



Rebel NUG in Myanmar accuses junta of attacks in earthquake-hit region

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Myanmar's resistance forces accused the military junta of launching attacks on rebel targets in earthquake-affected areas of Sagaing region and Shan State. Despite calls for a pause in fighting, the junta carried out bombing raids on Sunday, targeting areas near the earthquake's epicentre, including territories controlled by the Ta'ang National Liberation Army.



The National Unity Government (NUG) unilaterally announced a two-week pause in offensive operations starting March 30, 2025, to aid rescue efforts in earthquake-affected areas. However, Myanmar's junta has not acknowledged the ceasefire, and it is unlikely to apply in Rakhine State, where the Arakan Army continues fighting. NUG's acting president, Duwa Lashi La, urged the international community, including ASEAN and the UN, to provide cross-border aid to affected regions.

The NUG, along with some Ethnic Armed Organisations, controls large parts of Myanmar's Sagaing region and has pledged to conduct rescue and relief operations during its declared ceasefire. It reported 369 deaths, 223 missing persons, and 1,822 injuries in areas under its control due to the earthquake. The disaster also destroyed nearly 3,000 buildings, damaged seven bridges, and affected five dams. NUG's Prime Minister reaffirmed their commitment to aiding affected people. While the junta controls major cities, NUG and PDF remain active in Sagaing and Chin. Meanwhile, India, China, and Russia have sent relief teams to assist Myanmar.

50 Maoists surrender in Bijapur; CM praises Chhattisgarh policy

INTERNAL SECURITY

Fifty alleged Maoists, including 14 with a cumulative bounty of ₹68 lakh, surrendered before security forces in Bijapur, Chhattisgarh. Inspector-General P. Sundarraj called it the largest mass surrender, surpassing last month's surrender of 26 Maoists in the district. Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai credited the state's new Surrender and Rehabilitation Policy – 2025 for the development, stating that its positive impact is now evident.

Chhattisgarh's Surrender and Rehabilitation Policy – 2025 offers financial incentives, housing, and healthcare to surrendering Maoists. Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai stated that many trapped in Naxalism are now choosing peace. Among the 50 who surrendered, most were not armed cadres but villagers supporting Maoists. Inspector-General P. Sundarraj attributed the surrenders to security operations and camp openings in Maoist-affected areas.

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An IJS is an idea whose time has come

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Over the past few days, social media has been awash with several memes. Of these, there is one that appears to be the best — “For the first time, a fire brigade has ignited more fire than what it extinguished.” The fact is the fire is still raging.

Disturbing incidents

The discovery of half-burnt currency notes in the residence of a Delhi High Court judge has sparked concerns about judicial accountability. The Chief Justice of India has ordered an internal inquiry, but the judge involved has only been repatriated to his parent High Court, unlike other public servants who would face criminal investigation.

This incident follows two controversial judicial developments: the Supreme Court objecting to the Lokpal's cognisance of a corruption complaint against a High Court judge, questioning its jurisdiction, and a High Court ruling downplaying sexual assault against a minor, which was later stayed by the Supreme Court.

All three cases highlight the lack of transparency in the Collegium system for selecting judges, which has long been criticized for nepotism and allowing judicial dynasties to influence appointments, sometimes leading to the selection of incompetent or mediocre judges.

Have an Indian Judicial Service

The controversy surrounding judicial accountability has reignited the debate on the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Act, which was passed by Parliament and ratified by 16 State Assemblies but later struck down by the Supreme Court. While discussions on NJAC continue, an immediate solution could be the creation of an Indian Judicial Service (IJS), modelled after the UPSC's competitive, transparent, and merit-based selection process used for civil services like IAS, IPS, and IFS. Given that State-level Judicial Service Officers are selected through exams, implementing a similar system at the national level could ensure a more transparent and competent judiciary.

Will ensure course correction

An Indian Judicial Service (IJS) could make the higher judiciary more inclusive and representative, addressing the current dominance of elite families and the underrepresentation of women and marginalized groups. Recruitment through UPSC, with criteria set by the Supreme Court in consultation with High Courts and legal experts, would ensure independence from executive interference. A transparent selection process, replacing the opaque Collegium system, along with comprehensive training and oversight mechanisms, would enhance judicial competence and integrity. Implementing IJS could restore public trust and improve the judiciary's image in India's parliamentary democracy.

Timely restatement

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Supreme Court of India has reaffirmed the principles of free speech by quashing a Gujarat police case against Congress MP Imran Pratapgarhi for an allegedly inflammatory poem. The judgment highlights the growing trend of criminalizing speech based on claims of offense by powerful individuals. The Court reminded the police to uphold freedom of expression and cautioned against politically or communally motivated FIRs. It emphasized that speech should be assessed based on its impact on reasonable and strong-minded individuals, not those who feel insecure or see criticism as a threat.

