

18 held, ₹100 crore traced in Northeast drug raids: govt.

Home Ministry says Central agencies, police target international 'narco-hawala' network in Aizawl, Champhai, Zokhawthar in Mizoram, Churachandpur in Manipur, and the Cachar region of Assam

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

In a major crackdown on drug trafficking, enforcement agencies have conducted simultaneous raids at 38 locations across Assam, Mizoram, and Manipur, leading to the arrest of 18 accused persons and the detection of ₹100 crore in "hawala" transactions in connection with an international "narco-hawala" racket.

Congratulating the anti-narcotics team comprising Central agencies and police forces of the three States, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said the Narendra Modi government had dealt another "lethal blow" to drugs with "Operation Trident".

"Our agencies launched a barrage of simultaneous crackdowns across 38 loca-

Drug control

Central agencies carried out searches over alleged trafficking of drugs from Myanmar and 'hawala' settlements of proceeds

- Local carriers were hired by Myanmar-based organisers to move consignments
- Payments routed through 'hawala' accounts receiving drug proceeds from across the Northeast
- Bank accounts in Champhai, Aizawl, and Lawngtlai of Mizoram received drug money and settled with suppliers in Myanmar, says the ED



tions in Assam, Mizoram, and Manipur on October 23, smashing an international narco-cartel," Mr. Shah said in a post on X.

Coordinated action

The operation led by the Narcotics Control Bureau in coordination with the State police and Directo-

rate of Enforcement resulted in the freezing of 1,424 bank accounts, the attachment of assets estimated at ₹17.82 crore, the seizure of 500 detonators, and ₹12 lakh in cash, and the arrest of 18 people, a release by the Union Home Ministry said on Sunday.

The coordinated opera-

tion after days of collating confidential intelligence comprehensively covered major urban centres and sensitive border corridors such as Aizawl, Champhai, and Zokhawthar in Mizoram, Churachandpur in Manipur, and the transit corridor in the Cachar region of Assam, the Ministry said.

"The network trafficked narcotics across the borders of India, Myanmar, and Bangladesh through the Death Triangle Corridor. The offensive attests to India's Himalayan resolve to realise the mission of eradicating every drug network by December 31, 2029. India will hammer until the last nail is driven into the coffin of drug cartels," Mr. Shah said.

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'18 held, ₹100 cr. traced in Northeast drug raids'

In a separate press release, the Directorate of Enforcement (ED) said coordinated searches were carried out under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002, in connection with three cases alleging trafficking of heroin, brown sugar, and methamphetamine tablets from Myanmar, and "hawala" settlements of drug proceeds. The ED's investigation has revealed that the same set of bank accounts in Champhai, Aizawl and Lawngtlai received drug money generated in Manipur, Mizoram, Assam, and Tripura, and settled it with suppliers in Myanmar.

"Heroin and methamphetamine tablets entering Mizoram and Manipur are consumed locally and moved onward through Assam to the rest of India and Bangladesh, and the drug money generated across this chain flows back to the border towns of Mizoram for settlement with Myanmar-based suppliers. The trafficking corridor works as a two-way street through the Champhai-Zokhawthar sector of Mizoram," the ED said, explaining the *modus operandi*.

The Myanmar-based organisers hired local carriers and moved consignments concealed in soap cases, taxis, motorcycles, and escorted truck convoys. Payments were routed through the same Champhai "hawala" accounts receiving drug proceeds from across Northeast India. Drugs are sold for cash across Manipur, Assam, Tripura, and other parts of India, with the proceeds routed to suppliers in Myanmar through "hawala" channels.

In Manipur's Churachandpur, syndicate operatives collected cash for handlers, who channelled the funds into the banking system through mini-ATM/customer service point counters. The ED identified a counter which, under the code name "Nuniang", made 2,947 transfers involving ₹175.03 crore between 2024 and June 2026.

Congress demands Manipur CM's resignation, fresh polls

The Hindu Bureau

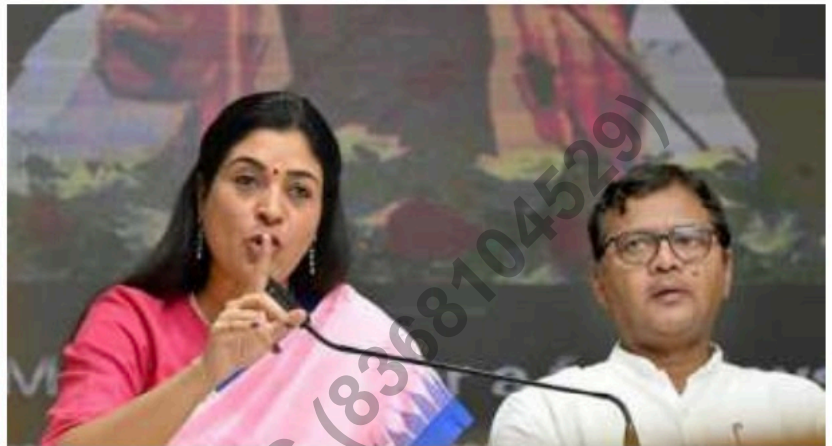
NEW DELHI

Alleging a failure to contain renewed violence in Manipur, the Congress on Sunday demanded the resignation of Chief Minister Y. Khemchand Singh, dissolution of the State Assembly, and fresh elections, alongside an intervention by the Union government to initiate an inclusive peace process.

