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PERSPECTIVE

The strongest are gentle. The smartest are quiet. The wealthiest are simple. The happiest are private. Real power doesn't need to prove itself.

Assam's Budget Projections 'Unrealistic':CAG

NEW DELHI

In a sharp assessment of Assam's financial management, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has criticised the state government for presenting what it called "unrealistic and overestimated" budget assumptions for the 2023-24 fiscal year.

The audit, tabled in the Assam Assembly, reveals substantial gaps between projected revenue and actual receipts, along with systemic weaknesses in fund utilisation and fiscal planning. According to the CAG, the Assam government incurred a total expenditure of ₹1,39,449.66 crore during 2023-24, against total grants and appropriations amounting to ₹1,69,966.13 crore.

This difference translated into overall savings of ₹30,516.47 crore, or 17.95% of total allocations. However, the audit makes it clear that these savings were largely "non-national".

The government simply did not mobilise the revenue it had projected in its budget. Actual receipts stood at ₹1,38,830.79 crore, significantly lower than the estimated ₹1,65,215.70 crore—a shortfall of ₹26,384.91 crore. Because these unachieved receipts created a resource gap, the savings shown in government accounts did not translate into real money that departments could spend.

WHO SAID WHAT



To all Airlines, Pilots, Drug Dealers, and Human Traffickers, please consider THE AIRSPACE ABOVE AND SURROUNDING VENEZUELA TO BE CLOSED IN ITS ENTIRETY. Thank you for your attention to this matter! PRESIDENT DONALD J. TRUMP ~ Donald J Trump, President of USA

Kokrajhar Imposes Prohibitory Orders After BTC Secretariat Vandalism

KOKRAJHAR

In the aftermath of vandalism at the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Secretariat, the Kokrajhar district administration on Sunday enforced prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 - the provision replacing Section 144 of the CrP - across the Secretariat complex and adjoining town areas.

The order, issued by District Magistrate Masanda M. Pertin, IAS, follows an incident on November 29 in which a group of students, identifying themselves as members of the Tribal Students of BTR, allegedly stormed the BTC Assembly House without authorisation and damaged property inside. The intrusion occurred during a protest against the Assam Government of Ministers' recommendation to grant Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to six communities. According to the administration, the act disrupted official proceedings and created panic among employees and visitors. The District Magistrate noted that similar gatherings or pro-

tests could recur, potentially threatening public peace, obstructing government functioning, and endangering lives and property - concerns underscored by earlier instances of unrest in the district.

Under the prohibitory order, gatherings of more than four people have been banned in Kokrajhar town and within the BTC Secretariat campus. Unauthorised rallies, marches, sit-ins, picketing, the display of banners, and the carrying of weapons, explosives, or inflammable materials have also been restricted. The use of microphones outdoors, torchlight processions, student group assemblies, and holding fairs or melas without prior approval are likewise prohibited. The order warns that any damage to government installations will invite strict legal action.

Exemptions have been granted to government officials on duty, magistrates, police, army and central armed forces personnel, and emergency service providers. Routine movement for senior citizens,

women, and children under 12 is also permitted. Individuals requiring special access may seek written permission from the District Magistrate. The prohibitory orders will remain in effect until further notice. Violations will be punishable under Section 223 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, in addition to other relevant legal provisions related to trespass or destroying public property. All police stations, sub-divisional officers, CRPF and SSB units, and local authorities have been directed to enforce the order strictly. The District Information and Public Relations Office has been instructed to disseminate the directives widely through media and public announcements. Authorities have clarified that the restrictions are preventive and intended to stabilise the situation, safeguard public order, and ensure uninterrupted functioning of government offices. Citizens or organisations seeking modifications or relaxation of the provisions may submit written objections to the District Magistrate.

SHILLONG

In a significant boost to India's semiconductor ambitions and a landmark achievement for the Northeast, the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Meghalaya has successfully completed two indigenous chip fabrications under the Centre's Chips to Startup (C2S) and SMDP programmes. The institute, now emerging as a key academic contributor to the country's growing semiconductor ecosystem, earlier this year designed and fabricated Meghalaya's first-ever indigenous digital integrated circuit. The chip, which drew national attention, was showcased at Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the SEMICON India 2025 Summit, highlighting the expanding role of academic research in India's push toward self-reliance in chip design and manufacturing. The milestone was widely recognised for placing Meghalaya on the semiconductor map and demonstrating NIT Meghalaya's advancing capabilities in digital logic and VLSI design.

Building on that success, the institute has now received its second

fabricated chip - a mixed-signal integrated circuit that combines digital and analog design blocks. Developed under the SMDP C2S programme and fabricated at the Semiconductor Laboratory (SCL), Mohali, the chip integrates a Finite State Machine (FSM) for classifying soil moisture levels and an 8-bit Digital-to-Analog Converter (DAC) to generate corresponding output signals.

The design holds potential applications in agriculture and environmental monitoring. The effort was led by faculty members Dr. Prabir Saha, Dr. Shubhankar Majumdar, and Dr. Pradeep Kumar Rathore, supported by PhD scholars Geetima Kachari, Parishmita Goswami, and Deibaphira Suchiang. Their achievements reflect NIT Meghalaya's growing research capabilities and its expanding role in advancing India's semiconductor mission. With two successful chip tape-outs in quick succession, NIT Meghalaya is steadily positioning itself as a key academic force in India's quest for semiconductor innovation and technological leadership.

Tripura signs major skill development MoUs with IIT Delhi

AGARTALA

In a significant step towards enhancing employability and creating new opportunities for the youth of Tripura, the Directorate of Skill Development has signed two major Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with IIT Delhi and Tata IIS. These partnerships aim to train a total of 1,000 candidates in cutting-edge job roles aligned with emerging industry demands, thereby boosting local employment and reducing outmigration.

The first MoU, signed with IIT Delhi, will train 500 candidates in five futuristic job roles—Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Internet of Things (IoT), Blockchain, and 5G technologies. These programmes will be implemented in collaboration with NIELIT Agartala, TIT, and other Government institutions in the State. Funding will be jointly provided through PMKVY 4.0 (Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana) and the State-supported MMDUP (Mukhya Mantri Dakyatha Unnyan Prakalpa) scheme.

Shri Ashutosh Dutt Sharma, CEO of IHFC (I-Hub Foundation for Cobotics), IIT Delhi's Technology Innovation Hub, was present during the signing and expressed interest in establishing a regional centre in Tripura in future. This proposed centre will focus on supporting startups in these new-age technology domains, empowering local innovators and generating IT-linked employment within the State.

Under the Second MoU, Tata IIS will train another 500 candidates in high-demand technical sectors such as Industrial

Automation Safety Engineering, Industrial Robotic System Integration, Electric Vehicle Maintenance Technician, CNC Programming, and 3D Printing Operations. These trainings will be conducted in collaboration with the State's ITIs.

