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PERSPECTIVE

A friend of mine just pointed out that Grok "kids mode" has exactly the same settings as what companies demand for "enterprise mode". We have indeed infantilized businesses in modern society. ~ Elon Musk, American Entrepreneur

Father gets life term for raping, impregnating minor daughter

NAGAON

A special POCOS court in Assam's Nagaon district has sentenced a 50-year-old man to life imprisonment for raping and impregnating his 13-year-old daughter.

The verdict was delivered on October 24 by Additional District and Sessions Judge-cum-Special Judge Chitra Rani Saikia at the Nagaon POCOS Court. The court also directed the convict to pay Rs 5 lakh as compensation to the survivor, warning that failure to pay would result in an additional six months of imprisonment.

According to Nagaon Additional Superintendent of Police (Crime) Jayanta Baruah, the assault occurred earlier this year at the family's home in the Amsoi area under Raha police station, while the convict's wife was away.

The crime remained undisclosed for nearly five months until the mother noticed signs of pregnancy in her daughter.

Following her complaint on June 3, police registered a case and filed the chargesheet within 28 days. Authorities confirmed that the teenager has since given birth to a child.

WHO SAID WHAT

I am deeply saddened by the passing of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit, The Queen Mother of Thailand. Her lifelong dedication to public service will continue to inspire generations. My heartfelt condolences to His Majesty The King, the members of the Royal Family and the people of Thailand in this hour of profound grief.
~ Narendra Modi, PM, India

Agartala-Bagdogra flights to take off today; air link with Silchar to resume after 30 years

AGARTALA

Direct flight services connecting Agartala with Bagdogra in West Bengal will begin on Sunday evening, while air connectivity between Agartala and Silchar in southern Assam will resume on October 28 after nearly three decades, officials said.

Assistant General Manager of the Airports Authority of India (AAI), Agartala, S. Haokip Jempu, said that Air India Express will commence its Agartala-Bagdogra service on Sunday evening from the Maharaja Bir Bikram (MBB) Airport in Agartala.

Bagdogra Airport, located in Siliguri in North Bengal, is about 68 km from the popular tourist destination Darjeeling. He said that flight services between Agartala and Silchar will begin from October 28, operating twice a week, every Tuesday and Friday.

The route will be operated by IndiGo, marking the resump-



tion of air services between the two Northeastern cities after almost 30 years. With these additions, Agartala will now have direct air connectivity with 10 destinations across the country. At present, the Tripura capital is connected by air to Kolkata, Delhi, Imphal, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Dibrugarh, Guwahati, and Chennai.

According to AAI officials, Agartala's MBB Airport ranks

10th in the country in terms of the customer satisfaction index among all airports in India. Currently, 13 to 16 flights operate daily, handling around 4,000 to 5,000 passengers per day. The newly-constructed terminal building at the MBB Airport, with a built-up area of 30,000 sq. metres, has been designed to handle both domestic and international passengers simultaneously during peak hours. Agar-

tala's MBB Airport is the second busiest airport in the Northeast, after the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International (LGBI) Airport in Guwahati. There are a total of 23 airports in the northeastern region, of which 17 are operational. These include Guwahati, Silchar, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Tezpur, Lilabari and Rupsi (Assam); Tezu, Pasighat, Ziro and Donyi Polo Airport (Arunachal Pradesh); Agartala (Tripura); Imphal (Manipur); Shillong (Meghalaya); Dimapur (Nagaland); Lengpui (Mizoram); and Pakyong (Sikkim).

Meanwhile, Tripura Transport and Tourism Minister Sushanta Chowdhury earlier said that the state government had decided to extend financial support for the proposed Agartala-Chittagong (Bangladesh) air service to be operated by SpiceJet. He said the government had allocated Rs 15 crore to the AAI for the project and already paid Rs 3.85 crore as a three-month advance in December 2022, besides

deploying 25 police personnel to assist the Bureau of Immigration under the Ministry of Home Affairs.

However, due to political unrest in Bangladesh since August last year, the launch of flight services between Agartala and Chittagong has been delayed. According to historian and writer Pannalal Roy, the land for Agartala, Kailashahar, and several other (now defunct) airports in Tripura was donated by the state's erstwhile royal family. "During the Second World War, King Bir Bikram supported the Allied powers, especially Great Britain, and deployed a contingent of the Tripura Army to assist them. During that time, airports at Agartala, Kailashahar, and other places were built to facilitate the Allied forces," Roy, who has authored several books on Tripura's royal history, told. He added that in 1943, Japanese fighter planes twice bombed the Agartala airport.

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Loktak Hydroelectric Project Hits Roadblocks; NHPC Seeks Manipur Governor's Support

IMPHAL

Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla held discussions with representatives from NHPC Ltd. and the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), focusing on the state's critical infrastructure and tourism challenges.

Gursharan Singh, Head of Project at NHPC Ltd. and recently appointed General Manager (Electrical), called on the Governor and briefed him about the operational challenges faced by the Loktak Hydroelectric Project. He highlighted difficulties in transporting large equipment essential for ongoing renovation and modernization works. Singh also apprised the Governor of the initiatives being taken to enhance mainte-



nance systems and boost the operational reliability of the project. Governor Bhalla took note of the concerns and stressed the importance of timely

renovation to improve the project's efficiency and ensure uninterrupted power generation for the region. Later in the day, H. Radhakrishna

Sharma, State-in-Charge of IATO Manipur, along with four other members, met the Governor to discuss the constraints faced by tour operators in obtaining Protected Area Permits (PAP) for foreign tourists. The delegation submitted a representation suggesting reforms, including the introduction of pre-arrival PAP applications during the visa process in travellers' home countries and authorizing recognized tour operators and IATO members to apply for permits on behalf of their clients.

Governor Bhalla appreciated the association's efforts to strengthen sustainable tourism in Manipur and assured to consider the proposals aimed at streamlining the permit system and promoting international tourism in the state.

Assam CM Supports ECI's Special Electoral Roll Revision Drive



GUWAHATI

As the Election Commission of India (ECI) prepares to announce the schedule for the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls across several states, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday, October 27 said the state government would "welcome" the move if implemented nationwide.

"We are aware that the Election Commission of India is holding a press conference

today. If the SIR is announced nationwide, we will welcome it," Sarma told reporters, expressing support for the electoral body's initiative.

According to official sources, the ECI will announce the SIR schedule at a press briefing slated for 4:15 PM on October 27, likely to be led by Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar. Though the poll body's media advisory did not specify the agenda, officials quoted confirmed that the conference will primarily address the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls.

Chief Minister Sarma also lashed out at Congress leader Priyank Kharge, calling him a "first-class idiot" for allegedly making derogatory comments about the education and capability of Assamese youth.

"Priyank Kharge has insulted Assamese youth, and Congress has not yet condemned this. Perhaps, we might file a case against him because he has said that Assam does not have educated youth. It is an insult to the entire Assamese youth," Sarma asserted.

Meghalaya statistician in Stanford's top 2% scientists list for 5th year in a row



SHILLONG

With barely three months left for his retirement, a statistics teacher at St Anthony's College in Meghalaya's Shillong, Sanku Dey, is topping off his career by securing a place on Stanford University's list of the top 2% of scientists in the world for the fifth year in a row.

Of the 1.17 crore researchers evaluated globally, only an estimated 2.34 lakh made it to the list, which included 23,549 statisticians. He has been ranked at 54,006 on the list, finding the 267th spot among statisticians. The certificate mentions mathematics and statistics as his main field. Notably, he is the first one from the Northeast to achieve this feat.

In 2021, his global ranking among the 2% of scientists was 1,04,260. It went up to 1,07,863 in 2022. He improved in 2023 with

a rank of 51,491 but then slipped to 57,410 in 2024.

Stanford's 2% list is developed with Elsevier, a Dutch academic publishing company that provides scientific, technical and medical information solutions. The exercise entails identifying acclaimed researchers based on standardised bibliometric indicators like total citations and h-index scores. Data from the Scopus database is used in the process. The list features researchers with significant impact and excellence, representing 2% of all scientists worldwide.

A postgraduate in statistics from Gauhati University, Dey is the youngest of five siblings—all men. He did his schooling at his birthplace, Kharupetia, a small town in Assam's Darrang.