No armed group or individual attacking civilians should enjoy “political protection or immunity”, the principal Opposition party at the Centre said.

The Congress leaders cited recent incidents of violence, including the killing of three Meitei civilians on October 19 and clashes in Kamjong district in which Kuki and Naga civilians were killed.

Addressing a press conference, Congress MP and Manipur in-charge Saptagiri Ulaka called for time-bound investigations and



Congress leaders Alka Lamba and Saptagiri Ulaka addressing the media in New Delhi on Sunday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

prosecution in cases of killings, firing, arson, and destruction of civilian property in the State.

Referring to the protests on Friday, Mr. Ulaka said thousands of people across five districts took to the streets and marched towards the Lok Bhavan before police stopped them. They carried out unique “sound protests”, Mr. Ulaka said, using the very technique prescribed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who had asked Indians to bang utensils during the COVID-19 pandem-

ic. The police, Mr. Ulaka alleged, used a heavy hand to suppress the protest by using tear gas shells and lathi charge against the people.

Mahila Congress president Alka Lamba, who visited Manipur earlier this month, said women affected by the conflict continued to face hardship. “The BJP government in Manipur has completely failed to stop the violence there,” she said.

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As Siang dam protests turn violent NHPC's Rs 11-cr PR push faces test

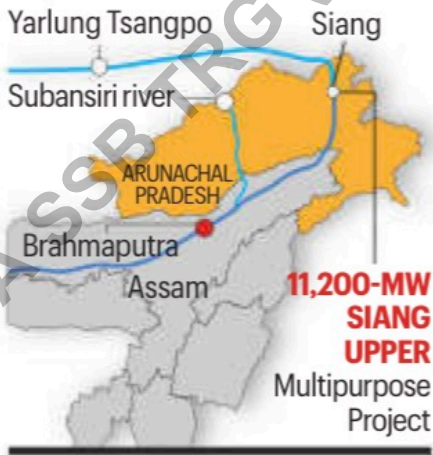
Jay Mazoomdaar
& Shinjini Ghosh

New Delhi, October 25

A HEAVY security deployment maintained an uneasy calm at Pasighat in Arunachal Pradesh's East Siang district after protests against the proposed Siang dam turned violent late on Friday and continued into the early hours of Saturday.

District Magistrate Jayanti Pertin told *The Indian Express* on Sunday afternoon that the

• PROPOSED PROJECT



law and order situation is under control. "It is too early to assess the damage. The restrictions on public gathering under section 163 of the BNSS in Pasighat, Mebo and Ruksin will continue until further orders," she said.

The simmering unrest underscores the resistance confronting the proposed 11,200 MW Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP) being undertaken by NHPC Limited.

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Siang dam protests

Sources in the hydropower PSU acknowledged that opposition to the project showed no signs of abating despite what they described as “pro-people CSR activities” and the appointment of a public relations agency to build local support.

NHPC awarded Mumbai-based Concept Public Relations a one-year, Rs 8.73-crore contract in July 2025, with services beginning the following month. The engagement was subsequently extended by three months, until November 6, 2026, at unchanged rates, taking its value to approximately Rs 10.91 crore.

The latest violence came during this extended outreach campaign.

On Friday, security personnel fired tear gas shells at bandh supporters in Geku who were demanding withdrawal of the forces and scrapping of the project. By late evening, groups of young protesters had taken to the streets in Pasighat, where incidents of arson and vandalism were reported.

On Saturday, Chief Minister Pema Khandu expressed concern and offered talks. On Sunday, Khandu posted on X: “Misinformation and misconceptions surrounding the Siang Upper Multipurpose Project are creating apprehensions among our people. Bridging this information gap through facts, transparency and open dialogue is essential.”

A senior NHPC official in Pasighat said the company suffered significant damage on Friday night. “One office was completely gutted while the other was partially damaged. A genset was also destroyed. We have not stepped out of our campus and are not in a position to assess the damage immediately,” he said.

On hiring the PR agency, the senior NHPC official said: “We

hired them as a professional service provider to put forward our side, to convey the facts about the project. This has helped as we have many supporters in the community who are not very vocal because of the pressure on them from the violent elements who have been disrupting our work.”

When contacted, Concept PR declined to comment on the engagement. Sources in the agency said a team of more than 30 executives, including staff from Delhi and Kolkata, was assigned to the project at Concept’s Itanagar office. Most of them have been withdrawn in the past few days as the protests turned violent.

The tender document for the PR assignment, reviewed by *The Indian Express*, makes clear why NHPC wanted professional persuasion. It identifies “growing negative discourse” around the dam project and acknowledges concerns over submergence, displacement, environmental damage and land loss. The campaign sought to reposition the project as an opportunity for development and improved livelihoods.