During the MoU signing, Shri Mayank Palan, CFO of Tata IIS, highlighted that these programmes will be strictly placement-linked. He assured that trainees will be connected to Tata's wide network of industrial clients across mainland India.

This initiative is expected to significantly enhance employability and open new livelihood avenues for the youth of Tripura in advanced manufacturing and automotive technologies.

The Director of Skill Development emphasised that digital skills will play a crucial role in enabling youth to secure employment within Tripura itself. By promoting IT, ITes, and startup-oriented training, the Directorate aims to reduce the need for youth to migrate to other States in search of jobs.

During the PMKVY 4.0 meeting, Shri Kiran Gite, IAS, Secretary, Industries & Commerce, highlighted three essential components for successful skill development in Tripura: highly skilled trainers, state-of-the-art training centres, and the careful selection of motivated aspiring candidates.

He noted that the Directorate is committed to strengthening training quality across all institutions. The trainings will focus more on outcomes and will be based on demand from the industries.

IMPHAL

Hundreds of internally displaced people (IDPs) affected by Manipur's prolonged ethnic conflict held a demonstration near the Raj Bhavan in Imphal on Sunday, demanding their right to return to their homes after more than two years of living in relief camps.

The demonstrators, who came from Churachandpur, Kangpokpi, Imphal West, and Imphal East districts, have remained displaced since ethnic violence erupted in May 2023. Many said they continue to face uncertainty, trauma, and deteriorating living conditions as government rehabilitation efforts stall.

The protest took place even as the state hosts the Sangai Festival, Manipur's biggest tourism showcase. For the displaced families, the festival's grand celebrations amid their ongoing suffering were symbolic of official indifference. Many held placards reading "Displaced lives matter", "People boycott Sangai Festival", "Rights first, tourism later", and "Ensure our fundamental rights", capturing widespread anger at what they described as the government's misplaced priorities.

Security personnel stopped

'Let Us Go Home': Displaced Manipur Families Protest Outside Raj Bhavan



the marchers approximately 200 metres from the Raj Bhavan, near Kangla Gate. Blocked from moving closer, the IDPs rerouted their demonstration towards Imphal West's Uripok area, continuing their rally under heavy police watch.

Sunday's protest is the latest in a growing wave of demonstrations since the Sangai Festival began on November 21. Displaced groups and civil society organisations argue that celebrating a tourism festival while thousands remain homeless sends a misleading message that normalcy has returned to Manipur.

"We gathered here today out of mounting frustration," said Irom Abung Meitei, who was displaced from Churachandpur. "The Sangai Festival is being held under the claim of

normalcy, while the plight of displaced people is completely ignored. If needed, we will intensify our agitation and stop returning to the relief camps."

Tensions have escalated in recent days, with clashes reported between security forces and displaced protesters as authorities attempt to secure festival venues. Community leaders insist that restoring the rights and security of displaced families must take precedence over tourism promotion.

More than 260 people have been killed and thousands uprooted since violent clashes broke out between the Meitei and Kuki communities in May 2023. Over two years later, many continue to live in makeshift camps with no clarity on when they can safely return to their homes.

India clinches 15th Manipur Polo International title, beats Colombia in final

KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

IMPHAL: The 15th Manipur Polo International wrapped up on Sunday at Mapal Kangjeibung with India-B (Manipur) lifting the title after an 8-5 win over Colombia. The tournament returned this year after a two-year break.

The Manipur Horse Riding and Polo Association organised the event, which began on 22 November at the world's oldest active polo ground. Five teams took part: the United States, Colombia, India-A, India-C (Chhattisgarh) and India-B (Manipur).

Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla inaugurated the final. He and First Lady Jyoti Bhalla later presented the trophies to the winners and runners-up.

Steering Committee Chairman Prof. Ch. Priyoranjan Singh called this edition one of the most gripping in recent years. He said Manipur's players have reached a level where they can compete with established polo nations like Colombia and the United States. He welcomed the tournament's return after disruptions caused by the pandemic and hoped to see more international participation in the coming years.

Priyoranjan added that the continued rise of polo in the state would help



preserve the Manipuri pony, which remains central to the sport's heritage.

The Governor released the tournament souvenir and formally opened the match by throwing in the polo ball. The final drew an enthusiastic crowd, showcasing the impressive skill and competitive spirit of the participating players.

The presence of international teams added significance to the event. The matches also highlighted Manipur's rich equestrian heritage and its global recognition as the birthplace of modern polo.

After the match, the Governor and the First Lady presented prizes to the winners and participating teams, appreciating their sportsmanship and dedication. The Governor then declared the tournament closed.

The 15th Manipur Polo International returned this year after a two-year break, revived with renewed energy under the Governor's leadership. The President of the Manipur Pony Society, dignitaries and local spectators were also present.

The tournament was organized by the Manipur Horse Riding and Polo Association and featured five teams USA, Colombia, India A (Indian Polo Association), India B (Manipur) and India C (Chhattisgarh).

Welcome Biswajit Biswas



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CLICKS VS. CREDIBILITY

Journalism, once celebrated as the conscience of democracy, has entered an era of profound ethical, structural, and philosophical transformation. The press long regarded as the fourth estate has historically operated as the watchdog of public interest and a mediator between the state and its citizens. It served as a moral and intellectual bulwark against arbitrariness and misinformation. Yet, in the twenty-first century, journalism stands at a critical juncture where credibility and commercialism contest for supremacy. The vocation that once symbolized the pursuit of truth and public enlightenment increasingly faces the risk of being subsumed within the profit-driven logic of the market and the algorithmic demands of digital visibility.

Historically, journalism in India and beyond was an act of public service animated by conviction, not competition. Editors of the nationalist and early postcolonial era such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, and B.G. Horniman conceptualized journalism as a pedagogical enterprise, committed to civic education and the collective good. Newspapers such as Kesari or The Bombay Chronicle served not merely as organs of opinion but as instruments of moral and political awakening. They derived legitimacy from their ethical authority rather than their circulation numbers. In contrast, today's media ecosystem operates within a hyper-commercialized, attention-driven economy where algorithms, analytics, and monetization models dictate not only what is published but also how truth itself is constructed and consumed.

As articulated by the Press Council of India (PCI) and echoed in UNESCO's Global Media Ethics Charter, journalism today must navigate a labyrinth of dilemmas arising from the commodification of information, political patronage, technological surveillance, and ideological polarization. What was once regarded as the "fourth pillar of democracy" risks devolving into an echo chamber amplifying existing biases and privileging virality over veracity. The shift from the public sphere to the marketplace of attention represents not just a structural evolution but a civilizational crisis of truth.