The Supreme Court analyzed Imran Pratapgarhi's poem and found that it contained no religious, racial, or communal imputation, nor did it incite hatred or disharmony. It dismissed accusations of outraging religious feelings as ridiculous, stating that the poem merely expressed resistance to injustice. The ruling clarifies that no elements of divisive speech or threats to public order were present. The verdict serves as a guideline for police officers, cautioning against politically motivated use of Section 196 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (formerly Section 153A IPC) to suppress government criticism. It also highlights the misuse of speech-related laws to intimidate dissenters, as defamation alone cannot warrant an FIR.

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“If you invest more in your education, then you are likely to get more interest in it.”

–Benjamin Franklin



Lessons from a quake

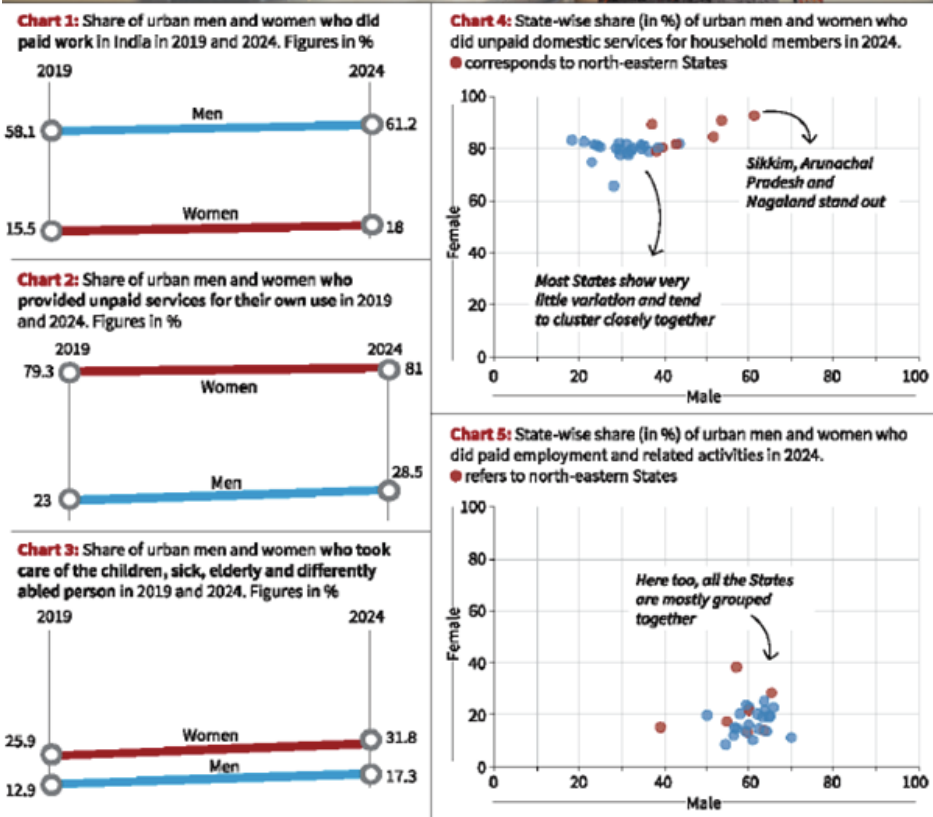
DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Rescue operations are underway after a 7.7-magnitude earthquake in Myanmar, which has claimed over 1,600 lives and injured around 3,400. The death toll is rising, and widespread infrastructure damage has left cities like Mandalay and Naypyitaw without electricity. Hospitals are overwhelmed, and many are homeless. Myanmar’s neighbours—India, China, and Thailand—have sent aid, including warships, aircraft, and rescue teams. India’s military has made multiple sorties to Naypyitaw, while Chinese rescue teams have arrived, including one from Yunnan province.

Myanmar, located in a seismically active region, experiences frequent earthquakes due to the collision of four tectonic plates—Eurasian, Indian, Sunda, and the Burma microplate. The Sagaing Fault, one of Myanmar’s most active, has caused six to eight major quakes since 1900. The recent 7.7-magnitude earthquake recalls the 2023 Türkiye-Syria quake that killed 55,000. While earthquake prediction remains uncertain, infrastructure can be strengthened to mitigate damage. However, Myanmar’s political instability since the 2021 coup has hampered enforcement of building codes. The current ceasefire presents an opportunity for political stability, investment, and regulatory improvements, crucial for future disaster preparedness.