The strategy operated across three distinct levels: Siang basin (Ground Zero), Itanagar (state capital) and New Delhi. Locally, the agency was to engage village elders, community leaders, priests, school headmasters, the youth, NGOs and indigenous groups. State-level outreach targeted officials, NGOs and media, while national messaging would emphasise clean energy, water security and national development.

The monthly schedule mandated 40 project staff, two NGO collaborations, 10 media-management engagements, four community events, four local travel assignments, 10 local social-media influencers, two na-

tional-media engagements and 10 skilled communication officials.

The prescribed community outreach included listening sessions, public forums, closed-door meetings with government representatives and individual relationship-building with influential figures. Stakeholder mapping, sentiment assessments and a database of opinion leaders were intended to guide persuasion and feedback.

The media plan spanned newspapers, television, digital platforms and YouTube. Expected outputs included favourable news reports, opinion articles, interviews, features, press-release coverage and site visits. The tender also sought sustained relationships with media outlets, crisis-response arrangements and monitoring of coverage and public sentiment. Reports were to track activities, audience reach, community feedback and shifts in perception.

Opposition to NHPC’s outreach predates the PR contract.

In March 2024, the Siang Indigenous Farmers’ Forum (SIFF) demanded withdrawal of what it said were NHPC CSR allocations of Rs 16.61 crore to the Siang district administration and Rs 94.29 crore to Upper Siang, questioning the use of the money for government schemes.

The proposed dam project remains at the pre-feasibility survey stage. The Government has presented it as a strategic response to China’s upstream dam plans, but it faces strong opposition from sections of the indigenous Adi community over fears of displacement, submergence of ancestral lands, loss of livelihoods and environmental devastation.

In his X post Sunday, Chief Minister Khandu also wrote that he met representatives of the Arunachal Indigenous Tribes Forum (AITF) and community organisations “to discuss the pro-

ject and strengthen our collective efforts to spread awareness across Arunachal Pradesh”. “Our people deserve accurate information to understand the project, its strategic importance and the concerns associated with it,” he posted.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Ojing Tasing, MLA from the Pangin constituency in Siang district, claimed that “85% of the residents are okay with the project”.

Tasing, who is also a State Cabinet Minister, said, “The government has decided to continue with the PFR (Pre-Feasibility Report). I was at ground zero and there was no unrest, especially where the proposed site is. There is politics involved and outsiders are provoking the villagers.” He said: “We have been inviting affected stakeholders time and again. Since water is a national security issue, the Central Government is also interested. So we will go ahead with the PFR. Whatever unrest happened was created by Congress.”

However, Bosiram Siram, president of the Arunachal Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC), said the government had “mishandled the entire situation”. “Unless the local people, indigenous farmers and villagers are convinced, it is not possible to implement the project because the landowners are reluctant. The government did not consult with the landowners and a large population can be displaced as a result of the project,” Siram said.

Tajom Ejing, a resident of Geku village in the Upper Siang district, said the issue has been a longstanding one. “The current situation is very tough because residents of the affected areas are not ready to accept the construction of the dam. The state government should speak directly with the people but instead they tend to deploy military forces,” said Ejing, who is also a part of SIFF.

Fertiliser sales see sharp dip as El Nino dries up farm demand

Tractor sales also down 18.1% in Sept amid festival calendar shift

Harish Damodaran
New Delhi, October 25

IN WHAT could be a real indicator of deficient rains and the El Nino effect on farms, domestic sales of all fertilisers, including urea, are down compared to last year.

The sales drop during April-September 2026 over April-September 2025 — roughly co-

● Production, import, sale of fertilisers (lakh tonnes)

PRODUCTION	UREA	DAP	MOP	COMPLEXES	SSP
Apr-Sep 2025	144.44	20.01	0	59.29	29.36
Apr-Sep 2026	150.64	19.94	0	38.22	26.32
IMPORT					
Apr-Sep 2025	39.79	38.26	11.91	20.19	0
Apr-Sep 2026	55.89	33.99	16.79	13.86	0
SALE					
Apr-Sep 2025	193.08	43.89	10.94	77.27	28.68
Apr-Sep 2026	185.22	43.64	9.66	60.08	28.29

DAP (DI-AMMONIUM PHOSPHATE), MOP (MURIATE OF POTASH), SSP (SINGLE SUPER PHOSPHATE).
SOURCE: THE FERTILISER ASSOCIATION OF INDIA.

inciding with the kharif (monsoon) planting season — has been the sharpest at 22.2% for

complex fertilisers containing nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P),

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Fertiliser sales decline

potassium (K) and sulphur (S) in different ratios, followed by 11.7% for muriate of potash (MOP).

The declines have been much lower, at 0.6% and 1.4% respectively, for di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) and single super phosphate (SSP).

A more significant fallout, reflective of subdued farmer offtake from the El Niño-induced dry weather conditions, is that of urea.

According to data from the Fertiliser Association of India (FAI), both production and imports of this most widely consumed nitrogenous fertiliser during April-September 2026 have been 4.3% and 40.5% higher relative to their corresponding April-September 2025 levels.