The defining feature of the contemporary news economy is immediacy, which privileges speed over substance. The relentless pursuit of "breaking news" has eroded the foundational tenets of journalism: truth, verification, and independence. In an age of algorithmic amplification, the axiom "if it bleeds, it leads" has acquired new dimensions now snow quantified through metrics like impressions, engagement rates, and click-through data. The Oxford-Reuters Institute's Digital News Report (2024) reveals a disturbing paradox: the proliferation of misinformation now often stems from mainstream media outlets under pressure to sustain relevance in a crowded digital marketplace. The ethical cost of such expediency is profound. Once public trust is eroded, it cannot be algorithmically restored. The rise of paid news, native advertising, and influencer-driven reporting epitomizes the corrosion of professional integrity. When editorial autonomy becomes vulnerable to financial inducement, the boundary between journalism and propaganda collapses. The Election Commission of India has repeatedly warned that paid news distorts democratic processes and manipulates electoral consciousness. As a result, the moral economy of journalism once anchored in public faith stands imperiled by systemic self-interest.

Despite the digital deluge, print journalism continues to command moral gravity and intellectual authority in India. Its permanence confers upon it a unique archival responsibility. A printed falsehood is not ephemeral; it enters the historical record. Therefore, accuracy, verification, and editorial scrutiny are not procedural luxuries but moral imperatives. The permanence of print compels accountability in a way that the fleeting digital interface does not. In India's diverse linguistic and cultural landscape, regional newspapers often serve as primary knowledge institutions for millions. Yet this power carries peril. Sensational or communalized reportage in vernacular dailies can inflame tensions and distort the social fabric. Here, journalistic ethics intersects with cultural responsibility calling for empathy, pluralism, and inclusivity in both language and representation. Ethical journalism, thus, is not merely a professional code but a cultural duty anchored in the recognition that every story has moral and social consequences.

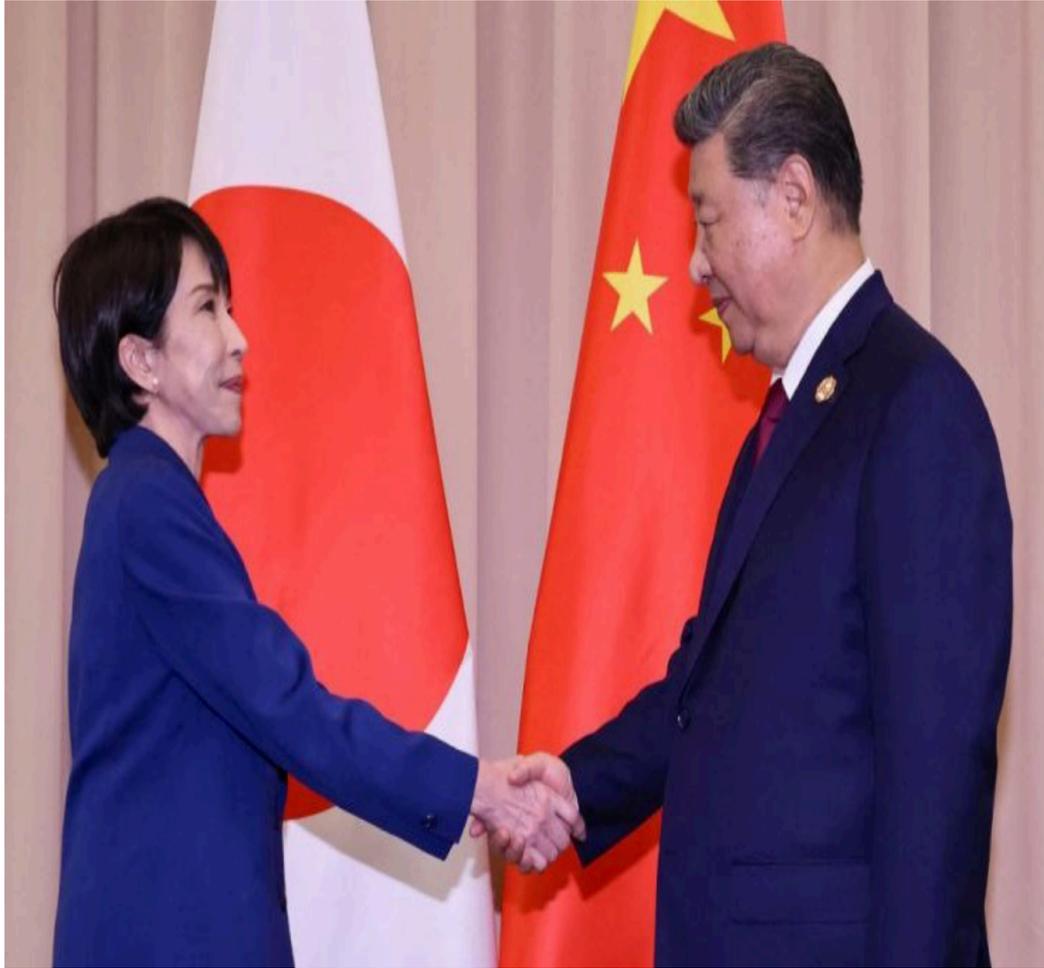
The collapse of traditional gatekeeping in the digital sphere has led to the conflation of news and entertainment, information and spectacle. Algorithms prioritize outrage, novelty, and emotional intensity often at the expense of nuance and depth. The result is a spectacularized public sphere, where virality substitutes for veracity, and where news is consumed as performance rather than deliberation. As Pierre Bourdieu argued in On Television, this transformation trivializes discourse by reducing complex realities to consumable sound bites. The rise of tabloidization has replaced critical inquiry with personality-centric narratives and celebrity scandals. Stories of agrarian distress, environmental degradation, or healthcare inequities struggle for visibility against the noise of celebrity weddings or political theatrics. Consequently, the epistemic function of journalism to inform rational public debate has been supplanted by the economics of distraction. This crisis is not merely editorial but epistemological. When news becomes entertainment, truth becomes relative. In this context, editors face a profound dual challenge: to sustain readership in a hypercompetitive environment while preserving journalism's civic and moral core. The ethical journalist, therefore, must act not as a performer but as a custodian of collective reason.

Media ethics in India is further complicated by questions of national security, privacy, and public accountability. Coverage during crises such as the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, the Pulfama incident, or the Galwan Valley conflict has exposed how real-time reporting, though technologically feasible, can endanger lives and compromise strategic operations. Ethical journalism must operate within the framework of "responsible freedom", balancing the citizen's right to know with the nation's right to safety. The Press Council of India's Norms of Journalistic Conduct (2022) emphasize that press freedom is not absolute; it is a disciplined freedom embedded in responsibility. The reckless dissemination of sensitive visuals or speculative narratives during crises corrodes both public trust and institutional credibility. Likewise, investigative journalism, when untethered from ethical safeguards, risks devolving into voyeurism or trial by media a phenomenon that subverts the judicial process and weaponizes perception. The use of undercover operations or hidden cameras must remain exceptional, justified only when overwhelming public interest is evident and all other avenues of disclosure have been exhausted.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

I much prefer the sharpest criticism of a single intelligent man to the thoughtless approval of the masses. - Johannes Kepler

CHINA-JAPAN SPAT



HARSHA KAKAR

China reacted angrily after the Japanese PM, Sanae Takaichi, mentioned in response to a question in their parliament that a Chinese assault on Taiwan could constitute a 'survival-threatening situation' for Japan, which could lead to it exercising 'its right of self-defence.' She even invoked the US-Japan defence treaty. All this, despite Japan accepting the 'One China' policy in 1972, when it normalized relations with Beijing.