Gender gap in household chores persists in urban India

POLITY & GOVERNANCE



Despite more urban women entering paid employment, their share in unpaid household work—such as cooking, shopping, and caregiving—has also increased, keeping the gender divide in domestic chores largely unchanged in India. While urban men’s participation in domestic work has risen, it remains significantly lower than that of women. This trend is consistent across most States, except for some north-eastern States, where a higher proportion of urban men contribute to household chores.

Chart 1 shows the share of urban men and women (above six years of age) who did paid work in India in 2019 and 2024. Among urban women the share increased from 15.5% to 18% — a 2.5% point rise — while among urban men it increased from 58.1% to 61.2%. Paid work includes self-employment, regular wage/salaried jobs, and casual labour.

Chart 2 shows the share of urban men and women (above six years of age) who provide unpaid services for their own use in India in 2019 and 2024. Unpaid provision of services for own use includes household accounting and management, purchasing goods, preparing and/or serving meals, waste disposal and recycling, cleaning, decorating and maintaining one’s own dwelling and gardening. The share of women doing such work increased from 79.3% to 81% in the period, with the share of men increased from 23% to 28.5%.

Chart 3 shows the share of urban men and women (above six years of age) who took care of children, the sick, the elderly, and differently abled persons in India in 2019 and 2024. The share of urban women doing such work increased from 25.9% to 31.8% in this period, while the share of men increased from 12.9% to 17.3%.

Chart 4 shows the State-wise share of urban men (horizontal axis) and women (vertical axis) who did unpaid domestic services for household members in 2024. All the States show very little variation and tend to cluster closely together. Across most States, the share of urban men who did household chores ranged from 20% to 40%, and the share of urban women ranged from 75% to 85%.

Some north-eastern States stand out. In Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland, over 50% men participated in household chores. Among major States, Kerala leads with 44% men participating in household work.

Chart 5 shows the State-wise share of urban men (horizontal axis) and women (vertical axis) who did paid employment and related activities in 2024. Here too, all the States are mostly grouped together. Across most of them, the share of urban men who went for work ranged between 55% and 65%, and the share of urban women ranged between 10% and 25%.

Tamil Nadu has the highest share of women in paid work (25%), followed by Telangana (24%), Himachal Pradesh (23%), and Karnataka (22%), while Bihar (9%) and Uttar Pradesh (10%) have the lowest. Despite their participation in paid employment, over 80% of women in these States also handle household chores, highlighting their dual burden of work and domestic responsibilities.

It is time to reform the Waqf

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Waqf, a statutory Islamic institution, holds vast land resources and has the potential to improve the socio-economic conditions of India's Muslim community. However, inefficiencies, mismanagement, and lack of transparency have hindered its effectiveness. Despite being India's third-largest landowning entity, the Waqf has failed to significantly address issues like education, healthcare, and socio-economic upliftment. Originally intended to fund public welfare institutions, its underutilization remains a longstanding concern.

State of the Waqf

The Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024 (UMEED Bill) aims to reform Waqf management by addressing misuse, inefficiencies, and lack of transparency in Waqf property administration. The bill responds to concerns about corruption and outdated rental structures, which prevent Waqf properties from generating sufficient revenue for community welfare. Many properties, such as those on Jaipur's M.I. Road, are rented at absurdly low rates, causing significant financial losses.

The Sachar Committee Report (2006) estimated that Waqf could generate ₹12,000 crore annually, but actual revenue remains at just ₹200 crore, despite over 8.72 lakh properties under Waqf. If properly managed, Waqf assets could fund schools, universities, and hospitals, benefiting not only Muslims but society at large.

The bill seeks to modernize governance, improve accountability, and unlock the economic potential of Waqf. The final version, after Joint Parliament Committee review, must ensure a transparent, visionary framework to uplift the Muslim community and enhance the role of Waqf in national development.

Generating revenue is crucial

Reforms in Waqf management should extend beyond governance to revenue generation. Updating the rental structure of Waqf properties to match current market rates is crucial for financial sustainability. Profits from these properties must be reinvested in community welfare projects, aligning with Waqf's original mandate.

Waqf is a vital institution for the socio-economic upliftment of Muslims and promoting inclusivity and excellence. Ensuring accountability and embracing reforms will help Waqf fulfill its purpose of benefiting both the Muslim community and broader society.





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What is status of the SpaceX Mars mission?

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Elon Musk announced that SpaceX plans to launch an uncrewed Mars mission by late 2026, featuring Tesla's Optimus robot as its passenger. If successful, human landings could begin by 2029 or 2031. The mission will rely on Starship, SpaceX's reusable super heavy-lift vehicle, to achieve this goal.