His teaching career spans three decades, during which he has taught at Kokrajhar College, Gauhati University, Banaras Hindu University and Saudi Arabia's King Abdulaziz University. His stint at St Anthony's College began in 2000. He now heads the Department of Statistics there.

Ask Dey about his passion for the subject, and pat comes his reply: "It was only when I was doing my honours in the subject that I fell in love with it. I cannot tell you why I pursued my education in statistics. I just picked it. Now when I ask my students this question, even they cannot give me an answer."

GUWAHATI

The number of beneficiaries under the Assam government's Nijut Moina scheme has risen to 3,50,256 girl students within a year, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced on Monday, asserting that the initiative has significantly contributed to curb child marriage and improve girls' education in the state. Also Read - Guwahati sees notable dip in Diwali pollution levels, AQI and noise down across city

Addressing a massive gathering at the Bhogeshwar Baruah Sports Complex in Sarusajai, Sarma said last year the scheme covered 1,61,302 students, and the sharp increase in beneficiaries reflects a surge in enrolment among girls.

"This number says a lot about the state's education sector as 30,000 more girl students have enrolled in educational institutions. It is a matter of great pride for Assam," he said. The Chief Minister further claimed that the state has recorded no drop-out among girl students in higher secondary, undergraduate or post-graduate courses over the past year.

"This was our goal behind launching the Nijut Moina scheme, and we have achieved it," he added. Terming the development a major milestone in curbing child marriage, Sarma recalled reports from 2021 that indicated girls as young as 12 were being



married off in districts such as Dhubri, Mankachar, Nagaon, Morigaon, Darrang and Barpeta, with many becoming mothers between the ages of 14 and 18.

"Child marriage had destroyed Assam. In 2023, we took a strong stand and arrested nearly 7,000 people involved in such practices," he said, adding that child marriage rates had reached 60% to 75% in some areas. Sarma reiterated that the government would take a two-pronged approach — strict enforcement of law against child marriage and empowerment of girls through education. "With the Nijut Moina scheme, our girls will gain courage and use it to fulfil their dreams," he said, announcing that the state government would create 1 lakh jobs, with special emphasis on opportunities for women. The Chief Minister also said the government has decided to provide

Rs 300 per month to students appearing for matriculation exam from November 15 to help them purchase books and educational materials. He announced that the Nijut Moina scheme will now cover girls in Degree 3rd Year and 5th Semester, as well as students in polytechnic and ITI institutes across Assam. Reaffirming his vision of a "new Assam", Sarma said it would be a state where women are "respected, cherished and empowered", and warned of stringent action against crimes targeting women. "No matter which religion a person belongs to, if they commit crimes against women or marry more than one wife, they will be jailed for seven years or more," he said. "This is the new Assam we are building — one where our daughters can dream without fear and succeed with dignity," he concluded.

BJP leader urges NRC in West Garo Hills, warns of 'mini Bangladesh' threat

SHILLONG

A local BJP leader has urged the implementation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in the plain belts of West Garo Hills, warning that unchecked settlement of undocumented people, allegedly from Bangladesh, poses a threat to the region's demographic balance.

Peterjob Sangma, BJP General Secretary of West Garo Hills, in a letter to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, said there is growing apprehension among locals that the district could soon turn into a "Mini Bangladesh," where native communities risk becoming minorities in their own land.

He stated that the plain belt areas, particularly Phulbari, Rajabala, Tikrikilla, and nearby villages, have seen an "alarming and unchecked increase" in undocu-

migrants from across the border in Bangladesh.

According to Sangma, these alleged immigrants have encroached on public and forest lands without legal documentation, illegally acquired agricultural plots, and consequently added to the number of undocumented voters and ration card holders.

"What was once a sporadic issue has now turned into systematic demographic encroachment, causing deep concern among the indigenous and local communities of Garo Hills," he said. The BJP leader alleged that despite peaceful and democratic efforts by NGOs, youth organizations, and traditional bodies, neither the district council nor the State government has taken any visible or concrete steps to curb the influx or address its long-term consequences.



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CHHATH PUJA: THEKUA AND THE DIVINE

Today is honoured across a wide swathe of Eastern India as the centrepiece of the four-day Chhath Puja or Surya Shashti Vrat. The word Chhath comes from the Sanskrit word Shashti, meaning 'sixth'. Chhath Puja falls six days after Diwali and is widely observed in Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Nepal. A folkloric angle later involved an aspect of the Devi called Chhati Mayi, who grants children to childless parents, and protects them thereafter. But it is essentially an ancient festival in honour of Lord Surya, thanking the sun god for the completed seasonal harvest.

What makes the festival treble special to devotees is its epic links. It is not a gender-specific festival, though nowadays we see pictures of mostly women performing this puja. However, no less than Sita Devi and Sri Rama are said to have performed Surya Shashti puja after returning from Lanka. Additionally, people in Munger, Bihar, believe that Sita performed this ritual there. Munger, formerly known as Monghyr, was originally Mudgagiri, founded by Chandragupta II in the ancient kingdom of Anga. It was one of the major cities in Eastern India, including undivided Bengal, during the Mughal period and British Raj. It is about 180 km east of Patna and was once the cultural capital of the region. I read that the Sitacharan (Sita's footprints) temple, situated on a boulder in the middle of the Ganga at Munger, is the main centre of public faith for Chhath Puja.

Most practically for today's world, Munger is the centre of the Bihar School of Yoga, established by the spiritual luminaries Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda. It celebrated its golden jubilee in 2013 with the World Yoga Convention, attended by delegates from over 56 countries and 23 Indian states. An akhand jyot, or eternal flame that was lit there over half a century ago still burns. In a personally meaningful way, the Bihar School of Yoga also deepens our link with Rama, connecting us as it does with Mahavishnu, the Mahayogi (Supreme Yogi) and Yogavidam-neta (the leader of those established in yoga). These are two of his epithets in the Vishnu Sahasra Namam, the Thousand Names of Vishnu. Moreover, in the famous verse 9.22 of the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna makes the powerful promise: "yoga-k?hema? vahamyaham," meaning "I carry the responsibility for the yoga and k?hema of my devotees," where yoga signifies gain and kshema, security.

I, too, learnt yoga once from one of the Munger School practitioners and can vouch for its monumentally calm approach. It was not flashy, aggressive yoga, but quietly centred on breathing and a gradual, harmonious flow of movement. Besides energising the body, I found it was deeply restful for the mind, especially an urban mind trying to cope with the toil and stress of our so-called modern lives. I no longer do yoga, though of course, I should, but what thankfully remains with me is the habit of taking deep, quiet breaths when I am stressed. Say, in one of Delhi-NCR's vile traffic jams, or if there is a sudden problem with water, electricity, or the internet—the usual triggers of impatience and annoyance across modern India. So, we could reasonably argue that Munger's epic legacy has remained alive for us not only through the annual ritual of Chhath Puja, which we may or may not observe, but also in our daily lives through the blessing of yoga. And, it is a short step from doing a surya namaskar to thinking of Karna and Surya.

In the Mahabharata, Karna, as we know, was the King of Anga and had a special relationship with Surya. He is said to have performed this puja ahead of the Battle of Kurukshetra, wading into the river to pray and make his offerings. This practice remains an essential ritual of the festival to this day. Draupadi and the Pandavas are also said to have performed the Surya Shashti puja.

No festival is complete without its special food, and the offering for Chhath Puja is thekua. This ancient cookie is found in Bihar, Jharkhand, eastern Uttar Pradesh and southern Nepal. It's a deep-fried biscuit, crunchy on the outside and soft on the inside, typically made with wheat flour and jaggery, often flavoured with fennel and cardamom. It is pressed into pretty wooden moulds shaped like leaves and flowers before being fried. It's available online if you're interested. I first tasted thekua courtesy of a Bihari friend and found it delicious, a simple but attractively presented treat. It can stay fresh in airtight containers for a month, and if made with wheat flour (not maida), jaggery (not refined sugar), and pure ghee (not oil), it has nutritional value, too. When I discovered that Rama and Sita had performed Chhath Puja, I wondered if they, too, ate thekua, and it became 'Ramayana cookie' to me ever after.