This comes on the back of the Government's concerted efforts at boosting imports of liquefied natural gas to ensure adequate feedstock availability for domestic urea manufacturers. State-owned companies have been pushed not only to source more gas from the US, Nigeria, Oman, Angola, Cameroon, Australia and Norway — to offset dwindling supplies from Qatar and UAE because of the Iran war and closure of the Strait of Hormuz — but also float international tenders for direct imports of the fertiliser.

The resultant increased availability notwithstanding,

urea sales are 4.1% down year-on-year (see table), marking the first dip after 2021-22 and from the record 39.6 million tonnes of 2025-26 (April-March).

"The main reason is poor rains across the southern states, Maharashtra's Marathwada and Vidarbha regions, Saurashtra and Kutch in Gujarat, Rajasthan, south Bihar, and Assam. It has led to lower demand from farmers. Last year, many of them paid Rs 350-450 per 45-kg bag of urea, as against its official maximum retail price (MRP) of Rs 266.50. This time, the black-market rate has been within Rs 300, as there is no physical shortage of material or much desperation among farmers to stock up," an industry source told *The Indian Express*.

Rainfall during the southwest monsoon season (June-September) was 12.6% below the normal long-period average for the country as a whole. October, too, has registered an overall 51.8% rain deficiency so far.

Most global weather agencies are forecasting the present El Niño to persist as a strong-to-very strong event through January-March 2027, before turning moderate-to-weak towards April-May. Sub-par winter precipitation and higher-than-usual temperatures from El Niño could, in turn, impact crop plantings

and fertiliser demand for the upcoming rabi (winter-spring) season, as well.

"The Government's focus now is just on urea and DAP. It does not want any shortage in these two politically most-sensitive fertilisers, especially in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab that are headed for Assembly polls in February-March," the industry source said.

In DAP, too, the supply position is reasonably comfortable, with sales happening at around or marginally above the government's controlled MRP of Rs 1,350 per 50-kg bag.

That is, however, affecting the offtake of complex fertilisers. Their MRPs are ruling higher at about Rs 2,100 per bag for the '20:20:0:13' and Rs 2,400 for '12:32:16' and '10:26:26' NPKS grades.

"Complex fertiliser sales are being hit from both the demand and supply sides. On the one hand, we have drought and the government setting an artificially low MRP for DAP, despite it having a higher 46% P and 18% N content. On the other, there is an acute scarcity of sulphur, without which no manufacturing of any P-containing complexes or even SSP can take place," the source said.

FAI data shows domestic production of complex fertilisers and SSP plunging by 35.5% and 10.4% respectively in April-September 2026 over April-September 2025. This has been largely courtesy of the soaring import prices of sulphur (\$1,000-1,100 per tonne versus \$300-400 a year ago).

Sulphur is a byproduct of oil refining and natural gas processing. Prior to the war, India was importing sulphur mainly from the likes of Saudi Aramco, QatarEnergy and Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, whose facilities have suffered damage from Iranian missile and drone attacks.

But it's not fertilisers alone. Domestic despatches of tractors also fell 18.1% to 1,19,667 units in September, from 1,46,180 for the same month of last year. Tractor sales hit an all-time-high of 11.60 lakh units in 2025-26. The first six months of this fiscal, too, also posted a cumulative 8% growth over April-September 2025.

An executive from a leading tractor and farm equipment company, however, attributed the September sales decline more to a shift in the festival season calendar and base effect.

"Last year, the season began early with Raksha Bandhan on August 9 and Navratri-Dussehra got over by October 2. This time, Raksha Bandhan was on August 28 and Dussehra on October 20. The GST rate cut on tractors (from 12% to 5%) also took effect in September 2025. Both these factors drove up industry shipments by 45.4% year-on-year last September," he said.

The executive said that drought was still a concern and "we have to see whether and how much our sales get impacted in the remaining months of this fiscal".



Indian Air Force's Surya Kiran Aerobatic Team performs during the 'Wings Over Ganges' airshow in Varanasi on Sunday. PTI

With airshow over Varanasi's ghats, IAF marks its 94th anniversary

Maulshree Seth

Lucknow, October 25

FROM THE banks of Ganga in Varanasi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday watched the 'Wings Over Ganges' airshow to mark the 94th anniversary of the Indian Air Force (IAF).

Along with French Rafale and Russian Sukhoi-30MKI, indigenous Tejas fighter aircraft also showcased the IAF's operational capabilities over the Ganga. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath also attended the event.

The event brought together military aviation and Varanasi's cultural landscape, with aircraft formations flying over the Ganga and the ancient city's ghats. The display featured fighter jets, helicopters, transport aircraft and aerobatic formations, highlighting the IAF's combat readiness, precision flying and coordination across different aircraft platforms.

The indigenous Tejas per-



PM Narendra Modi with Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath. PTI

formed a series of manoeuvres, while the nine-aircraft Surya Kiran aerobatic team's synchronised aerial displays drew applause from spectators gathered along both banks of the river.

The programme also featured formations named after religious and cultural landmarks associated with Kashi, including 'Ganga', 'Vishwanath' and 'Dashashwamedh'.

IAF officials said that in one

display, three Chetak helicopters flew over the river as flowers were showered as a tribute to the holy river. An 'Omkar' formation of three Mi-17 V5 helicopters carried the national flag and the IAF flag.