In 2011, former Japanese PM, Shinzo Abe, had also mentioned, 'A Taiwan contingency is a contingency for Japan. In other words, it is also a contingency for the Japan-US alliance. People in Beijing, particularly President Xi Jinping, should not misjudge that.' Japan has been conveying that occupation of Taiwan would only be the start of Chinese offensive actions in the region.

Takaichi is a conservative who regularly visits the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo. This shrine honours Japan's war dead, including convicted war criminals, hence disliked in China. Since becoming PM, she has avoided doing so. China, responding to her Taiwan comments, issued travel and education advisories for Japan, stopped imports of Japanese sea food as also dispatched coast-guard and naval vessels close to Japanese islands as a show of force. It began falsely highlighting targeting of Chinese citizens in Japan, ignoring the reverse in China.

Beijing prevented its premier from meeting Takaichi on the sidelines of the G20 summit. The Chinese also summoned the Japanese ambassador and demanded that the statement be retracted. Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi stated that 'Japan crossed the red line.'

China's concern was evident when it raised the dispute in the UN. In a letter to the UN Secretary General, the Chinese per-

manent representative wrote, 'If Japan dares to attempt an armed intervention in the cross-strait situation, it would be an act of aggression. The Chinese Counsel General in Osaka tweeted on social media seeking the 'head' of the Japanese PM, only to retract it later. China was countering with every means at its disposal, led by its 'wolf warrior' diplomats.

The Chinese President, Xi Jinping, requested for a tele conversation with Trump on the subject. This is possibly the first time in years that China requested for a call, normally it being the US. While Trump commented on the conversation in his Truth Social post, avoiding any mention of Taiwan, the Chinese read out specifically mentioned Taiwan. It said Taiwan's return to China was an 'integral part of the postwar international order,' highlighting its historical dispute with Japan.

Trump also spoke with Takaichi soon after his conversation with Xi Jinping. This call was initiated by Trump. Takaichi mentioned, 'We confirmed the close coordination between Japan and the US.' Neither side confirmed whether Taiwan was discussed, though Trump is likely to have asked her to tone down her comments, as he seeks to enhance US ties with China.

Such reaction from China would not have happened unless Takaichi hit a raw nerve. There is no doubt that an independent Taiwan is a concern for China, which has threatened to integrate it by force. Xi has repeatedly tasked his PLA to prepare for occupation of the island and has regularly conducted threatening exercises in its vicinity.

China had presumed that the world would watch, possibly criticize in global forums, while it occupied Taiwan by force, but Takaichi's comments implied possible global intervention.

Till now it was expected that Japan would militarily only intervene in Taiwan, provided the US did, though it has no legal obligation to do so. Thus far, US policies

on supporting Taiwan militarily have been vague. However, this statement meant that it could be Japan leading the way, with the US forced to be involved, based on the US-Japan defence pact.

A similar scenario could emerge with the Philippines, where it may also join the US in countering the invasion. This could draw in other nations. Takaichi's statement also conveys that nations would intervene, despite accepting the 'One China' policy. This goes against the Chinese perception.

Takaichi had her reasons for making the statement. For Japan, the loss of Taiwan would impact its maritime and economic security, hence is essential that the nation continues to survive. Taiwan is located barely a hundred kms from Yonaguni Island, Japan's westernmost inhabited territory.

This implies that any Chinese activity would violate Japanese air and EEZ, which it already does during exercises threatening Taiwan. It would also open doors for China to demand possession of the disputed Senkaku islands from Japan.

Most of Japan's oil imports move through the Taiwan straits. Loss of these straits to China would have far reaching impact on Japan's economy, as the straits would become China's inland waterway, which it could block at any time. Taiwan is Japan's fourth largest trading partner as also plays a major role in its IT sector, which would be impacted.

Takaichi did signal a turn down when she stated that she would restore ties with China through dialogue.

For India, which has steered away from the controversy, the Chinese message is clear. If it is threatening Japan today, it would do the same with India, when it comes to its claim lines. Any nation coming in support of India could face the same set of pressures as Japan is facing. China has not budged on its claims on Ladakh as also Arunachal. India must be prepared to defend its

territories on its own. Taiwan, realizing the same, has enhanced its defence budget by USD 40 Billion to counter growing Chinese threat.

China recently re-ignited the Arunachal dispute with the incident of Pema Thongdok, an Indian national, born in Arunachal, settled in the UK, while transiting through Beijing. She was held up for more than 18 hours, on grounds of her passport mentioning Arunachal, before being permitted to proceed. India issued a 'demarche' to China on the subject but that would have little meaning.

Takaichi has displayed that standing up to China can rattle Xi Jinping, forcing Beijing to open all cards. This approach should also be considered by India in its dealing with China. India and Japan should also enhance their security ties, especially as it concerns the Indo-Pacific, in view of the common threat by China. The two most powerful nations in Asia, after China, standing together, can send a firm message, especially now when Trump has different intentions.

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

30 YEAR BUBBLE BURSTING
Japan ends "CARRY TRADE" ending. For 30 years Japan has loaned billions to investors in global markets, and money flowed into real estate, stocks, bonds, commodities & businesses. The Japanese "carry trade" blew the assets of the world...into the biggest bubble in the world.

Japan put a pin into these Global assets and the biggest crash into history began over Thanksgiving. For my next few "Tweets" I will be sharing my opinions on what a person like you can do to get richer... as global asset bubbles burst and unemployment rises.

The 10 possible actions may prevent you from being you from being a victim of the biggest bubble in history bursting.

Rather than being a victim...my intention is you possibly get richer instead of poorer.

Investment #1: I invest in energy such as oil and natural gas: We all know AI will wipe millions of jobs out.

I am investing with oil and natural gas producers because AI demand massive amounts of energy to support AI growth.

You may want to invest in oil and natural gas companies via private equity (which is what I do...a Fast Track deal in my Cashflow Boardgame...or you can all your financial planner or stock broker... and invest via stocks, ETFs or mutual funds dedicated to energy companies. I am. I plan on getting richer although tragically...millions will become unemployed, poorer, and most likely lose the homes they own. Always remember Rich Dads lesson, "The real estate market depends upon jobs."

You can become richer even if the global economy crashes.

Please wait for my next nine investment suggestions. Remember all 10 suggestions are only my suggestions... I make no recommendations.

Take care.



Zohran Mamdani political future depends on his performance

KALYANI SHANKAR

Zohran Mamdani's recent record-breaking achievement in New York as its Mayor is astonishing. Elected as the first Muslim South Asian Mayor, he represents a unique mix of identities. Born in Africa with South Asian heritage and a practitioner of Shia Islam, he is also the son of renowned filmmaker Mira Nair.