Just like eating curd rice is never ordinary if we recall that this was the packed lunch that Mother Yashoda gave Krishna when he went to graze the cows with the gopa boys. Vyasa says in the Srimad Bhagavatam, "Vaamey poney masrula kabalam tad phalanx aangulishu", meaning, 'His left hand held the ball of curd rice (on a leaf) and in the fingers of his other hand, he held the accompaniment', which was either lemon or mango pickle. One cannot help but feel charmed and elated to think that we still eat the food Rama and Krishna ate, and it's quite marvellous how our festivals keep the magic alive in so many ways.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

If the wicked flourish and the fittest survive, Nature must be the god of rascals.

- George Bernard Shaw

Indian and Afghan Unity for Balochistan



FATIMA BALOCH

Pakistan has launched a full-fledged war against its western neighbor, Afghanistan. While temporary ceasefires may occur under pressure from Saudi Arabia and Qatar, this conflict is likely to persist until Pakistan collapses. Historically, Afghanistan has resisted foreign domination. In 1979, the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) intervened militarily, toppling President Mohammad Daud Khan and installing a communist regime under Babrak Karmal. In response, Afghan mujahideen-backed by the United States, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and other Arab states waged a decade-long proxy war that led to the Soviet withdrawal in 1989.

After the Soviet retreat, Pakistan supported warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, whose rivalry with other mujahideen commanders triggered a brutal civil war in 1992. As former allies turned on each other, Afghanistan descended into chaos. In this vacuum, the Taliban—largely composed of madrassa students backed by Pakistan's military—emerged in 1994. They eventually defeated Hekmatyar and seized control, establishing a regime that served Pakistan's strategic interests by providing "strategic depth" against India.

Emboldened by its perceived success in Afghanistan, Pakistan adopted similar proxy tactics in Kashmir. Islamabad supported, trained, and funded militant groups—most notably Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), led by Masood Azhar, and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), led by Hafiz Saeed—fueling an insurgency in Indian-administered Kashmir. Before the Soviet invasion, Kashmir was known for its natural beauty and international tourism.

India initially responded to cross-border militancy with strategic restraint, focusing on counter-insurgency and diplomacy. However, major attacks—such as the Uri assault in 2016, the Pulwama bombing in 2019, and subsequent incidents in Pahalgam—forced a shift in India's posture. In May 2025, India launched Operation Sindoor, a targeted military campaign to dismantle

terror networks responsible for mass civilian casualties. Though briefly paused, India warned that any future attack would trigger Operation Sindoor 2.0—an even more forceful response against the Pakistan Army, now an active participant in the conflict.

Since then, there have been no attacks on the Indian Army in Kashmir. India has resumed large-scale counter-terror operations, while Pakistan has refrained from openly supporting Kashmiri and Punjabi militants due to fear of Operation Sindoor's resumption. As a result, parts of Kashmir have returned to relative normalcy. Meanwhile, Pakistan faces escalating internal crises in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), along with deteriorating relations with Afghanistan.

Despite possessing a large nuclear arsenal, Pakistan is grappling with a deepening security crisis. The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Baloch separatist groups like the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) continue high-intensity insurgencies. Frustrated by its inability to suppress these movements, Pakistan has launched fighter jet and drone strikes into Afghanistan—violating Afghan sovereignty—and opened a full-scale western front. Yet, TTP and BLA fighters continue to operate inside Pakistan. These strikes appear aimed at pressuring Kabul to dismantle anti-Pakistan insurgent networks.

Pakistan's failure to manage asymmetric warfare has led to desperation. It now seeks to internationalize its internal conflicts, hoping regional powers such as China, Qatar, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United States will pressure Kabul to act against groups sheltering along the Afghan border. After 9/11, Pakistan allied with the U.S. and NATO-led war on terror in Afghanistan, receiving Non-NATO ally status and substantial aid. During this period, the TTP emerged and aligned ideologically with the Afghan Taliban. Pakistan's repeated interference in Afghan affairs has fueled nationalist and anti-Pakistan sentiment among Afghans and the Taliban 2.0. Today, Afghanistan views a TTP-controlled Pakistan as a potential source of long-term

peace and security—envisioning both countries as sharia-based Islamic allies. Thus, Afghanistan is unlikely to abandon the TTP.

Pakistan has made it clear that unless the TTP is dismantled or unless the Afghan Taliban acts against the TTP and BLA—cross-border pressure will persist. Islamabad likely hopes for either a diplomatic resolution or direct Taliban action. Simultaneously, it appears to be preparing for potential escalation with India in areas such as Sir Creek and other border sectors. There is growing concern that the TTP could expand its territorial control within Pakistan, echoing the Taliban's rapid takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021. A scenario in which militant groups control significant territory in a nuclear-armed state would be profoundly destabilizing.

This Afghan-Pakistan conflict was predicted in the October 2025 article "Pakistan's War Option and India's Strategic Response."

Conclusion
Pakistan's military campaign in Afghanistan is aimed at pressuring the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) into submission. However, Afghanistan has a long history of resisting external influence—from the Soviet Union to the United States and NATO—and is unlikely to comply with Pakistani demands. The TTP and BLA insurgencies are expected to persist, with continued attacks on Pakistani military installations and ambushes. In response, Islamabad may escalate its operations deeper into Afghan territory.

There is also a growing possibility that Pakistan will provoke a confrontation with India—either to rally domestic support, divert attention from internal instability, or internationalize the conflict by appealing to the United Nations and other global powers for protection against the TTP, BLA, and Afghan Taliban (TTA).

In this context, India and Afghanistan must strengthen their cooperation. This includes sharing weapons and air defense systems, and jointly confronting Pakistan's military in the east through Operation Sindoor 2.0. India should formally recognize

the Afghan Taliban, as Russia has done, and deepen coordination with Kabul. New Delhi must also engage with secular Baloch nationalists—particularly the BLA leadership—and support the establishment of a free and independent secular Balochistan. This would enhance long-term security for both India and Afghanistan.

India should prepare contingency plans, including a calibrated expansion of Operation Sindoor 2.0—not only to safeguard its national interests but also to reclaim Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) before a potential collapse of the Pakistani state. If extremist groups like the TTP gain control of a nuclear-armed Pakistan, the threat would become significantly more dangerous and unpredictable. Managing a radical neighbor with a jihadist ideology would pose a far greater challenge.

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Tenzin Yangki from Tawang has become the first woman from Arunachal Pradesh to join the Indian Police Service. An academician, a civil servant, and now an IPS officer, she carries forward the legacy of service from her parents while carving her own path of excellence. Being first is never easy. It means you walk alone at first, so that others may one day walk beside you. Don't be afraid of walking alone today... Others will follow ~ Anand Mahindra, Chairman, Mahindra Group #MondayMotivation



INDIAN DEFENCE PRESENCE ON CHAGOS ISLANDS

ASAD MIRZA

Reportedly, India has secured an agreement with the government of Mauritius allowing it to establish a satellite station in the Chagos archipelago, near the controversial Diego Garcia base. According to reports the purpose of the new station, will be to track satellites and "to serve as a strategic asset for monitoring the region," a formula normally used to describe SIGINT collection sites. Apparently, India has signed an agreement with the Mauritius government to secure its defence presence on the Chagos Islands. The report does not give a precise location for the new facility, which has probably not yet been fixed, but postulates it will be "near the Diego Garcia US-UK strategic base." It is not clear how the site will be serviced. The Indian ambition is likely to be to create a similar facility to that which has already established on Agaléga, an island belonging to Mauritius, which, despite denials, India has already for practical purposes annexed.

Mauritius is heavily dependent on India's support and goodwill, under which Mauritius operates as an offshore financial centre for India. When the agreement was signed, India's Prime Minister Modi said he had always supported decolonisation of the Chagos, and that while "India and Mauritius are two nations, our dreams and destiny are one."

Also, as part of the Indian-Mauritius agreement, which was made during an eight-day visit

of Mauritius PM Navinchandra Ramgoolam to New Delhi in September 2025, a plan was sanctioned to allow Indian naval vessels to conduct hydrographic surveys of the archipelago, most of which was a closed describing it as a 'Marine Protected Area' when administered by the British Indian Ocean Territory. Such surveys would be necessary if India's Arihant-class nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines are to operate in Chagos waters. The deal also calls for the refitting of a Mauritius Coast Guard ship to prepare it for patrol duties in the Chagos, and the provision of \$680 million in aid, some of which is allocated to "development of the Chagos Marine Protected Area." Importance of Mauritius Getting Chagos Islands

Mauritius won a strategic victory on May 22, 2025, when the United Kingdom (UK) officially handed over sovereignty of the Chagos Islands after finalising the political treaty agreed to in October last year.

