," Musk had said in a post on X.

Sources said Rubio is expected to allay the concerns of India's business community on the proposed trade deal between the two sides, and underline that there is enough space for both American and Indian businesses to tap the potential of the Indian market.

In this context, the energy needs of India's growing middle class is a case in point -- where US energy supply can supplement the Russian and Gulf supplies to meet the high-energy demands in the Indian market, sources said.

The two sides are also expected to talk about the techno-

logical partnership between the two countries, and the importance of the resilience of supply chains -- at a time when China is once again restricting critical technologies.

On October 16-18, China's Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Science and Technology jointly published a draft proposal to add 40 technologies to its list of prohibited or restricted export items. This included artificial intelligence, solar manufacturing and biomedicine which targets cell and gene therapy technology platforms.

According to sources, the two sides will also discuss efforts to increase defence sales and co-production, mainly in the air and sea domains where the US has significant technological advantages. "The two ministers will discuss the possibility of technology transfer, which has been a major ask from the Indian side. Also, the two sides are looking at how the Make-in-India programme can be incorporated into India's defence purchases from America," sources said.

The Rubio-Jaishankar bilateral is also expected to discuss the issue of mobility restrictions that have cast some shadow on the India-US relationship. The Indian side is expected to make the point about how the Indian business and skilled professionals have contributed to the US economy.

Rubio last visited Delhi in May this year, when he attended the Quad Foreign Ministers' meeting.

‘Malicious’: India rejects OIC remarks on Jammu & Kashmir

Divya A

New Delhi, October 19

INDIA HAS strongly rejected a resolution by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on the purported deterioration in the humanitarian, human rights, and security situation in Jammu and Kashmir. It said the 57-member bloc of Islamic nations has allowed itself to be “misused” by Pakistan for its “bigoted agenda”.

In a statement on Monday, a day after the resolution passed during the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers’ meeting held in Baghdad, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said, “The references to India are malicious, biased and false, and have been orchestrated by Pakistan. We are disappointed that the OIC has once again allowed itself to be misused by Pakistan for its bigoted agenda.”

OIC’s Baghdad declaration also maintained that the Kashmir issue remains an unresolved matter. To this, New Delhi emphasised that the OIC has “no locus standi whatsoever” to comment on matters that are strictly internal to India.

“The Union Territories of J&K, and Ladakh are integral and inalienable parts of India. Politically motivated propaganda can never alter this reality,” the MEA said, adding, “Over the past years since the abrogation of Art 370, J&K has seen significant economic growth and benefits...”

This, the MEA said, is in “stark contrast” to the situation in Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir where Islamabad has “unleashed violence, repression and brutality on civilian protesters...”

“The only issues related to J&K that remain to be addressed are Pakistan vacating areas under its illegal and forcible occupation and ceasing its continued support to cross-border terrorism,” it added.

OIC has made repeated statements and adopted resolutions regarding J&K in the wake of abrogation of Article 370. The most recent resolution comes just weeks after the joint communiqué issued by the OIC Contact Group on Jammu and Kashmir on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York in September 2026.



GURJIT SINGH

THE FIRST ASEAN-India Defence Think Tank Forum, organised by the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses in New Delhi on October 14-15, brought together representatives of India and all 11 ASEAN member states. Its significance lies not merely in fulfilling a commitment but in addressing a gap in India-ASEAN engagement. As I have argued in *The Durian Flavour: India-ASEAN After a Decade of the Act East Policy*, the Delhi Dialogue, conceived as a Track 1.5 platform, lost momentum as participation by ASEAN ministers diminished. By concentrating on experts, researchers and defence professionals rather than seeking

India and ASEAN need to talk more

ministerial participation, the new initiative has the potential to sustain a more candid and informed conversation.

The Defence Minister's inaugural address provided a useful political framework. He envisaged an Indo-Pacific in which all countries, large and small, could "make their own choices, protect their interests and pursue development in peace". The forum's five thematic areas reflected the breadth of the agenda: Strategic stability and regional geopolitics; maritime cooperation amid grey-zone challenges; humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR); defence technology and innovation; and defence-industrial collaboration.

My session on strategic stability and regional geopolitics highlighted both convergences and gaps in perception. ASEAN interlocutors generally appeared less inclined

to discuss some of the sharper strategic concerns that animate Indian thinking. For instance, the South China Sea Code of Conduct did not emerge spontaneously in the discussion, although it was raised later. The Quad was also relatively peripheral. This should not be read as evidence of indifference; rather, it illustrates the sensitivities surrounding strategic competition and the desire to preserve ASEAN's autonomy. India must understand these concerns rather than assume its Indo-Pacific priorities will automatically resonate across Southeast Asia.