Since his election, he has received considerable media attention. "A moment comes but rarely in history when we step from the old into the new," Mamdani told a cheering crowd in New York, quoting India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, from his 1947 freedom speech. Nehru said, "A moment comes but rarely in history when we step from the old into the new," Zohran Mamdani told a cheering crowd in New York, quoting India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, from his 1947 freedom speech. Many people believe that Mamdani's mention of Nehru's speech signalled the beginning of something new and potentially transformative in New York.

Mamdani expressed his pride in possibly becoming the first Indian-American Mayor of the city, honouring his mother's Hindu heritage. Though he identifies as

a Muslim, he has a strong understanding of Hinduism and values traditions like Raksha Bandhan, Diwali, and Holi. On Instagram, he shares messages in Hindi, often using playful imagery and dialogues from Bollywood films.

Mamdani's mother, Mira Nair, is an award-winning filmmaker known for "Monsoon Wedding" and "The Namesake." His father, Mahmood Mamdani, is a professor of anthropology at Columbia University. Mamdani grew up in Cape Town and moved to New York at the age of seven.

Mamdani's election marks a progressive shift in American politics, as he defeated established figures like Andrew Cuomo and Curtis Sliwa. His victory symbolises change and overcame a \$22 million effort by 26 billionaires to block his path to becoming New York City's Mayor, inspiring hope in the power of democracy.

In just nine months, Mamdani went from being a little-known assemblyman in the New York state legislature to mayor-elect. He ranked low in opinion polls. The heart of his campaign was a strong field operation. Many New Yorkers, mostly unpaid, worked hard to share his message of progressive change.

"Zohran Mamdani is transforming pol-

itics," said Bernie Sanders, the US Senator from Vermont who inspired him. "As mayor, he will advocate for New York's working people, which may alarm the establishment and billionaires, but it's why over 100,000 volunteers backed his campaign."

New York's mayoral elections often receive little attention, as they are frequently dominated by wealthy politicians in this Democratic city. However, when Zohran Mamdani won the Democratic primary, his campaign gained traction quickly. In just one month, he transformed social media support into real votes, making the race a global focus. In his victory speech, Mamdani declared, "I will wake up each morning determined to make this city better for you than it was the day before."

He graduated in 2014 from Bowdoin College in Maine, where he earned a degree in Africana studies and cofounded his college's Students for Justice in Palestine chapter. He worked as a housing counsellor for low-income families before being elected to the New York Assembly in 2020, defeating a longtime Democratic incumbent in Queens. He has since won reelection twice.

His campaign appealed to young voters who valued his authenticity, while crit-

ics question his leadership experience. Mamdani's democratic socialist platform includes free public buses, universal childcare, rent-stabilised apartments, a \$30 minimum wage by 2030, and higher taxes on the wealthy, offering hope for a better future in New York City. Despite a brief campaign, he effectively turned social media support into community votes, drawing attention in India and highlighting the Indian diaspora's influence in the US.

Trump called Zohran Mamdani a "communist" and claimed that America "lost a bit of sovereignty" in the Mayrale elections. Trump was concerned about funding New York, stating that Mamdani would waste the money due to his leftist views. Trump's supporters, the MAGA crowd, reacted strongly to recent losses in mayoral and gubernatorial elections, especially Mamdani's victory, blaming Trump for prioritising foreign policy over domestic issues.

The elections saw major Republican losses in Virginia, New Jersey, California, and New York City. Mamdani's victory has drawn national attention, sparking criticism among Trump loyalists who question his influence on the GOP. Trump faces criticism from supporters over these defeats, especially in New York City.

Police announce traffic, parking, and security plan for Hornbill Festival 2025

KOHIAMA
Kohima police have released detailed traffic, parking, shuttle, and security guidelines for the 28th Hornbill Festival, scheduled from December 1-10 at the Naga Heritage Village in Nagaland's Kisama.

During a media briefing at the PHQ Mini Conference Hall on Saturday, Additional Director General of Police (ADGP) Renchamo P. Kikon highlighted that traffic management has improved over the years.

He noted that last year's 25th edition saw "seamless regulation" with minimal complaints. ADGP Kikon said necessary security arrangements have been made, including a three-tier security system.

He added that armed personnel will not be allowed inside the main arena, following the practice of previous editions.

Exceptions will be made only for VVIPs with Z-plus protection, whose security personnel may carry only small, concealed



weapons. "There will be no visible arms inside the festival arena except for Tourist Police and District Police on duty," Kikon said, noting that the Chief Minister has reiterated this directive to all security forces in the state.

Additional SP (Traffic) Puzoto Khatso presented the traffic management plan. Vehicles entering Kisama will be parked in designated zones based on car pass categories:

Z (VVIPs): Main Arena/VW-II Museum

X (Heads of Departments): Parking near Gate-2

Y (Others): Parking near Gate-2
Organisers/ Artists: Amphitheatre
Vendors/Service Providers: Entry via Japfu Christian College (JCC), exit via Imagland to NH

PWDs: Parking near Gate-2

Key traffic and parking rules include:
Entry to the venue is allowed only for valid car pass holders via Gate-1, with parking near Gate-2.

Vendors must enter via JCC before 9 a.m. or after 6 p.m. and exit via Imagland.

Z-category vehicles can enter the main arena only through Gate-2.

Vehicles with X, Y, and PWD passes will park at Kisama Parking Area near Gate-2.

Vehicles parked near Gate-2 will exit via Imagland (southern/Manipur-bound) or Rhododendron Resort/NH (Kohima-bound). Additional parking for LMVs is

available at Phesama ground. An alternate route from Dimapur/Chumoukedima to Kisama is via Old KMC check gate-Joiso-Nagaland College of Music and Fine Arts-Forest Colony-BSNL Exchange-PHQ Point-Phesama-Kisama.

Vehicle owners should display contact numbers on windshields.

Vehicles parked on the NH between Phesama old check gate and Kisama will be towed under Section 127 of the MV Act; owners bear damage costs, towing charges Rs 1,500, plus a Rs 500 penalty under Section 201. Drone operators must obtain prior permission from PHQ; violations will be prosecuted.

Shuttle services include:

35 free buses between parking zones and the venue. 10 NST paid buses (five each from PHQ Point and ISBT) with fares of Rs 50 and Rs 80, respectively.

Army escort vehicles must park at Kig-

wema ground, and no armed personnel will be allowed inside the main arena.

Heavy vehicles will be restricted from entering Kohima between 7 a.m. and 10 p.m. from December 1-10, with specific diversion routes in place. At Kigwema ground, vehicles without passes can park on a payment basis, with free shuttle services transporting visitors to and from the festival venue.

During the Night Carnival, the road stretch from Y-Junction Phoolbari to Razhü Point will be closed daily from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. Light motor vehicles and public utility vehicles will follow designated alternate routes, while city buses will terminate at assigned points to ensure smooth traffic management.