Under the deal, the important naval and bomber base on Diego Garcia — one of the archipelago's largest islands, operated by US forces, will be leased by the UK from Mauritius which will maintain sovereignty over the region, according to The Independent.

Terminating the deal as vital to British security, PM Starmer said that it was the only way to maintain the naval base's long-term future. He added that if UK had not agreed to the deal, the

legal challenges mounted by Mauritius would open avenues to China or any other nation to set-up their own bases on the outer islands or carry out joint exercises near its base. Mauritius has agreed to initially lease Diego Garcia to the UK for £101 million a year for 99 years.

India had welcomed the signing of the treaty between the United Kingdom and Mauritius on the return of Mauritius sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago, including Diego Garcia. External Affairs Ministry said in a statement that the formal resolution of the longstanding Chagos dispute through this bilateral treaty is a milestone achievement and a positive development for the region. This is further to the understanding between the two sides reached in October last year, and marks the culmination of the process of decolonisation of Mauritius in the spirit of international law and rules-based order.

India has consistently supported Mauritius's legitimate claim over the Chagos Archipelago in keeping with its principled position on decolonization, respect for sovereignty, and the territorial integrity of nations. External Affairs Ministry said in a statement that as a steadfast and long-standing partner of Mauritius, India remains committed to working closely with Mauritius and other like-minded countries to strengthen maritime security and regional stability and ensure peace and prosperity in the Indian Ocean region. Diego Garcia

Whenever, the name Diego Garcia is mentioned, an image of a remote island probably in the Caribbeans or near Greece conjures up, but in reality, it lies much closer to India in the Indian Ocean. For years it has served as an important base for the US and UK air and naval forces.

According to a BBC report, the base is also one of an "extremely limited number of places worldwide available to reload submarines" with weapons like Tomahawk missiles, and the US has positioned a large amount of equipment and stores there for contingencies.

Walter Ladwig III, a senior lecturer in international relations at King's College London, agrees the base fulfils "a lot of important roles" — but that "there is this level of secrecy that seems to go beyond what we see at other places."

Rumours have long swirled about the uses of Diego Garcia, including that it has been used as a CIA black-site — a facility used to house and interrogate terror suspects.

The UK government confirmed in 2008 that rendition flights carrying terror suspects had landed on the island in 2002, following years of assurances that they had not, as per the BBC. Further, tankers operating from Diego Garcia refuelled US B-2 bombers that had flown from the US to carry out the first airstrikes on Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks. And, during the subsequent "war on terror", aircraft were also sent directly from the island itself to Afghanistan and Iraq.

Arunachal CM Strengthens Strategic and Cultural Links with Japan

ITANAGAR

Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu concluded his official visit to Japan on Friday, marking a significant step towards strengthening cooperation between Japan and India's North Eastern region, particularly Arunachal Pradesh.

As part of his concluding engagements, the Chief Minister held a productive meeting with Dr Atsushi Sunami, president of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation (SPF), and senior members at the SPF headquarters in Tokyo. The discussions focused on key takeaways from the visit and a future road map for deeper engagement in areas such as infrastructure development, education, tourism, and cultural exchange.

Expressing his gratitude to the SPF for facilitating multiple interactions during his visit, Khandu said, "My sincere thanks to the Sasakawa Peace Foundation for arranging meetings with policymakers, academia, journalists and business leaders. These interactions have been immensely productive and have strengthened our shared vision for cooperation



between Japan and India's North East." The Chief Minister noted that the visit aligns with the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Japan's leadership to promote sustainable development and mutual understanding through close collaboration.

Khandu also extended appreciation to the Sasakawa Peace Foundation for showcasing the handicrafts and textiles of North East India at its headquarters in Tokyo. "The North Eastern States are known for their diverse textiles, intricate handicrafts, and unique artistry – a reflection of our vibrant traditions and creativity. Such gestures deepen cultural understanding and strengthen the people-to-people bond between India and Japan," he said. During his engagements, Khandu interacted with prominent Japanese delegates from academia and media, including Ryohei Kasai, Takenori Horimoto, Mayumi Murayama, Yujiro Futori,

Toru Takahashi, and Akiko Suzuki, along with senior members of the SPF. The discussions focused on promoting Arunachal Pradesh's culture, tourism potential, and development story.

In another key meeting, Khandu met Hiroshi Tanimura, Executive Director of the Japan Association of Travel Agents (JATA), where they deliberated on enhancing tourism cooperation between Japan and the North Eastern region, and promoting two-way travel opportunities. Khandu's visit, facilitated by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, marks a significant step towards expanding economic, cultural, and tourism linkages between Japan and India's North East, in alignment with the Act East Policy and the shared vision of sustainable regional development. The Chief Minister was accompanied by a high-level delegation including Arunachal East MP Tapir Gao, and MLA Oken Tayeng.

Manipur police make first-ever arrest in mobile tower battery theft case

IMPHAL

For the first time, the Manipur Police on Sunday arrested a man on charges of stealing a battery from a mobile tower located at Bashikhong Bazar in Imphal East, officials reported on Monday.

Following an investigation into a case of battery theft, the police arrested one Heisnam Sanjit Kumar (33), a resident of Moirang Konjengbam Leikai in Bishnupur district.

He was apprehended from Kongba Bazar under Iriblung Police Station, Imphal East district.

The police said that the market value of the battery is Rs 80,000, while the battery along with its accessories is worth Rs 2 lakh.

Upon interrogating the arrestee, the police found that well-trained technicians were involved in the theft racket, as only experienced technicians can safely disconnect the battery, even a small error during disconnection could cause a dangerous explosion.

The stolen battery and other equipment are often sold for their resale value. Some of the criminals are ex-employees who use their knowledge and old IDs to gain access to the towers.

This type of crime can have serious consequences, as it can disable mobile services during emergencies when backup batteries are needed, the police said. The police stated that further investigation is underway to recover the stolen items, as this is the first such case in the state.

The accused was produced before the court and has been remanded to police custody for four days.

The investigation is ongoing, and further links are expected to come to light soon.

Two arrested by Tripura police for violence in Dhalai district during civil society bandh

AGARTALA

Tripura Police arrested two individuals in connection with violence in Shantir Bazar following a 24-hour strike by the Tripura Civil Society. During the police operation, a crowd attacked a police vehicle while transporting suspect Riaz Debbarma, prompting additional police deployment.

The arrests of Riaz Debbarma and Ratnadeep Rudrapal led to heightened tensions, requiring extra police presence to maintain order.

Tripura Police on late Saturday, October 25 night arrested two individuals in connection with the recent violence that took place in Shantir Bazar village under Kamalpur sub-division of Dhalai District, following a 24-hour strike called by the Tripura Civil Society.

A senior Tripura Police official on Sunday, October 26 confirmed the arrests, stating that the police conducted a raid and apprehended two suspects linked to the October

23 bandh-related violence in Shantir Bazar.

"Late on Saturday, the police raided Maharani in the Salema police station area and apprehended Riaz Debbarma. While taking him to the police station, a crowd of agitated locals attacked the police vehicle, reportedly causing damage. Additional police personnel were deployed to control the situation, and the accused was successfully taken to the station," said the official.

He added that another person, Ratnadeep Rudrapal, was arrested from the Shantir Bazar area on suspicion of involvement in the same incident.

"Both individuals are currently being interrogated at the police station. A full investigation is underway into the unrest and clashes that occurred in Shantir Bazar on the day of the bandh. Legal action will be taken against the accused. The situation in the area is now under control, and we are keeping a close watch," the official added.

Himanta Biswa Sarma urges fans to preserve Zubeen Garg's legacy through music, not alcohol

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday, October 26 underscored the need to preserve the legacy of the state's beloved cultural icon, Zubeen Garg, through his music, art, and creative contributions rather than through alcohol.