The show also included flying demonstrations by Mirage-2000, Jaguar, MiG-29 alongside transport and surveillance aircraft. A simulated aerial combat sequence illustrated the co-

ordination and decision-making involved in air operations.

Earlier in the day, in a roadshow-like welcome, PM Modi stepped out of his car to greet people gathered along the route from Police Lines helipad to Namo Ghat. Residents and BJP workers lined the nearly eight-km stretch, with cultural performances organised at 12 locations. The route reverberated with drumbeats, damru playing and conch-shell blowing as crowds raised slogans of 'Har Har Mahadev', 'Jai Shri Ram' and 'Modi-Modi' to welcome the Prime Minister to his parliamentary constituency. People also took photographs and videos of his convoy as it moved towards the venue.

The Prime Minister also inaugurated a garment manufacturing plant of Ahmedabad-based Arvind Limited at Khochawan in the Mirzamurad area of the city. Built across around seven acres at a cost of Rs 150 crore, the facility is expected to employ 1,000 women, of whom over 300 have already been recruited and are undergoing training.

‘No permanent geographic split of fighter assets under theaterisation plan’

Press Trust of India
New Delhi, October 25

IN HIS first comprehensive articulation on the theaterisation plan, Chief of Air Staff AP Singh said on Sunday that the Indian Air Force is not in favour of permanently splitting fighter assets geographically, advocating instead for a tailored structure built around India's specific security requirements rather than replicating foreign models.

In an exclusive interview to PTI, the Air Chief Marshal said the guiding principle for theaterisation should be “centralised control” where necessary and “decentralised execution” where appropriate as he cited ongoing conflicts in various geographies to assert that air power can decisively shape military outcomes.

Air Chief Marshal Singh also emphasised that the “transformation of this scale” should be implemented in phases so that operational readiness is “never compromised” and warned against the “trap” of trying to predict the future battlefield with “excessive certainty”.

Announced in 2019 as India's most ambitious military reform since Independence, the theaterisation plan seeks to integrate the three services for greater operational synergy.

The proposed architecture envisaged three integrated commands: a Northern Theatre Command in Lucknow focused on China, a Western Theatre Command in Jaipur to address challenges from Pakistan, and a Maritime Theatre Command in Thiruvananthapuram.

However, progress has stalled due to divergent views



Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal AP Singh takes a selfie during the IAF Day Aerial Display 2026 in Varanasi on Sunday. PTI

among the three services over the proposed command structures. The IAF has been cautioning against implementing the plan in a hurry and has strong reservations about splitting its fighter squadrons under the proposed structures.

“We are not viewing theaterisation as an exercise to permanently divide fighter assets geographically. The IAF is fully committed to jointness and integration,” he said, outlining the IAF's vision for the project. At the same time, he asserted that air power remains India's primary responder to any security challenge.

The IAF chief noted that the real question is how to employ air power to its greatest effect within an integrated structure, arguing air power's defining strengths are its speed, reach, flexibility and ability to concentrate combat power rapidly at

the point of decision.

“The guiding principle should, therefore, be centralised control where necessary, and decentralised execution where appropriate. That way, air power can be concentrated where it is needed most, while commanders retain the agility to act swiftly on the ground,” he said.

The IAF chief, then, highlighted how the joint structure during Operation Sindoor produced desired results. “Our own experience bears this out. During Operation Sindoor, under a joint architecture established by the Chief of Defence Staff and the three service chiefs, the centralised allocation and timely reallocation of critical resources proved decisive in the outcome.”

He also called for avoiding the trap of trying to predict the future battlefield with “excessive certainty”.

“As we design future structures, we must also avoid the trap of trying to predict the future battlefield with excessive certainty. What we can anticipate is that the next conflict will likely be: faster, more autonomous, yet more network-dependent, more transparent, yet more deceptive and more precise in some respects, and characterised by mass in others,” he said.

“Our structures must be able to absorb that shift. They should be evaluated against India's specific security requirements, not built by replicating models from other countries, because each nation operates within its own strategic, geographical, technological and operational environment,” he noted.

Why Loss & Damage Fund for Nepal matters beyond it



AMITABH SINHA

A MONTH after it raised a request, Nepal has been promised a sum of \$20 million (around Rs 190 crore) to help it recover from the devastating flash floods in August this year. Though the amount is extremely small compared to an estimated need of about \$4.75 billion (around Rs 44,600 crore) in recovery and reconstruction costs, it marks the beginning of the implementation of a new international regime on loss and damage. This system seeks to provide financial assistance to developing countries affected by climate events.

The allocation is a first from the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD), a new international financing instrument created in 2022 to address a long-pending demand from developing nations, particularly those small and vulnerable countries that face the maximum risk from climate events. These countries have contributed negligibly to creating the problem of climate change because of their extremely low emissions footprint, and yet, they disproportionately suffer its consequences. For instance, Nepal's contribution to historical global emissions of greenhouse gases is a tiny 0.01%.

Developing countries also have fewer resources and happen to be among those least equipped to deal with major climate-related disasters.