Kohima police have urged the public to follow all traffic and security guidelines to ensure a safe and smooth festival experience.

Biprojit Deb emerges champion



OUR CORRESPONDENT

SILCHAR: Biprojit Deb has won the second North East Para Sports Meet in Guwahati, delivering a commanding performance that added another highlight to Assam's para sports record. The tournament was organised by Udayachal, a memorial trust, with support from the Paralympic Association of Assam under the Paralympic Committee of India. Biprojit defeated Sikkim's Rajen Tamang 3-0 in the final, wrapping up the match with set scores of 11-2, 11-2 and 11-3.

The result showcased his growing dominance and steady rise on the para table tennis circuit. With the title secured, Biprojit will now shift his attention to the upcoming Inter-District Championship at Nehru Stadium. His strong run of form reflects the training he has received under coach Subhashish Chakraborty at the Silchar DSA Table Tennis Academy. Partha Dev has also played a key role in shaping his progress. The victory has drawn praise in Silchar and across Assam. Both Chakraborty and Partha Dev congratulated Biprojit and wished him continued success in the days ahead.

Assam MLA Sherman Ali Ahmed Suspended Again After Procedural Face-Off in Assembly



OUR CORRESPONDENT

GUWAHATI: Assam MLA Sherman Ali Ahmed was suspended from the Assembly for the second time on Saturday, a day after his earlier suspension for the entire Winter Session was revoked. The latest action followed his attempt to raise a Point of Order without adhering to the procedural rules of the House.

Speaker Biswajit Daimary intervened and asked Ahmed to

specify the rule under which he sought to raise the issue. Ahmed offered no clear response and kept speaking despite repeated instructions to follow the procedure. His continued defiance prompted the Speaker to order a brief suspension.

On the opening day of the session, both Ahmed and Congress MLA Nurul Huda had been suspended for the entire Winter Session on the recommendation of the Privilege Committee over alleged misconduct toward Deputy Speaker Numal Momin. The suspension was withdrawn on Friday after appeals from leaders across party lines.

Ahmed's fresh suspension came less than 24 hours after that reinstatement. Once the Speaker issued the order, the House moved on with its scheduled business, signalling an emphasis on discipline and procedural clarity during the ongoing Winter Session.

Meghalaya Kicks Off Northeast India Organic Week, Attracts International Delegates

GUWAHATI

The Meghalaya agriculture department, in collaboration with the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), the Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Department of Commerce, and the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM-Organics Asia), inaugurated the first Northeast India Organic Week on Friday.

The four-day event, which will conclude on Monday, brings together global buyers, organic experts, and youth delegates.

It aims to position Meghalaya and the northeast as a major hub for organic products, featuring the APEDA buyer-seller meet and the 4th IFOAM World Organic Youth Summit.

Delegates, importers, and representatives from 13 countries, including Malaysia, Tai-



wan, Mongolia, New Zealand, and Indonesia, are attending. Officials said the initiative

provides a platform to showcase the region's organic potential and foster long-term collab-

orations.

"APEDA has helped Meghalaya's high-value organic and natural produce such as ginger, turmeric, fresh fruits and niche spices enter new and emerging markets in the Middle East. These efforts have enabled stronger market linkages, higher value realisation for farmers and enhanced visibility for the state's organic products," an official said.

APEDA general manager Saswati Bose added, "Meghalaya, with its rich biodiversity and strong community-driven farming systems, is an ideal state for advancing organic agriculture."

Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Secretary Vijay Kumar D said, "Meghalaya is the second fastest growing state in the country, behind Tamil Nadu, and the only state with 10% growth over the last four years, post-Covid, a surge driven primarily by the agriculture sector."

Opposition Slams Assam's Tea Worker Land Bill as 'Poll-Driven' Legislation

GUWAHATI

The Assam Assembly's passage of an amendment bill enabling land distribution to tea estate workers has triggered sharp political reactions, with the Congress alleging that the move is timed to influence the upcoming state elections rather than address long-standing demands of the community.

The bill, cleared on Friday, allows the state government to allot land within the labour lines of tea estates so workers can gain ownership of their homes. While the government has framed the initiative as a welfare measure aimed at improving living conditions in the state's vast tea belt, opposition leaders have questioned its timing and sincerity.

Speaking to reporters after a party meeting in Guwahati, Assam Congress president Gaurav Gogoi



said the sudden push for the legislation raises "deep doubts" about whether the government intends to implement it meaningfully. "If the government genuinely wanted to grant land rights to the tea community, why didn't it act in the last 10 years? Why bring such a law just months before the election?" Gogoi asked.

The Congress leader argued that successive BJP-led governments

under Sarbananda Sonowal and Himanta Biswa Sarma had ample time to introduce similar reforms, yet did not. He claimed that the ruling BJP's urgency now appears driven more by political optics than long-term policy.

Gogoi also escalated his criticism by alleging that Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and his family have purchased several tea gardens in recent years. "If the inten-

tion is truly to empower workers, the Chief Minister could begin by giving land rights in the gardens acquired by his family," he said, urging Sarma to publicly release a list of those estates.

Only then, Gogoi added, would people believe the government's claim that the bill represents a genuine effort to uplift tea workers rather than an election-season gesture.

The Congress has also demanded that the state address concerns of small tea growers and invest in stronger education, healthcare, and welfare systems within tea estates, where workers continue to face chronic socio-economic challenges.

The opposition party plans to launch statewide protests beginning 10 December to highlight what it calls the government's failure to deliver substantive welfare measures for the tea community.

Free diabetes detection and counselling camps held



OUR CORRESPONDENT

SILCHAR: The Lions Club of Silchar Valley View held a free diabetes detection and counselling camp on Saturday at Ghaniala Club in Malugram, in collaboration with Youths Against Social Evils (YASE), Ghaniala sub-committee. A total of 75 people were screened by health worker Fayza Yas-

min Barbhuiya. Seven were found with high diabetes levels.

The Lions Club said it will follow up with each of them to help ensure they receive the required medical care. Club president Bandita Trivedi Roy, project chairperson Pushpabati Roy, and members Subir Dey and Sanjeev Roy were present at the camp.

Kohima Peace Memorial & Eco-Park Inaugurated, Celebrating History and Strengthening Message of Peace

KOHIAMA

Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio on Friday inaugurated the Kohima Peace Memorial & Eco-Park, a new landmark honouring the region's war-time history while promoting peace, culture, and community engagement. The event, held on November 29, brought together dignitaries, officials, and local residents, with Dr. Rio describing the memorial as "a reminder of our past, our present, and a promise for our future."

The memorial stands on ground marked by the brutal Battle of Kohima, one of the fiercest confrontations of the Second World War. Speaking at the inauguration, Dr. Rio said the site reflects both the sacrifices made and the enduring ties forged between Japan and the Naga people. The project, developed with contributions from Japanese partners, symbolises decades of reconciliation and friendship.