Addressing the ongoing discussions surrounding the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for "Zubeen Khetra," the memorial dedicated to the late singer, the Chief Minister remarked, "Will we keep Zubeen Garg alive through music or through alcohol? Some unruly people want to keep him alive through alcohol, but the 3.5 crore people of Assam want to celebrate him through his musical creations."

He further stated that while a small group of individuals are trying to link Zubeen's legacy with alcohol, the overwhelming majority of his admirers wish to honour him through his songs, the nahar



flower, and other Assamese cultural symbols.

Clarifying his stance, Sarma added, "Some have argued that indigenous people also consume alcohol. But indigenous commu-

nities do not drink alcohol—they consume heritage drinks like Xaaj, Apong, or Rohi, which are part of cultural traditions. These drinks are served to celebrate culture, unlike whisky or rum,

which require government permission to sell." The Chief Minister also urged Zubeen's true fans to support the government's vision of building a grand memorial in his name, suggesting that it could serve as a temple or pilgrimage site for admirers to celebrate his cultural legacy.

However, the remarks drew a sharp reaction from Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) president Lurinjyoti Gogoi, who asserted that the state government should not interfere with traditional practices followed by communities in paying tribute to Zubeen Garg.

"We will not allow any interference with traditional rites while paying tribute to Zubeen Garg," Gogoi said. "Offering traditional tributes, including those involving alcohol, is part of our cultural right. The Chief Minister should respect these customs instead of undermining them," he added.

Nagaland CM calls on architects to blend safety, sustainability and Naga identity

KOHIMA

Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio has called on architects in the state to take the lead in promoting safe, sustainable and locally inspired architecture, highlighting the sector's vital role in driving employment and economic growth.

Speaking as the Guest of Honour at the 25th anniversary celebration of the Association of Nagaland Architects (ANA) held under the theme "Celebrating Community, Nurturing Creativity" in Chimoukedima, Rio said safety and sustainability must remain central to architectural practice. He encouraged architects to blend innovation with cultural identity, creating designs that are both functional and rooted in Naga heritage.

"Architects are not just designers



of buildings; they are custodians of our heritage, interpreters of our culture, and visionaries of our future," Rio said, urging the profession to shape spaces that reflect Nagaland's ethos while embracing modern technology.

The chief minister inaugurated an exhibition of home and décor materials before addressing the gathering. Reflecting on ANA's early efforts to introduce development controls and building bye-laws in the state, he said those initiatives laid the groundwork

for "organised, safe, and sustainable urban growth".

Rio lauded the association's growth into a professional body of over 120 registered architects serving across government, private, and entrepreneurial sectors. He also underscored the economic significance of the construction industry, describing it as Nagaland's "largest employment engine".

Acknowledging the state's vulnerability to natural disasters, Rio reminded the audience that Nagaland falls under "Earthquake Zone 5", stressing that safety cannot be compromised. He appealed to ANA to train and empower local youth, engineers, masons, and artisans in modern and eco-friendly construction techniques.

"By empowering our local workforce, you are not just constructing

buildings; you are constructing careers and strengthening our economy," he said.

Rio urged the architectural community to continue its mission with renewed purpose—to innovate responsibly, mentor the next generation, and build a resilient Nagaland that is "beautiful, sustainable, and proud of its identity".

Council of Architecture (India) member Dr Gauri Nitin Shiurkar also addressed the event, describing Nagaland as "a living laboratory of sustainable and cultural architecture". She emphasised the importance of blending traditional wisdom with contemporary design technologies.

The celebration paid tribute to the late C. Yantsushan Murry, Nagaland's first architect, along with other pioneers who laid the foundation for the profession in the state.

Rotary Club of Agartala Launches Food Basket Program for TB Patients under National Campaign



AGARTALA:

In a move to support the fight against tuberculosis, the Rotary Club of Agartala, in collaboration with the National Health Mission (NHM), Government of Tripura, and CSR partners NEEPCO and NTPC, has launched a Food Basket Distribution Program for TB patients. The initiative is part of the Pradhan Mantri TB. Mukh Bharat - Nikshay Mitra Campaign.

The program aims to provide sustained nutritional support to 200 TB patients over six months, helping ensure continuity in treatment and promoting recovery. Each food basket includes rice, dal, soyabean, eggs, and cooking oil—staples critical for proper nutrition during TB treatment.

The initiative is being implemented on the ground by the Rotary Club of Agartala, with NHM acting as the coordinating partner. CSR support from NEEPCO and NTPC has made the program possible.

The first phase of the distribution

began on 25th October at Sukanta Academy for Science, Arts and Culture, Agartala, with 100 TB patients receiving food baskets. The second phase will follow shortly, reaching the remaining beneficiaries. The launch ceremony was attended by His Excellency Shri Indrasena Reddy Nallu, Hon'ble Governor of Tripura, as Chief Guest. Other dignitaries included Shri Gite Kiran Kumar Dinkarao, IAS, Secretary, Health Services, Tripura; Dr. Vishal Kumar, IAS, District Magistrate & Collector, West Tripura; Shri Jeetendra Lal Das, HoPS, NEEPCO Ltd., Agartala; Dr. Nupur Debbarma, Member Secretary, NHM, Tripura; Prof. (Dr.) Tapan Majumdar, Director of Health Services, Tripura; and Rtn. Kosalaya Ghosh, President, Rotary Club of Agartala.

This collaborative initiative reinforces the shared mission of building a TB-free India while providing direct support to patients in need, combining government, corporate, and civil society efforts.

Nagaland University Researchers reveal strong link between Land Use and Water Pollution in Loktak Lake Catchment in Manipur

LUMAMI

A Nagaland University study has sounded an environmental alert for Loktak Lake, one of India's most iconic freshwater ecosystems and a designated 'Ramsar Site' in Manipur.

Researchers found that changes in land use—particularly agriculture, settlements, and shifting cultivation—are directly deteriorating the water quality of rivers feeding into the lake, threatening its biodiversity and the livelihoods of local communities.

Loktak Lake is home to 132 plant species and 428 animal species, and supports hydro-power, fisheries, transport, and tourism. However, in recent decades, the lake has been listed under the Montreux Record—a global warning list for wetlands undergoing serious ecological damage. Reduced fish populations, rising pollution levels and increased sedimentation have now become growing concerns.

A Ramsar site is a wetland designated to be of international importance under Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. These sites are recognised for their ecological significance, such as supporting biodiver-



sity or providing critical habitat for waterfowl. The convention was signed in 1971 in Ramsar, Iran.

The study was undertaken by Dr. Eliza Khwairakpam of Nagaland University. The findings were published in the International Journal of Environment and Pollution (https://doi.org/10.1504/IJEP.2025.148717), a peer-reviewed journal publishing research on environmental contaminants and their impact on health and ecosystems.

Highlighting the need for such studies, Prof. Jagadish K Patnaik, Vice Chancellor,

tal stewardship that informs policy, fosters sustainable livelihoods, and safeguards our natural ecosystems."

To understand the root cause, Nagaland University researchers conducted field sampling across nine major rivers—Khuga, Western, Nambul, Imphal, Kongba, Iri, Thoubal, Heirok and Sekmai—that drain into Loktak Lake.

Using detailed Land Use Land Cover (LULC) maps, Dr. Eliza Khwairakpam compared different types of land activities such as agricultural areas, dense and degraded

forests, settlements, Jhum cultivation and water bodies, against water quality indicators like dissolved oxygen (DO), biological oxygen demand (BOD) and temperature.

Elaborating on the key findings, Dr. Eliza Khwairakpam, Assistant Professor, Department of Environmental Science, Nagaland University, said, "Our study confirms that land use decisions across villages and forest landscapes upstream are directly impacting water quality downstream. This makes community-based land management and stricter control of agricultural runoff and waste discharge crucial for restoring Loktak Lake."

Further, Dr. Eliza Khwairakpam added, "Land management is not just an environmental concern but a livelihood protection strategy for the people of Manipur. Catchment-wide land regulation, sustainable agriculture practices and controlled Jhum cycles will be vital for protecting India's only floating national park and the endangered Sangai deer habitat within the lake."