The allocation for Nepal, which still has to undergo some procedural formalities before being released, is by no means commensurate with the extent of damage inflicted by an event assessed to be triggered by climate change. But its importance lies in acknowledging the need for quickly mobilising financial resources. The decision to earmark \$20 million for Nepal was taken at an emergency board meeting of the FRLD, following requests from Nepal and several other countries that supported it.

Emergency allocation

The money for Nepal is an out-of-turn allocation by the FRLD, and essentially its first decision on applications made by countries. Operationalised in 2023 after receiving the first round of contributions from



The devastated structure around Betrawati Rasuwa border in Nepal following the flash floods on August 31. FILE

donor countries, the FRLD made its first call for applications during the annual climate conference in Brazil last year (COP30). By the time the window for applications closed on June 15 this year, 119 countries had submitted 176 funding requests.

The total amount requested by countries added up to \$2.8 billion — over three times the fund's existing corpus. The fund has so far received only \$822 million from donors, and much of it is currently only at the commitment stage, with the actual amount yet to be delivered. Clearly, the fund has no capacity to accept every request even after capping each request at \$20 million.

As a result, the fund will have to prioritise these requests. A decision on these requests is scheduled for December, although Nepal's case is a separate one. The flooding incident, in which more than over 1,300 people were killed and over 5,000 continue to be missing, happened in August, and an extraordinary request was made in September. Its acceptance underlines the need to provide emergency financial assistance to countries following a large-scale climate disaster.

The success in disbursing funds to Nepal quickly, even though the amount is nominal, is likely to become a template for many such requests in future. Countries struck by a disaster would insist on immediate consideration of their request and quick access to money, which is how this mechanism was envisaged to work.

One small, quick step

The allocation for Nepal is by no means commensurate with the extent of damage inflicted by the floods this August.

But its importance lies in acknowledging the need for quickly mobilising financial resources.

Huge demand, limited supply

Most of the current requests made to the fund are of a slightly different nature when compared to Nepal's case. They pertain to both economic and non-economic loss and damage arising out of climate-induced extreme weather events or slow-onset events like glacial melt, sea-level rise, biodiversity loss and desertification.

Reconstruction of damaged infrastructure and restoration of essential services like health, transport, energy and education services are a small part of expenditures for which money is being sought.

The countries' demands are generally associated with building resilience, setting up early warning systems, institutional strengthening, including the capability to assess the contribution of climate change in causing an event, livelihood restoration, and providing psychosocial support to affected populations. India, too, has made three requests to FRLD, totalling over \$52 million.

The range of financial needs presented by the countries before the FRLD highlights the inadequacy of climate finance available to developing countries. Under the global climate change architecture governed by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the 2015 Paris Agreement, developed countries are mandated to provide financial assistance to developing countries to help fight climate change. But just as they have been lacking in meeting their greenhouse gas emission reduction targets, developed countries have

Developing nations have long pushed for payouts for events worsened by climate change. Nepal could become a template

not fulfilled their financial obligations either.

Between 2020 and 2025, they have failed to mobilise \$100 billion every year but could never deliver on it. In 2024, developing countries presented requirements for climate finance, which added up to \$1.3 trillion every year. Still, developed nations agreed to increase their commitment to only \$300 billion a year and that too from 2035 onwards.

Important beginning

This reluctance of developed nations to put money on the table has affected the fund and damage fund as well. These countries had stalled the creation of the fund for years before giving in to sustained pressure.

But the actual contributions to the fund have been minuscule. Consider that a total of 27 donor countries have together pledged \$822 million. Of them, three countries — Italy, France and United Arab Emirates — have made a commitment of over \$100 million each. FRLD does not have any target — countries are encouraged to contribute voluntarily.

Nepal's case is a small but important beginning. It opens up the possibility that mediate financial assistance could be provided to resource-scarce countries respond to a major climate disaster. Over the long term, as such disasters come more frequent, the effectiveness of FRLD would remain severely constrained unless developed nations put more money into the fund.

'Maldives President could stir up anti-India campaign again'

Suhasini Haidar

NEW DELHI

Days after Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu visited Pakistan for a bilateral visit that yielded many agreements, the former Foreign Minister of Maldives, Abdulla Shahid, accused him of moving in an "anti-India" direction.

Mr. Shahid, who is running for the leadership of the Opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) ahead of the Presidential elections in 2028, alleged that Mr. Muizzu, who has had a cordial relationship with New Delhi for most of his tenure, would revive the "India Out" campaign of 2023.

"The President [Mr. Muizzu] is trying to make India the issue again, because for him, he hasn't been able to perform. He hasn't been able to provide any development or deliver on any of the promises, and therefore, come next election again, he will try to create some narrative on hate," Mr. Shahid, who was



Abdulla Shahid was Foreign Minister during the tenure of the previous President Ibrahim Solih. SUHASINI HAIDAR

Foreign Minister during the tenure of the previous President Ibrahim Solih (2018-2023) and won a term as the President of the UN General Assembly with India's support in 2021, told *The Hindu* in an interview here.

The Maldives government spokesperson did not reply to a request for a response to Mr. Shahid's comments.