Sharing personal memories, Dr. Rio noted that the war holds deep significance for his own family. His father served as a British Indian Army soldier on the eastern front, and he recalled stories of hardship narrated



by his mother and elders who lived through the war. "Our stories were never told, but now researchers are documenting Naga perspectives," he said, emphasising the need to preserve local history.

The Chief Minister highlighted that Japanese nationals continue to visit Kohima to pay homage to their ancestors who died in the region. Thousands

of soldiers from both the Japanese and Allied forces lost their lives during the 1944 battle, which reshaped the course of the war in Asia.

Drawing on his experience visiting Hiroshima's Peace Park, Dr. Rio reflected on the human cost of conflict and urged young people to learn from history. He encouraged schools to organise educational trips to the me-

morial and reiterated the shared responsibility to uphold peace. He also acknowledged Japan's ongoing support to Nagaland through conservation projects, livelihood programmes, and a forthcoming 400-bed hospital jointly operated by Japanese and Naga professionals.

Dr. Rio extended gratitude to the landowners, village community, Forest Department, architect Richard Belho, and all teams involved in bringing the memorial and eco-park to life. The inauguration comes ahead of the Hornbill Festival, with officials expressing confidence that the site will soon emerge as a major public space in Kohima.

In his welcome address, Environment and Forest Minister C. L. John described the memorial as a joint initiative of the governments of Japan and Nagaland, calling their relationship "born out of World War II and matured into a relationship of peace." He said the eco-park will serve as a centre for culture, remembrance, and community opportunities including self-help initiatives.

Advisor to the Chief Minister and IDAN Chairman Abu Metha offered a historical overview of the battleground that "changed the course of world history." He said the memorial transforms a painful past into a powerful contemporary message. "Let us remember two words for the world - 'Never again'," he concluded.

Quest!

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Cyclone Ditwah: Indian Air Force, Navy scale up humanitarian assistance to battered Sri Lanka



NEW DELHI

The Indian Air Force and Indian Navy have scaled up humanitarian assistance to Sri Lanka under Operation Sagar Bandhu in the wake of the devastation caused by Cyclone Ditwah across the island nation.

The Indian Air Force was quick to respond, deploying one C-130 and one IL-76 from Hindon Air Base near Delhi on the night of November 28/29 to airlift 21 tonnes of relief material along with over 80 NDRF personnel and eight tonnes of rescue equipment. Essential rations and critical supplies were delivered to support affected communities.

The IAF reaffirmed the spirit of 'neighbourhood first', saying, "India stands firmly with Sri Lanka in this hour of need."

On Saturday, Sri Lanka appealed for urgent international assistance as Cyclone Ditwah continued to batter the island. According to reports,

the cyclone led to the deaths of up to 153 people with 191 still missing.

More than 15,000 homes were destroyed and nearly 78,000 people forced to take refuge in state-run temporary shelters consequent to the continued torrential rain and landslides triggered by the cyclonic storm. Cyclone Ditwah is one of the country's worst natural disasters in recent years.

The Sri Lankan Air Force posted on X about the assets and manpower committed by the Indian Air Force to augment the ongoing humanitarian operation. "Two IAF MI-17V5 helicopters arrived in Sri Lanka this evening, with 22 personnel and essential HADR supplies to support ongoing Search and Rescue (SAR) operations," it said.

The mission teams were led by Wing Commander Nagesh Kumar and Wing Commander Mukul Mahajan. Mentioning the deploy-

ment by the Indian Navy, Foreign Minister Jaishankar posted on X, "Two Chetak helicopters from @IN_R11Vikrant (INS Vikrant, Aircraft Carrier) took off for Search and Rescue Operations with @airforceik (Sri Lanka Air Force) personnel onboard." Responding quickly, relief supplies from INS Vikrant and INS Udaygiri, including 4.5 tons of dry rations, 2 tons of fresh rations, and essential items, were handed over to the Sri Lankan authorities as assistance to the affected families.

Further, another Indian Navy ship, INS Sukanya, departed from Visakhapatnam with additional relief material and is expected to arrive in Sri Lanka soon.

Indian High Commission officials in Colombo are supporting stranded Indian passengers at Bandaranaike International Airport, providing food, water and assistance amid severe flight disruptions.

"Young civil servants must understand their crucial role in safeguarding national interests": Rajnath Singh

MUSSOORIE

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Saturday called upon the young civil servants to understand their crucial role in safeguarding national interests and, like the brave soldiers, always stay ready for such critical situations, as per a release by the Ministry of Defence.

He was addressing the valedictory ceremony of the 100th Common Foundation Course at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA) in Mussoorie, Uttarakhand, on November 29.

"Operation Sindoor is a brilliant example of civil-military fusion where the administrative machinery worked seamlessly with the Armed Forces to communicate vital information and build public confidence," Rajnath Singh said.

The Defence Minister asserted that, during Operation Sindoor, the Armed Forces destroyed the terror camps in Pakistan and PoK in a balanced & non-escalatory response. Still, it was the misbehaviour of the neighbouring country which did not allow the situation along the border to return to normal.

While he commended the soldiers' bravery, he appreciated the work of the administrative officers, who communicated crucial information and ensured the successful conduct of mock drills across the country. He emphasised increased coordination between governance and national security for the government to become Viksit Bharat by 2047.

Shedding light on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's mantra of 'Minimum Government, Maximum Governance' and 'Reform, Perform & Transform', Defence Minister Rajnath Singh emphasised that the civil servants have a pivotal role to play in accelerating the goal of a self-reliant and developed India.

"When our government was formed in 2014, India was ranked 11th in terms of economic size.



In the last 9-10 years, we have jumped to fourth place. Even highly reputed finance firms like Morgan Stanley now say that India might become the third largest economy in the next two-three years. You are not platonic guardians but people's servants. You are not just providers, but facilitators of empowerment. Your character should be incorruptible. Your conduct should be full of integrity. You must create a culture where honesty is neither a virtue nor an exception; but a normal part of everyday life," he said, urging them to work with a sense of responsibility and public accountability.

He called upon the young civil servants to work innovatively in the technology-driven era and to find solutions to the people's problems. Technology

is today playing the role of an enabler, he said, mentioning the success of Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, Direct Benefit Transfer, Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, and the Income Tax Department's Faceless Assessment Scheme. Throwing light on the SAMPURNA initiative of the Ministry of Defence, he informed that it is an AI-driven automation system that analyses defence procurement and payments transparently. He maintained that technology should be a medium, not an end.

"You must use technology to increase public outreach, accessibility, and transparency. Use technology to promote welfare and increase inclusivity," he told the officers.

The Defence Minister also stressed that as civil servants,

trainees must meet every citizen with empathy & understanding. "When officers interact with the underprivileged or vulnerable sections of society, they must recognise that people's struggles are shaped not only by their efforts but by wider social and economic circumstances. This is what makes an administrator truly people-centric and compassionate," he said. Defence Minister acknowledged the continuing rise of women in the Civil Services, noting that in the latest UPSC examination, a woman secured the top rank, and three of the top five candidates were women. He expressed confidence that by 2047, many women will rise to the position of Cabinet Secretaries and lead India's development journey.