The Nambul River was identified as the most polluted, with low oxygen levels and high organic contamination, directly linked to 47% agricultural land and 11% settlement areas in its sub-catchment. The Khuga River showed the second poorest water quality, despite having higher forest cover. Researchers attribute this to extensive Jhum (shifting) cultivation, which was recorded at 42% in the region.

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“People who ruined Bihar can’t be called Nayak”: Prashant Kishor’s dig at Tajashwi Yadav



SITAMARHI

With less than two weeks to go for the Bihar assembly polls, Founder of Jan Suraj, Prashant Kishor, on Sunday launched a veiled attack on RJD leader Tajashwi Yadav and wondered “if the people who have ruined Bihar are called ‘heroes’, ‘then who is the villain’?”

“The campaign will start after Chhath Puja. We are meeting people and our colleagues... We will start the campaign on the 28th after Chhath,” Kishor told reporters here during campaigning for the assembly

polls on November 6 and November 11, with counting of votes on November 14.

Answering a question on Mahagathbandhan Chief Ministerial face Tajashwi Yadav, who is also the leader of Opposition in the Bihar Legislative Assembly, being called “Nayak of Bihar” on social media by his supporters, Kishore replied, “If the people who have ruined Bihar are heroes, then who is the villain? The people of Bihar know which people have brought Bihar to this state...”

“They can’t be Nayak of Bihar,” he asserted. Jan

Suraj, seen as the third alternative for voters in the assembly poll, is contesting on all 243 seats.

Meanwhile, Tejashwi Yadav on Sunday assured voters that his alliance would deliver on every promise made. He took a sharp dig at the NDA, saying that “no one in NDA is saying anything except abusing Lalu Yadav and Tejashwi Yadav”.

He further hit it out at the NDA over its unfulfilled commitments, saying, “What happened to the two crore jobs, Startup India, Make in India? We believe in doing the work. We are telling everything to the people about what we will do in the next 5 years.”

Tejashwi also took aim at the NDA’s campaign strategy, saying that instead of addressing key issues, the alliance was focused on personal attacks.

“No one in NDA is saying anything except abusing Lalu Yadav and Tejashwi Yadav. This time, people of Bihar are impatient for the change,” he said.

Mahagathbandhan earlier declared Tejashwi Yadav as the CM face for the Bihar assembly polls, while also naming Mukesh Sahani of Vikasheel Insaan Party (VIP) as Deputy CM candidate.

Operation Sindoor success makes festivals vibrant: PM Modi

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday described the Chhath festival, being widely observed across Bihar and other states, as reflecting India’s cultural and social unity, with devotees from all castes performing rituals together.

In his monthly radio programme, ‘Maan Ki Baat’, Modi extended greetings on Chhath puja and said festivals have become more vibrant this year due to success of Operation Sindoor and steps taken to eradicate the Maoist menace.

“The Mahaparva of Chhath is a reflection of the deep unity between culture, nature, and society. Every section of society comes together at the Chhath ghats,” the PM said. “This sight is the most beautiful example of India’s social unity. No matter where you are, within the country or in any corner of the world, if you get the opportunity, do participate in the Chhath festival,” he said.

The PM said the achievements of the country have made the festive season more vibrant. “Operation Sindoor has filled every Indian with pride. This time around, lamps of joy were lit even in those areas where the darkness of Maoist terror once prevailed,” he said. “People want the complete eradication of Maoist terror that had jeopardised the future of their children,” he added.

The PM expressed happiness that security forces have increased the number of indigenous breeds of dogs in their contingents after he had previously suggested this in the same broadcast. He praised Gujarat’s mangrove revolution, which has



led to the return of dolphins. “This mangrove plantation, which began five years ago in Dholera near Ahmedabad, has now spread across 3,500 hectares,” he said.

Modi spoke about the unifying patriotic essence of Vande Mataram. “The Vande Mataram ignites boundless emotion and pride in every India’s heart,” he said, expressing gratitude to its creator Bankimchandra

Chattopadhyay. The PM noted that the country will mark 150 years of Vande Mataram on November 7, adding that it was first sung by Rabindranath Tagore in 1896.

He spoke about the growing global demand for Indian coffee and lauded the “unparalleled services” of Sardar Patel for the unity and integrity of the nation. “Sardar Patel has been one of the greatest personalities

of the nation in modern times. His great personality contained many qualities. I request you all to join Run for Unity to be held on October 31.”

Modi said, “On social media, we can see many reels featuring young people speaking in Sanskrit and about Sanskrit. Many even teach Sanskrit through their social media channels.” He paid tributes to Bhagwan Birsa Munda.

INTERNATIONAL

Japan successfully launches new cargo spacecraft to deliver supplies to International Space Station



TOKYO

Japan’s space agency successfully launched Sunday its most powerful flagship H3 rocket, carrying a newly developed unmanned cargo spacecraft for its first mission to deliver supplies to the International Space Station.

The Japan Aerospace Exploration

Agency said the HTV-X1 spacecraft successfully lifted off atop the No. 7 H3 rocket from Japan’s Tanegashima Space Center in the country’s south and confirmed it entered targeted orbit 14 minutes after liftoff.

The spacecraft was separated and placed into a planned orbit, JAXA said. If everything goes smoothly, it is expected to arrive at the ISS in a

few days to deliver supplies. Japanese astronaut Kimiya Yui, currently at the ISS, is set to catch the craft with a robot arm in the early hours of Thursday.

The HTV-X is the successor to JAXA’s unmanned H-II Transfer Vehicle, known as Koumотор, or stork in Japanese, which flew nine missions to the ISS between 2009 and 2020.

The new freighter can carry a bigger payload and supply power during flight, enabling the transport of lab samples that require storage at low temperatures.

The HTV-X is designed to be connected to the ISS for up to six months to deliver supplies and retrieve waste from the ISS, then conduct technical missions while making an orbital flight after leaving the station, this time for three months.

Sunday’s launch also marks a successful debut for H3 rocket’s most powerful version, with four rocket boosters and a bigger fairing, a top compartment for payloads, officials said.

JAXA President Hiroshi Yamakawa called Sunday’s launch “a major step forward” that demonstrated Japan’s capability of delivering supplies to space, which serves as “the basis of autonomous space activity.”

Iwao Igarashi, head of the Space Business Department at Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, responsible for developing H3 with JAXA and operating rocket launches, said Japan’s track record of on-time launch and accuracy in delivering payloads and the newly modified rocket prove they can accommodate a range of customer needs. He said his company plans to expand its launch facility.

H3 rocket replaces Japan’s long-beloved mainstay H-2A rocket, which made its final flight in June, as a new flagship model designed to be more cost-competitive in the global space market. The H3 has so far made six consecutive successful flights after a failed debut attempt in 2023, when the rocket had to be destroyed with its payload.

Japan sees a stable, commercially competitive space transport capability as key to its space program and national security.

US says 100% tariff on China ‘off the table’ as trade deal ‘consensus’ reached ahead of Trump-Xi meet



WASHINGTON

China announced Sunday it has reached a “basic consensus” on a potential trade deal with the United States, ahead of a highly anticipated meeting between US President Donald Trump and Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping this week.

The breakthrough came after two days of “candid, in-depth, and constructive” discussions held on the sidelines of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in Kuala Lumpur.

The talks involved Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng and a US delegation led by Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer, as reported by Xinhua.

The discussions covered a wide range of issues, including tariffs, export controls, trade in agricultural prod-

ucts, and cooperation on fentanyl-related enforcement, CNN reported.

Following the negotiations, US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told CBS News that President Trump’s threat of imposing an additional 100% tariff on Chinese goods “has gone away.”

“I would expect that the threat of the 100% has gone away, as has the threat of the immediate imposition of the Chinese initiating a worldwide export control regime,” Bessent said.

This proposed 100% tariff was initially a response to Beijing’s expanded export controls on rare earth materials. The tariff threats were set to take effect on November 1.

Both sides are reportedly now focused on preventing any further escalation in their trade tensions, which had intensified earlier this month.

Vice Premier Lifeng said

the “mutual benefit and win-win results” inherent in the economic relations between Beijing and Washington, adding that “both countries gain from cooperation and lose from confrontation.”

The “consensus” reached by the trade delegations is intended to provide a “very successful framework” for Presidents Trump and Xi Jinping to finalize a deal during their highly anticipated meeting in South Korea.