The real test of the maiden ASEAN-India Defence Think Tank Forum will be whether it produces sustained engagement

Nevertheless, there is considerable scope for practical cooperation. HADR is an established and relatively comfortable area for collaboration. The maritime domain and cyber security could provide further opportunities for joint research and innovation. The industrial dimension is equally important. ASEAN partners are unlikely to be interested simply in purchasing Indian equipment. They will look for reliable maintenance, repair and overhaul, technology transfer, local industrial participation and sustained technical support.

At the same time, the forum exposed a wider weakness in India's regional outreach. Sustained interaction requires more than hosting conferences in New Delhi. ASEAN intellectuals and policy specialists are regularly invited to fully funded programmes by other dialogue partners. India must com-

pete in this crowded field through consistent engagement, research collaboration, fellowships and reciprocal institutional exchanges. The Malaysian suggestion to engage more closely with the Network of ASEAN Defence and Security Institutions, alongside proposals for tabletop exercises, deserves serious consideration.

The real test of this maiden forum will be whether it will lead to more than just another successful conference. The Defence Minister proposed a joint research agenda, exchanges involving younger scholars, pilot projects, tabletop exercises, and periodic progress reviews. These suggestions provide a practical roadmap. The forum should meet regularly, preferably biennially, with participating institutions undertaking interim work.

The writer is former ambassador to ASEAN

PRESIDENT MACRON DECLINES INTERIOR MINISTER'S OFFER TO RESIGN; MAYORS REBUKE GOVT FOR SECURITY FAILURE

France imposes curfew in riot-hit areas

Unions call for national strikes on November 5

Reuters
Paris, October 19

FRENCH AUTHORITIES have issued a curfew in the northern city of Lille from 1800 GMT on Monday until 0400 GMT Tuesday, following a weekend of riots, a source in Prime Minister Sebastien Lecornu's office said.

The curfew, which runs for two days, also covers the cities of Douai, Wattignies and Denain in northern France, the source added.

Earlier, French PM Sebastien Lecornu said he had asked local authorities to impose partial curfews this evening following violent protests across the nation during the weekend.

Lecornu said he was "fully resolved to restoring public order" and that if declaring a state of emergency was deemed necessary "we could do so", but added that at this stage partial curfews seemed "more appropriate". He did not say which cities would impose partial curfews nor what form they would take, although he excluded imposing a full curfew on the whole of Paris.

"These curfews must be local and partial. It is out of the question to put all of Paris under curfew," Interior Min-



A vandalised Rolex store following clashes during a national day of protest, in Marseille on Monday. REUTERS

ister Laurent Nunez also told reporters during the same press conference there were no plans to cancel Tuesday evening's Paris Saint Germain versus Barcelona soccer match.

The mayors of France's biggest cities on Monday demanded answers from the government to what they called a lack of preparation by security forces as the country licked its wounds from a weekend of rioting and looting.

President Emmanuel Macron's office said on Monday he had turned down his Interior Minister Laurent Nunez's offer to resign, telling him instead to put an end to barricades and looting and be transparent over what Macron called "intelligence and foresight failings".

The mayors of Paris, Marseille and Lyon said in a joint op-ed published by the newspaper Liberation that they were used to demonstrations and protests.

"But on Saturday ... for the first time, we had the feeling that whole sections of our cities had been left without protection," the mayors — all from the centre-left — said. "We now need to patch the wounds of our cities and face up to the anger of our residents, aghast at this level of violence."

Marseille, one of the cities worst hit by the riots, put in place a ban on gatherings and demonstrations. French unions meanwhile called for a new round of national strikes and demonstrations on November 5.

EUROPEAN GOVERNMENTS CAUTION CITIZENS

European governments on Monday advised citizens travelling to France to avoid large crowds and exercise caution, warning of a deterioration in security conditions after thousands were arrested and shops looted in protests over the weekend. Demonstrations across France over high prices and declining public services erupted into riots on Saturday.

ITALY

Italy said its citizens should register their presence in France on a website or an app to enable them to be located, as it warned them to avoid large crowds and exercise extreme caution.



CZECH REPUBLIC

Czechs in France are advised to avoid demonstrations, marches and public gatherings, CTK news agency reported. The security situation in France has deteriorated, according to the Czech foreign affairs ministry.



POLAND

Poland said in its country guidance that visitors should avoid places where demonstrations are taking place, though there was no change to its overall guidance about whether France was safe to visit.



NETHERLANDS

The Dutch government in an advisory last updated on October 7 warned travelers to France to avoid protests.



REUTERS

GERMANY

The German foreign ministry said further riots in the coming days couldn't be ruled out and urged German nationals to follow instructions from local police. It warned citizens that they could face fines or claims for damages if they failed to leave unauthorised demonstrations when asked to do so.



NORDICS

Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway have issued advisories urging their citizens in France to avoid demonstrations and follow the guidance of local authorities.