Mr. Shahid called for more transparency about the 20 MoUs signed between the Maldives and Pakistan when President Muizzu went on a three-

day visit to Islamabad from October 20 to 22, the first such visit by a Maldives President since 2015. After talks between Mr. Muizzu and Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the two sides announced agreements in a number of areas, including defence and maritime security, combating illicit trafficking and narcotics, information technology, cybersecurity and AI. They agreed to start direct flights between Male and Islamabad. In particular, Mr. Muizzu's meeting with Pakistan's Field Marshal and Army

chief General Asim Munir had raised eyebrows in Delhi. Mr. Muizzu also called for the revival of SAARC, on hold since 2016 when India pulled out of the summit in Islamabad over cross-border terrorism.

"We do not want Maldives to be drawn into disputes within our neighbours," said Mr. Shahid, demanding that the Muizzu government make a statement in Parliament about the nature of the agreements signed with Pakistan. "We must aim for expanding our relationship with everyone who has goodwill to the Maldives, but it should not come at the cost of our own friends, our established relationships," he added.

When asked about Mr. Muizzu's Pakistan visit on Friday, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said that the government kept a "close watch" on such developments and would "take whatever appropriate steps may be necessary".

In response to the comments on SAARC, Mr. Jaiswal said that it was "one country", indicating Pakistan, that had "stalled" the functioning of SAARC, and India was keen to strengthen regional cooperation.

'India Out' campaign

Mr. Shahid's comments to *The Hindu* indicate that ties with India may once again become an issue in the Maldivian elections. Mr. Solih lost the elections in 2023 due to the "India Out" campaign of the People's National Congress (PNC), led by Mr. Muizzu, against what he alleged was undue Indian influence in the island chain, especially accusing the Solih government of allowing India to build military bases in infrastructure projects that India had constructed.

Mr. Muizzu had also demanded that Indian Air Force personnel stationed at three locations in the Maldives, including Gan Island and Hanimadhoo Atoll, who operated air-

craft that India had provided to the Maldives, be removed. While the beginning of Mr. Muizzu's tenure saw tensions with the Modi government, and he chose to travel to Turkey, the UAE, and China before visiting India, relations improved after India agreed to withdraw military personnel and replace them with civilian personnel instead.

In June 2024, a month after the final batch of 89 Indian personnel had been withdrawn, Mr. Muizzu visited India to attend Prime Minister Narendra Modi's swearing-in ceremony, and then returned in October 2024 for a bilateral visit, when India offered the Maldives several economic support measures, including a currency swap agreement to help Maldives avoid a debt failure.

Mr. Shahid is in India to attend the Words Beyond Borders International Literature Festival and is expected to affirm a campaign more friendly to India.

Houthis target Riyadh, say Yemen infra struck

Agence France-Presse

RIYADH

The Houthi militia in Yemen on Sunday launched wide-ranging strikes across swathes of southern Saudi Arabia even as the Iran-backed group said the kingdom struck Yemen dozens of times over the previous 24 hours.

The attacks targeted Riyadh's international airport hours after its partial reopening, as well as an airbase and naval base. "The Yemeni armed forces conducted three military operations with dozens of ballistic missiles," Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Saree said on X, adding that the strike on the airport "achieved its target".

He added that they tar-

geted King Khalid air base in Khamis Mushait and a naval base in Jazan.

The Saudi Arabia-led coalition fighting the Houthis earlier said at least 10 ballistic missiles were intercepted during.

The kingdom's civil defence agency later said two people were injured in the south by falling debris, also reporting damage to several buildings and vehicles.

The Houthi spokesperson warned that Riyadh airport was still "unsafe" and a "military target". He said Saudi Arabia launched 56 airstrikes and missiles targeting civilian infrastructures in Yemen over the previous 24 hours.

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Houthi target Riyadh, say Yemen attacked

Riyadh's King Khalid International Airport's website showed several domestic and international flights scheduled on Sunday, including arrivals to the kingdom from Dubai, Paris and Cairo, after being closed for two weeks. Saudi Arabian officials did not provide additional information about the scope of the renewed operations at the airport. But the tracking website Flightradar24 showed a small number of flights had departed, though the vast majority were cancelled.

“The Yemeni Armed Forces warn all international, regional, and local airlines – as well as staff and travellers – against using King Khalid Airport in Riyadh, as it is unsafe and serves as a military target for our forces,” the Houthi spokesperson said, adding that “The Saudi regime shall bear the consequences of any operations at the airport.”

HOUTHIS SAY AIRPORT REMAINS A TARGET, URGES TRAVELLERS TO STAY AWAY

Saudi says Riyadh airport partly reopened despite Houthi threat

Missile shrapnel injure two, damage buildings & vehicles

Reuters
October 25

SAUDI ARABIA said its main airport resumed operations at two terminals on Sunday even as Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthis vowed to keep striking the facility, saying it remained a "military target".

King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh had halted operations on October 10 following an attack claimed by the Houthis that killed 13 people, the deadliest in the kingdom in more than a decade. Saudi Arabia intercepted another wave of missiles and drones on Sunday as fighting with the militant group continued unabated.

The conflict has become an increasingly destabilising element in the US-Israeli offensive against Iran, turning US ally Saudi Arabia into a pressure point in the wider war.