President Trump, who arrived in Malaysia for the ASEAN summit on Sunday, expressed optimism, telling reporters, “I think we’re going to have a deal with China.”

The two leaders are scheduled to meet on October 30 in South Korea, on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit. This will be their first in-person meeting amid a period of intense trade conflict.

Zubeen Garg's Death and Assam's Political Symphony: Between Mourning and Manipulation

When Assam's beloved singer Zubeen Garg passed away under mysterious circumstances in Singapore, the shockwaves of grief quickly rippled across the state - and then, just as swiftly, across its political landscape. What began as collective mourning soon transformed into a contest for moral authority, as political parties rushed to claim the mantle of "justice for Zubeen." His death, tragic and untimely, has now become the emotional axis around which Assam's political discourse turns - and perhaps, the most potent election issue heading into 2026.

The political storm following Zubeen's death has been both swift and bewildering. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), instead of maintaining a dignified silence while the investigation unfolds, has taken to the streets. Its state president, Dilip Saikia, declared that the party would "put pressure on the government" - their own government - to bring justice to Zubeen.

This declaration struck many as ironic. Why must a ruling party exert pressure on itself, when it already commands the machinery of power? The Assam Police have already constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the circumstances surrounding Zubeen's death. The team even travelled to Singapore to collect evidence, coordinate with local authorities, and interrogate suspects including Shyamkanu Mahanta, a close associate of Zubeen, now in custody.

Yet, BJP leaders continue to organize public rallies and candlelight marches, ostensibly to demand "justice for Zubeen." Ministers and MLAs, including Pabitra Margherita, Jayanta Malla Baruah, Pijush Hazarika, and Chandramohan Patowary, have joined the chorus. The optics - senior members of the ruling establishment protesting against their own administration - are peculiar, if not politically calculated.

The BJP insists that these gatherings are apolitical, meant only to accelerate judicial proceedings. But the timing and theatrics suggest otherwise. With elections less than a year away, the emotional resonance of Zubeen's name has become too powerful for any party to ignore.

Not to be outdone, the Congress Party has mounted its own campaign of sympathy. Rahul Gandhi himself visited Zubeen's home, offering condolences to his family - an unmistakable signal that the party hopes to align itself with the late singer's admirers. Gaurav Gogoi, the state Congress president, has actively sought to consolidate this emotional constituency, building bridges with the vast fan communities that continue to organize tributes and vigils across the state.

Regional and leftist parties have joined the symphony of grief, expressing condolences while subtly weaving narratives of social justice, cultural pride, and governmental negligence. Each statement, though draped in the language of mourning, carries an undertone of political calculation - a bid to translate collective emotion into electoral capital.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, known for his political agility, has found himself navigating a delicate balance. On one hand, he has publicly expressed his commitment to ensuring justice for Zubeen. On the other, his remarks have occasionally deepened confusion. Since the SIT operates under the Assam Police - and by extension, under the Chief Minister himself - his repeated assurances of "non-interference" ring somewhat hollow. He has claimed that "justice will come from the court, not the government," even as he presides over the investigative apparatus. Sarma also commented that some of Zubeen's fans are acting "against his ideals," drawing ire from sections of the public who saw it as an attempt to delegitimize spontaneous public grief. Perhaps most curiously, the Chief Minister said that "people are not angry with the BJP, but with me personally." This attempt at political self-distancing - separating his leadership from the party's identity - seemed unconvincing to many. How can a leader who personifies his party claim detachment from it when facing public anger? Sarma's remarks also ventured into the philosophical. Responding to Zubeen's oft-quoted line - "I have no caste, I have no religion, I am free, I am Kanchenjunga" - he suggested that the line was merely a movie dialogue, not an expression of the singer's true beliefs. He reminded people that Zubeen was a devout Shiva bhakta who frequently visited temples, hinting that political attempts to universalize Zubeen's identity were misplaced. But such assertions seem less like factual clarifications and more like political positioning - a subtle effort to reclaim Zubeen's legacy for a cultural narrative that aligns with the BJP's own ideological frame. Zubeen Garg was more than a singer; he was an emotion that united Assam across boundaries of caste, religion, and ethnicity. His art, his fearlessness,

the danger of exploitation.

His death has created a vacuum - emotional, cultural, and moral - that parties are racing to fill. For the BJP, framing Zubeen as a "cultural patriot" allows it to tap into Assamese pride while sidestepping ethnic



and his unfiltered honesty resonated deeply with ordinary people. On stage, he could be rebellious; off stage, disarmingly humble. When told not to sing in Hindi during a Bihu function, he refused to bow to parochial dictates, declaring, "The choice of songs belongs to the artist." He returned his payment and walked off stage, proclaiming, "I do not like you, but I love my audience. You are my people, and I am yours." This authenticity made him a rare figure in Assam's cultural landscape - one who transcended tribal and linguistic divisions that have long fragmented the state. Zubeen represented the dream of an inclusive Assam. And it is precisely this universality that political actors now seek to appropriate. By emphasizing his religious devotion, or his Assamese identity, or his humanistic philosophy, different parties are attempting to draw ideological boundaries around a man who, in life, defied them all. Zubeen's death has triggered a wave of emotion that Assam hasn't seen since Bhupen Hazarika's passing. Yet, the two artists embody contrasting legacies. Hazarika was the reformer, the torchbearer of Assamese pride in the post-independence era. Zubeen was the rebel - spontaneous, unpredictable, yet deeply humane. His appeal was not confined to connoisseurs of music; he belonged to every rickshaw puller, every tea garden worker, every young dreamer who saw in him a symbol of creative defiance. After his death, videos and anecdotes flooded social media, revealing the quiet generosity of a man who helped countless people in need without publicity or expectation. Stories of Zubeen paying for strangers' medical bills, or supporting struggling artists, multiplied. The legend expanded - from a musician to a moral icon.

That spontaneous public outpouring found its culmination in a funeral procession that became one of the largest in history. Official estimates suggest it was the fourth-largest funeral gathering in the world, after those of Michael Jackson, Queen Elizabeth II, and the Pope. For a man who once shunned fame, Zubeen's farewell was celestial.

Even after his cremation at Sonapur, thousands visit his resting place daily. No political directive sends them there. They go because grief has become a ritual of belonging - a silent declaration that Zubeen was not just an artist, but Assam's own conscience.

Zubeen sang in over 40 languages and recorded more than 32,000 songs - a staggering legacy for an artist who consciously distanced himself from commercial stardom. Though he won national awards and had Bollywood hits, he rejected the celebrity circuit, leaving Mumbai to live among his people. "I feel more at home with rickshaw pullers and shopkeepers than with elites," he once said. His humility struck a chord across borders. After his death, singers from Bangladesh and other South Asian countries began covering his Assamese songs online - tributes born not of publicity, but of pure respect. In his art and in his life, Zubeen embodied a borderless identity. That is why his death resonated far beyond Assam, drawing attention from 146 countries in the days following the tragedy.

Art and politics have always had a fraught relationship in Assam. From Bhupen Hazarika's revolutionary songs to Parvati Prasad Baruva's poetry, the state's cultural figures have shaped public emotion - and political consciousness. Zubeen's passing adds another chapter to this history, but one fraught with

ing Zubeen's "voice of the people" bolsters their claims to represent authentic Assamese aspirations.

Thus, every tribute carries an echo of strategy. Every condolence meeting doubles as a political rally. Every candle lit for Zubeen flickers with a hint of electoral calculation.

Zubeen's death has revealed something larger about Assam - how quickly sentiment can be mobilized, and how fragile the boundary between emotion and politics has become. In a state still nursing wounds from ethnic clashes, migration anxieties, and identity crises, the collective grief over Zubeen briefly united people. But as the political drums grew louder, that unity began to fracture.

The BJP's strategy - organizing rallies in the name of justice - seems aimed at converting sympathy into loyalty.

The Congress's approach - personal visits and moral positioning - seeks to humanize the opposition. Both are betting on the same emotional currency.

As 2026 approaches, Zubeen's name may echo not just in songs but in slogans. His death, tragic as it is, risks becoming the emotional battleground of the next election - Assam's political trump card.

And yet, to reduce Zubeen Garg to an election symbol would be a disservice to his legacy. He was not a man of political games but of artistic truth.