Is it possible?

SpaceX's Mars mission has faced setbacks, including two Starship test failures, but Elon Musk remains committed to the late 2026 launch timeline. Despite technical and logistical challenges, he has not postponed the plan, though experts question its feasibility.

What are some of the challenges?

SpaceX faces major challenges in its Mars mission, particularly in developing and deploying tanker spacecraft for in-orbit refuelling. Starship's fuel capacity is insufficient for the journey, requiring refuelling in Low Earth Orbit (LEO)—a process that has never been attempted before. Experts doubt whether SpaceX can design, test, and deploy the tankers in time for the 2026 launch window, as missing it could delay the mission by over two years. Additionally, launching and docking multiple tankers quickly to prevent fuel evaporation adds to the technical complexity of the mission.

How has SpaceX fared so far?

SpaceX has a proven track record of achieving ambitious space feats, such as reusable Falcon 9 rockets and the Dragon capsule. Its Starbase facility in Texas provides a key advantage, with rapid production capabilities, including one Raptor engine per day and quick Starship assembly. These strengths could be crucial for developing tanker spacecraft needed for the Mars mission.

How will SpaceX land on Mars?

SpaceX's 2026 Mars mission will likely attempt a surface landing with Tesla's Optimus robot aboard. However, Starship lacks proper landing gear and relies on a "Chopsticks" catching system, which is not available on Mars. Moreover, high test flight failure rates indicate that further refinements are necessary before Starship can be deemed mission-ready.

What has NASA said?

Senior NASA officials are concerned about potential conflicts of interest between SpaceX and the Department of Governmental Efficiency (DOGE), an advisory body to former U.S. President Donald Trump, led by Elon Musk. DOGE's push for federal budget cuts has led to the shutdown of key NASA offices, raising speculation that more funds could be directed to SpaceX's contracts. While Musk's ambitious Mars landing could cement SpaceX's dominance, overcoming the technical, logistical, and political challenges remains uncertain.

What is the controversy over the Bodh Gaya temple?

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Since February, nearly 100 Buddhist monks under the All India Buddhist Forum (AIBF) have been protesting in Bodh Gaya, demanding a repeal of the Bodh Gaya Temple Act (BTA), 1949. The AIBF, supported by prominent Buddhist bodies, has submitted a memorandum to the Bihar government. Bodh Gaya is one of Buddhism's four sacred sites, along with Lumbini, Sarnath, and Kusinagar.

Have there been protests before?

In November 2023, Buddhist monks rallied in Gaya and submitted a memorandum to the Central and State governments. After it had no effect, they escalated their protest with a rally in Patna demanding the repeal of the Bodh Gaya Temple Act. In 2012, monks had also filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court, but it has not been heard yet.

What is the Act?

The Bodh Gaya Temple Act (BTA) established an eight-member management committee with equal representation of Buddhists and Hindus, but made the local district magistrate the ex-officio chairperson. Since the magistrate was typically Hindu, this led to a Hindu majority on the committee, causing resentment among Buddhist bodies. As a result, Buddhist groups have repeatedly demanded autonomy over the Bodh Gaya temple (Mahavihara).

What do the annals say?

Bodh Gaya gained prominence as the site of Gautam Siddharth's enlightenment, famously depicted in Edwin Arnold's **The Light of Asia**. Emperor Ashoka built a temple there in the 3rd century BCE, and it remained a Buddhist pilgrimage site through the Pala dynasty. Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsang visited in 629 AD, confirming its Buddhist significance. However, Bakhtiyar Khilji's invasion in the 13th century ended Pala rule, leading to Buddhism's decline. In 1590, during Akbar's reign,

a Hindu monk established the Bodh Gaya mutt, transferring control to the Hindu community. After India's Independence, the Bihar Assembly passed the Bodh Gaya Temple Act (BTA), 1949, shifting control to a new management committee.

How has the government intervened?

The Bodh Gaya Temple Act (BTA), 1949, was passed to settle a dispute between Buddhist and Hindu heads over control of the Mahabodhi Temple. Buddhists opposed the rule that the district magistrate, as ex-officio chairman, had to be Hindu. This changed in 2013, allowing a chairman of any faith. In the early 1990s, Bihar CM Lalu Prasad Yadav drafted the Bodh Gaya Mahavihara Bill to give Buddhists full control, prohibiting idol immersions and Hindu marriages at the temple, but the Bill was never enacted.