After Saudi authorities announced the partial resumption of operations, Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Saree



Officials inspect debris from ballistic missile interceptions in Ar Rashidiyyah, near Mecca, on Saturday. REUTERS

vowed facility would "never be safe" and urged airlines, airport staff and travellers not to use it.

Late on Saturday, the airport said Terminal 1 would be designated for domestic flights and Terminal 2 for international flights operated by national carriers starting Sunday. Despite the announcement, flight tracking data from FlightRadar24 showed little traffic at the airport Sunday.

The Saudi-led coalition said earlier this month the Houthis had carried out 20 attacks on the airport between October 1 and 11.

Saudi civil defence said Sunday shrapnel from the interception of two ballistic missiles

launched by the Houthis over Khamis Mushait and Ahad Rafidah injured two people and damaged residential buildings and vehicles. Civil defence authorities earlier issued emergency alerts for Riyadh and the cities of Abha, Khamis Mushait, Jazan and Najran on Sunday, before saying minutes later that the danger had passed.

The coalition said two drones and a ballistic missile were launched towards Riyadh, and a cruise missile towards the southern city of Khamis Mushait.

The Houthis said they attacked the airport and Saudi oil facilities on Saturday.

With Iran, Trump weighs harder strikes or a deal

Associated Press
Washington, October 25

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump bristled when asked how far he was from a possible attack on Iran. He recently said on social media he would not hit Iran again before the November 3 midterm elections.

"Do you really think I'm going to tell you if I'm going to do it?" Trump told reporters here on Saturday.

"And there's a possibility I will. There's also a possibility we'll have a nice, big, beautiful agreement," he said.

Trump repeated his assertion that Iran wants to make a deal, "but the problem is, will they hold the deal?" Meanwhile, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian accused Washington of disrupting negotiations to end the war but said he still believes "we have to go and finish it".

In comments aired on state television, he said Iran's supreme leader had instructed Iranian officials to "go and finish it (the deal)," but "these scoundrels broke the rules of the game. We were holding talks, and they disrupted them".

Pak reopens key border with Iran

Islamabad: Pakistan has reopened a key border crossing with Iran to resume bilateral trade and cross-border movement after a week-long suspension that stranded freight vehicles and disrupted supplies.

Mir Naveed Jan Kalmati, president of the Gwadar

Chamber of Commerce and Industry, confirmed that the crossing has reopened.

"Pakistan has opened the border with Iran at Gabd-Rimdan... and allowed trucks and other vehicles to move toward Iran and Pakistan with import and export goods," he said. PTI

War, or no war, our policies remain unchanged, says Iran

We must accept the new realities, I'm already thinking about the post-war period, Araghchi says; his remarks come as U.S. President Trump indicated on Friday plans for a new military operation

Agence France-Presse

TEHRAN

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Sunday that a potential resumption of war with Israel and the United States would not change his country's positions.

The remarks come amid mounting U.S. and Israeli threats of renewed attacks on Iran, as President Donald Trump said on Friday that Washington "may do another little Epic Fury," referring to the U.S.-Israeli campaign on Iran that began on February 28.

"Recently, there has been talk of a new war, but I am already thinking about the post-war period. Whether there is war or not, our policies remain the same," said Mr. Araghchi in Tehran.

"They have already done so twice and have seen the results. If they want to try again, they know they will achieve no different outcome from those of the past."

An April 8 ceasefire put an end to the most intense fighting, apart from spo-



Mural messaging: Motorcyclists drive past a billboard depicting a Persian legendary hero hitting U.S. aircraft carriers in Tehran. AP

radic exchanges of fire in and around the strategic Strait of Hormuz, a key route for global energy supplies.

Iran has claimed control over the strait since the outbreak of the war and has regularly targeted vessels that attempt crossing without its authorisation. In response, the U.S. has been maintaining a naval counter-blockade on Iranian ports.

In June, Iran agreed with the U.S. to a memorandum of understanding laying out a pathway to a permanent settlement of the conflict, only for the

deal to later unravel as each side accused the other of violating it. Tehran has since called for a return to the accord to end the conflict.

"The current war has changed everything. We must accept that new realities are taking hold. Shipping routes through the Strait of Hormuz will no longer be the same, and the management of the strait will no longer be the same," Mr. Araghchi said.

"To achieve peace and stability, our region must move towards the complete absence of foreign forces."

Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Esmail Baghaei, said Tehran has not closed the window of diplomacy and messages are being passed to the U.S. via intermediaries.

State media said Mr. Baghaei spoke in an interview with a German broadcaster. He said the U.S. persist in unilateral demands and that Mr. Trump and U.S. officials repeatedly use the phrase "complete surrender," which Mr. Baghaei said no Iranian accepts.

Calls to cut gas usage

Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf on Sunday called for a campaign to cut gas usage by at least 10%, with officials anticipating shortages as winter approaches.

While a major producer, Iran has long suffered shortages of natural gas which have been exacerbated by war.

"To get through the approaching winter, a nationwide effort is essential ... to reduce gas consumption by at least 10%," Mr. Ghalibaf said.

(With inputs from AP)