He sang of freedom, humanity, and the refusal to conform. His words - "I am Kanchenjunga" - were not a rejection of identity, but an embrace of the boundless.

They captured what Assam most needs today: a spirit of transcendence beyond narrow divisions.

If politicians truly wish to honour Zubeen, they must protect that spirit - the idea that art and compassion can unite where politics divides.

Otherwise, all the rallies and slogans will only hollow out his memory, turning a people's musician into a political instrument.

In life, Zubeen Garg gave Assam a voice that soared beyond caste and creed. In death, he has become a mirror reflecting both the beauty and the ugliness of public emotion - love on one side, opportunism on the other.

As the state heads toward another election, one truth stands clear:

Zubeen's song may be over, but the echoes of his life will keep haunting Assam's conscience - a melody of unity in a time of political noise.

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FICCI Co-Chairman Joydeep Gupta on Northeast Integration Rally 2026: “A Journey to Bridge Hearts and Highways”

SHILLONG:

The upcoming Northeast Integration Rally 2026 is shaping up to be far more than a road trip. It's being envisioned as a month-long celebration of connection, culture, and national unity — a moving tribute to the diversity and beauty of India's Northeast.

Joydeep Gupta, Co-Chairman of FICCI Assam, shared his reflections on the rally's vision and significance, describing it as “a unique effort to integrate mainstream India with the Northeast — emotionally, geographically, and culturally.”

Speaking to reporters, Gupta explained, “The rally will take place from January 4 to February 4, 2026, starting from Kolkata and traversing through all the Northeastern states. Normally, car or bike rallies are short, competitive, and focused on adventure. This one is different — it's about integration. It's a month-long movement meant to showcase who we are, what we stand for, and how deeply connected we are to the rest of India.”

Gupta said the idea emerged from a long-felt need to bridge perception gaps. “There's always been this sense that the Northeast is aloof or distant. Our brothers and sisters from the region often say that when they travel to Delhi or other metros, people treat them like they don't belong — just because they look



different. This rally is about changing that narrative. We want to tell the country that we are as Indian as anyone else. We're proud Indians, and this region is an inseparable part of India's heart.”

Showcasing the Unseen Northeast

The Northeast Integration Rally 2026 aims to go beyond the usual tourist trail. Instead of focusing on familiar destinations like Shillong or Kaziranga, the rally will bring attention to lesser-known but equally stunning regions.

“In Assam, when people talk about wildlife, they only talk about Kaziranga,” Gupta said. “But we also have Manas and Pobitora — beautiful, diverse ecosystems that deserve to be seen. The rally will spotlight these areas as alternatives, not replacements, but as equal jewels in Assam's landscape.”

Each state, he added, will play host and curate its own route. “Meghalaya will show places beyond Shillong and Cherrapunji. Tripura will bring to light its hidden cultural and natural treasures. The goal is to let people see what's been unseen — to understand that every turn in the Northeast tells a different story.”

He emphasised that even areas close to urban hubs remain largely unexplored. “Look at where we are — between Nongpoh and Shillong. It's stunning, but hardly anyone outside the region knows about it. That's what this rally is going to change.”

Adventure Meets Purpose

For adventure seekers, the rally promises an unforgettable journey. “We'll have both on-road and off-road routes,” Gupta said. “Participants will get to experience real terrain — not just highways but forest roads, riversides, and mountain passes. It'll be a thrilling chal-

lenge, especially for young people who want to see the country from a different lens.”

But beyond the thrill, he said, there's a deeper message. “Adventure is just the vehicle. The destination is integration. This rally is a call to every young Indian to understand, appreciate, and celebrate the Northeast.”

Echoing the Prime Minister's Vision

Gupta linked the initiative to the broader national sentiment expressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who often refers to the Northeast as the Ashtalakshmi of India — a symbol of prosperity and divine strength through its eight states. “What the Prime Minister says about the Northeast being the Ashtalakshmi of India is exactly what this rally stands for,” Gupta said. “It's about showing that our strength lies in unity, in understanding each other's stories, landscapes, and

struggles.”

A Rally With a Soul

The Northeast Integration Rally 2026 is expected to bring together participants from across the country — bikers, drivers, filmmakers, and explorers — each contributing to a living narrative of connection.

“The idea is not just to travel but to tell stories,” Gupta added. “Stories of people, of places, of possibilities. The Northeast is not just beautiful — it's deeply human. Through this rally, we're inviting the rest of India to come see that for themselves.”

The event, organised under the banner of the Northeast Integration Rally 2026 initiative, is now live online at northeastintegrationrally.in

As Gupta summed it up: “This is not just a rally. It's a movement — one road, one region, one India.”

Gupta further said that right now, we live in a state of disconnection. Despite being deeply dependent on one another — economically, socially, and culturally — we often act as if we stand alone. This lack of unity weakens our collective strength. The Northeast Integration Rally is more than an event; it's an opportunity to bridge these divides, to remind ourselves that real progress can only happen when we move forward together. Growth and development demand cooperation, not isolation. If we can rebuild that sense of shared purpose, we can unlock the region's full potential.



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JANUARY 10-12, 2025

ACTIVITY PROGRAM



10 JAN
NE Cultural Fest
 Any Form of Art and Cultural showcase can be showcased here. The Top performances will be invited to perform in the Main Event. Schools, College, University Department, Individual & Group Competition.



11 JAN
Adventure Sports
 Trekking & Canoe, Obstacle Navigation, Sport Climbing, Disaster Management Technique, Water Sports.



11 JAN
Barak Valley Conclave
 Potential, Issues and Challenges of Barak Valley by different youth organizations. Includes NGOs, and Governmental institution for social, political, economic, sports, environment, and other related subjects. Participation through invitation only. Different rewards are provided.



12 JAN
River-Climate Conclave
 Climate change will influence on Climate Change, pollution and river flooding. The Conclave will focus on the importance, technical and protection of River Barak. Training & Geography competitive and certification. River Barak, Climate Change.



JAN'25
Online Global Fest
 All can participate online and send a video clip on Poems, Songs, and Dance. Present in Assamese, Bengali, English, Hindi & Manipuri. Last Date: 31st December 2024.



10 JAN
Media Conclave
 Media Conclave: Media Conclave, Workshops, and the Fund, Talks and Conferences are part of the 'Barak Festival 2025'. Theme: 'One for All, All for One'. Welcome your news streamers, journalists, media & corporate HR, entrepreneurs, givers, speakers, founders.

Barak Festival

Adventure Sports, Art & Culture Promotion




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11 JAN
5E For Success Conclave
 The 4th 5E For Success Conclave is going to be held at the theme: 'From School to Campus to Corporate'. Schools, Educational Institutions and corporate houses can join the Conclave as sponsors. Quiz and Group Discussion for Barak valley Schools & College. Extension: School, Public Speaking (College). In an online event where students of NE India Schools and Colleges can participate.



10 JAN
Media Conclave
 Media Conclave: Media Conclave, Workshops, and the Fund, Talks and Conferences are part of the 'Barak Festival 2025'. Theme: 'One for All, All for One'. Welcome your news streamers, journalists, media & corporate HR, entrepreneurs, givers, speakers, founders.

10-12 JAN
Science Studio
 Get a glimpse of Science to its new heights. Class VI-XI | Teachers | Seniors, Administrators | Parents. Raw science out of textbooks into real-life experiences of students.

DEC'24-JAN'25
Photography
 Online Photography Contest: River Barak | NE India | Art & Culture of NE | NE Culture. Real-Time Photography Contest of 'Barak Festival 2025'.

10-12 JAN
E-Sports
 Full-Blown Demos | CASH PRIZES | Trophy.

Barak Festival

Band Night | 10 JAN
 Musical Night | 11 JAN



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10-12 JAN
Book Bank
 #NoLike Campaign Book Bank 2025 | Donate | Reuse | Recycle.

Book Club
 Meet Authors, Publishers, Read & Discuss, Buy and Sell Books.

Painting Carnival
 Water Colour painting and Draw-Paint Campaign.

11 JAN
film festival
 Award-Giving Ceremony | Film from Mizoram. Short Films from Barak Valley, NE India, W's. Media Talk | Exhibitions | Meet Number.



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