Indian Army team reaches Mandalay in Myanmar, recce on to set up a field hospital

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

India launched "Operation Brahma" to aid Myanmar after a devastating earthquake. As part of this, a 10-member advance team from the Indian Army's 118-personnel field hospital unit landed at Mandalay airport on Sunday evening. They have begun site reconnaissance to set up a field hospital. The main team, along with equipment, is expected to arrive by road the next day.

As part of India's "Operation Brahma", the Indian Army's 60 Para Field Hospital unit arrived at Nay Pyi Taw airport on Saturday night via two IAF C-17 transport aircraft. Mandalay was designated as the primary Area of Operations, with a two-member reconnaissance team reaching there on Sunday morning.

Additionally, the Indian Navy deployed four ships—Satpura and Savitri from Visakhapatnam on Saturday, and Karmuk and LCU 52 from the Andaman and Nicobar Command on Sunday. These ships carried 52 tonnes of relief material, including food, water, medicines, and emergency supplies, to support Myanmar's disaster relief efforts.

What is the controversy over the Bodh Gaya temple?

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Haryana Police's crackdown on songs promoting violence and gun culture has sparked controversy, with several artists alleging bias in enforcement. The issue was raised in the State Assembly, where legislators called for a more lenient approach.

In the past two weeks, 10 songs have been removed from social media, and at least two concerts—including one in Gurugram—were stopped mid-performance. Six of the banned songs were by popular Haryanvi singer Masoom Sharma, who has hinted at a conspiracy against him, allegedly involving Gajender Phogat, a rival artist and government official. Phogat has denied the claims. Sharma argued that many songs promote violence, yet the police targeted only 10, with a disproportionate focus on him.

Haryanvi singer Masoom Sharma questioned the selective ban on certain songs, arguing that Punjabi music and Bollywood films also promote violence and gun culture but remain unaffected. He claimed that the ban harms not only his career but the entire Haryanvi music industry, which has grown significantly since 2009.

Haryana Police defended the action, citing a Punjab and Haryana High Court order and government directives against songs promoting anti-social behaviour. ADGP Mamta Singh denied allegations of bias, stating that district social media monitoring cells carefully reviewed lyrics before recommending takedowns. She highlighted instances where songs referenced crimes, such as firing in court, arguing that such content disrespects institutions and incites violence.

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11 billion cubic metres of water saved in eight years, says PM

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

In the 120th episode of Mann Ki Baat, Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasized rainwater harvesting, wastewater management, and recycling for a sustainable future. He highlighted that in the past 7-8 years, over 11 billion cubic meters of water had been conserved through tanks, ponds, and recharge structures, surpassing the capacity of Bhakra Nangal Dam.

Mr. Modi also discussed sustainable fashion, noting that textile waste is being used to create decorative items, handbags, and toys. He praised Panipat as a global hub for textile recycling, while Bengaluru leads in tech-driven textile waste solutions, and Tiruppur focuses on wastewater treatment and renewable energy. Additionally, he announced "Yoga for One Earth, One Health" as the theme for this year's International Yoga Day.

Make a nuclear deal or there will be bombing, Trump threatens Iran

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

U.S. President Donald Trump has threatened Iran with bombings and secondary tariffs if it does not agree to a new nuclear deal with Washington. In an interview, he confirmed ongoing talks with Iran but did not provide details. During his first term (2017-21), Mr. Trump withdrew the U.S. from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal and reimposed sanctions, leading Iran to exceed uranium enrichment limits. Despite warnings, Tehran has rejected U.S. demands, responding through Oman to Mr. Trump's letter urging a new agreement. Western nations accuse Iran of secretly aiming for nuclear weapons, while Tehran insists its program is for civilian energy purposes.

Third term

U.S. President Donald Trump stated that he was serious about seeking a third presidential term, despite it being barred by the U.S. Constitution. However, he said it was too early to consider it. Now serving his second, non-consecutive term, Mr. Trump has previously made vague references to a third term but addressed it directly in an interview. He claimed there were "methods" to achieve it but declined to elaborate.

Turkiye's Opposition protests as Swedish reporter jailed for 'insulting President'

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



The arrest of Istanbul's Opposition mayor, Ekrem Imamoglu, on March 19 over corruption charges has triggered mass protests across Turkiye, with his supporters calling the charges false. The Republican People's Party (CHP) organized a large rally in Istanbul, drawing hundreds of thousands demanding his release.

Mr. Imamoglu, seen as a strong contender against President Erdogan in the 2028 elections, sent a message from prison vowing to stay connected with his supporters. Meanwhile, Swedish journalist Joakim Medin was arrested upon arriving in Turkiye to cover the protests and is being held on terror-related charges and for insulting the President.



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