Houthi strike govt military camp in Yemen, 53 killed

Associated Press

Cairo, October 19

IRANIAN-BACKED Houthi rebels struck a military camp for government forces in southern Yemen on Monday, killing at least 53 soldiers, provincial authorities in Shabwa said Monday, making it one of the deadliest attacks in the recent surge in fighting.

The rebels fired three ballistic missiles on the al-Alam military camp in the southern province of Shabwa in an attack that also wounded 200 recruits, the Shabwa provincial government said. The Iran-backed rebels have acknowledged targeting the camp in Shabwa.

Shabwa provincial government said in a statement that the death toll is preliminary, suggesting it may rise. It said the recruits were receiving training to be part of internal security forces.

"This bloody, treacherous attack targeted new recruits in the training and preparation phase and is considered an extremely critical military escalation and a blatant aggression on the security and stability of Shabwa province," the statement said.

It called on Yemen's president, the Saudi-led coalition and the government to expedite providing air defence and early warning systems to reinforce Shabwa's capabilities. It also added that it instructed two public hospitals and other private health facilities in the province to provide care for the wounded and transfer the seriously hurt to

US issues alert over attacks backed by Iran

US missions across West Asia posted a security alert on Sunday advising their nationals to "exercise heightened vigilance," citing Houthi attacks against Saudi Arabia and the potential for Iran and its proxies to launch attacks against American interests.

"Be aware of potential flight cancellations, airspace closures, and travel disruptions," the advisory said, adding that "the hostilities have the potential to escalate rapidly beyond that immediate area." "Iran and groups supportive of Iran may target other US interests overseas or at locations associated with the United States and Americans throughout the world, including US businesses and other institutions," the advisory said.

The advisory came amid heightened security concerns in the region following drone and missile attacks by Yemen's Houthis on Saudi Arabia. PTI

specialised units.

Rashad al-Alimi, head of the ruling Presidential Leadership Council, promised a "firm response." He said the attack reflects the Houthis' "approach of resorting to cowardly terrorist attacks whenever they face pressures or their Iranian-backed sabotage plots falter."

UNDER THE PACT, NEW ZEALAND HAS COMMITTED TO INVEST \$20 BILLION IN INDIA OVER THE NEXT 15 YEARS

India-New Zealand FTA kicks in, gives exports zero-duty access

ENS Economic Bureau
New Delhi, October 19

INDIA-NEW Zealand trade deal, which has secured full tariff elimination for all Indian exports to New Zealand while reducing tariffs on 95% of New Zealand's imports into the country, came into effect on Tuesday. Under the pact, New Zealand has also committed to invest \$20 billion in the country over the next 15 years.

A host of Indian goods from labour-intensive sectors such as leather, footwear, apparel and textiles will attract zero import duty in New Zealand from October 20, when the India-New Zealand FTA (free trade agreement) comes into force, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Monday.

He added that sensitive sectors such as dairy, onions, chickpeas, peas, corn, almonds, artificial honey, and sugar have been kept out of the trade deal. The commerce ministry has

also notified the procedure for allocation of Tariff Rate Quotas (TRQ) under the trade agreement. Goods under TRQ include apples, kiwi fruit, albumin, and Manuka honey. Goyal said Centres of Excellence would be set up under the agricultural partnership in areas like apples, kiwifruit, and honey. He said sensitive agricultural sectors, including dairy, would remain protected under the agreement.

Sensitive sectors, duty free access

He said the Commerce and Industry departments would work with state governments to inform farmers, entrepreneurs and businesses about opportunities arising from the FTA. The agreement was signed on April 27 and ratified on September 21. Bilateral trade in goods and services stands at \$2.4 billion.

Starting tomorrow, 100% of the goods from every sector in India going to New Zealand will go there with zero duty," he



Several products from New Zealand will see lower tariffs. EXPRESS PHOTO

said. The duty-free access is expected to improve the competitiveness of Indian exports, particularly in labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, apparel, leather and footwear, while creating opportunities for engineering goods, pharmaceuticals, and agricultural products.

India and New Zealand have little bilateral trade, at just \$1.3 billion in 2024-25. New Delhi's goods exports during the last financial year stood at

almonds, among others.

However, a number of products from New Zealand will see lower tariffs. These products include wine, pharmaceutical drugs, polymers, aluminium, iron and steel articles, etc. India has also allowed honey, apples, kiwi fruit, and albumins, including milk albumin, under a TRQ.

Student mobility, work visas

Under the trade pact, New Zealand has created a dedicated pathway for student mobility and post-study work visas with India. The agreement removes numerical caps on Indian students, guarantees a minimum of 20 hours per week of work during study, and provides extended post-study work opportunities up to three years for STEM Bachelor's and Master's graduates, and up to four years for Doctorate holders-creating clear pathways for skills development and global careers, the ministry said.