Rajnath Singh described the Foundation Course not merely as a training module but as a commitment to building an efficient, capable, and sensitive governance system. He lauded LBSNAA for its comprehensive training ecosystem, which, he said, makes it a complete institution that strengthens the nation's administrative capabilities. Reflecting on the legacy of former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, Defence Minister underlined that the academy that bears his name stands for courage, simplicity, and integrity. He recalled Shastri's leadership during the 1965 war, his role in the Green Revolution and his message of "Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan" urging officers to draw strength from his example. As the UPSC marks its 100th year, he highlighted that the partnership between UPSC & LBSNAA has shaped generations of administrators and will continue to strengthen India's governance architecture.

Earlier, Rajnath Singh paid floral tributes to former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and Iron Man of India Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. He also inaugurated an ODOP Pavilion on the academy's premises.

INTERNATIONAL

Pope Leo wraps up Turkey visit, heads to Beirut to try to give Lebanese hope after years of crises

ISTANBUL

Pope Leo XIV wrapped up his visit to Turkey on Sunday before heading to Lebanon, where he hoped to bring a message of hope to its long-suffering people and bolster a crucial Christian community in the Middle East.

Leo had two key appointments in Istanbul before flying to Beirut: a prayer at the Armenian Apostolic Cathedral and a divine liturgy with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, spiritual leader of the world's Orthodox Christians, whose invitation to commemorate an important Christian anniversary was the impetus for Leo's visit.

On the second leg of his maiden papal trip, Leo was visiting Lebanon at a precarious moment for the small Mediterranean country after years of successive crises. He is fulfilling a promise of Pope Francis, who had wanted to visit for years but was unable to as his health worsened.

Francis often quoted St. John Paul II, who in 1989 said Lebanon was more than just a country, it was a "message" — a message of fraternity and coexistence. Under Lebanon's power-sharing system, the country's president is always a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim and the speaker of parliament Shiite.

A Muslim-majority country where about a third of the population is Christian, Lebanon has always been a priority for the Vatican, a bulwark for Christians throughout the region. But after years of conflict in the region, Christian communities that date from the time of the Apostles have shrunk.

Leo was expected to try to encourage Lebanese who believe their leaders have failed them, and to encourage Lebanese Christians to stay or, if they have already moved abroad, to come home.

"The Holy Father is coming at a very difficult moment for Lebanon and for our region," said Bishop George, archbishop of the Melkite Greek Catholic



Archeparchy of Beirut. Lebanese are worried about the future, he said, and still fear a possible return to all-out war with Israel.

"In this difficult moment, the pope's visit is a sign of hope. It shows that Lebanon is not forgotten," he told reporters ahead of the visit.

Pope Leo XIV and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, the spiritual leader of the world's Eastern Orthodox Christians, leave after attending the Doxology at the Patriarchal Church of Saint George, in Istanbul, Turkey, Saturday, Nov. 29, 2025.

Pope Leo visits Istanbul's Blue Mosque at start of day of meetings with Turkey's religious leaders.

In 2019, the country's currency and banking system collapsed and many Lebanese saw their savings evaporate. The financial crisis drove shortages of electricity, fuel and medicine.

Another disaster followed in 2020, when hundreds of tons of ammonium nitrate improperly stored at the Beirut port detonated an explosion that blasted through the surrounding neighborhoods, killing 218 people, wounding thousands more and causing billions of dollars in damages.

The highlight of Leo's Lebanese visit will come on his last day, Dec. 2, when he spends time in silent prayer at the site of the Aug. 4, 2020 blast and meets with

some of its victims.

Lebanese citizens were enraged by the blast, which appeared to be the result of government negligence, coming on top of the economic crisis. But an investigation has repeatedly stalled, and five years on, no official has been convicted.

There are hopes among Lebanese that Leo will demand accountability from Lebanon's political class, and insist that there can be no peace without truth and justice.

Another important moment will come when Leo meets with young Lebanese. He is expected to give them words of encouragement, amid the decades-long flight of Lebanese abroad, while also acknowledging their disillusionment over the failures of generations before them. After the Oct. 7, 2023 Hamas-led attack in southern Israel sparked the war in Gaza, the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah entered into a low-level conflict with Israel that escalated into a full-fledged war in September 2024, killing more than 4,000 people and causing widespread destruction.

Despite a US-brokered ceasefire that nominally ended the conflict two months later, Israel continues to launch near-daily airstrikes that it says aim to stop Hezbollah from rebuilding. Many Lebanese fear a return to all-out war.

Ahead of Leo's arrival, Hezbollah urged the pope to express his "rejection

to injustice and aggression" that the country is being subjected to. It was a reference to the Israeli strikes. The group also urged its supporters to line up along the road the papal convoy will take from the airport to the presidential palace to pay their respects.

Hezbollah — a primarily Shiite group — is allied with several Christian political groups in the country including the Free Patriotic Movement and Marada Movement.

However, the Christian party with the largest parliamentary bloc, the Lebanese Forces, is an opponent of Hezbollah and has criticized the group for pulling the country into a war with Israel.

Syrian Christians also look to the papal visit for hope.

In neighboring Syria, hundreds of thousands of Christians fled during the country's 14 years of civil war.

The country's former autocratic leader, Bashar Assad, was ousted in an offensive led by Islamist insurgents last December. Since then, there have been outbreaks of sectarian violence and some attacks on religious minorities, including a suicide attack on a church in Damascus in June.

While the new government has condemned attacks on minorities, many accuse it of looking the other way or being unable to control allied armed groups.

A delegation of some 300 Syrian Christians heading by a Greek Melkite Catholic priest was set to travel to Lebanon to see Leo during his visit.

"We are in need of someone like the pope to come and give us hope as Christians" at a time of "fear of an unknown future," said 24-year-old Dima Awwad, one of the delegation members. "We wish that the pope would come to visit Syria as he visited Lebanon, to reassure the people and to feel that we are present as eastern Christians and we need to be in this place."

Turkey investigates suspected drone strikes on sanctioned Russian-linked tankers in Black Sea

ANKARA

Turkish authorities are investigating alleged external interference after two oil tankers linked to Russia's so-called "shadow fleet" were struck in quick succession in the Black Sea, causing at least one major fire and prompting large-scale rescue operations. All crew members from both vessels were reported safe.

Transport and Infrastructure Minister Abdulkadir Uraloglu said rescue teams suspected the tankers had been subjected to "external interference". He later told reporters that the captain of the Virat tanker had issued a distress call over "a drone attack".

Earlier, he told broadcaster NTV, "The first things that come to mind for external interference could be a mine, a missile, a marine vessel or a drone. We don't have definitive information on this."

The OpenSanctions database, which tracks people or organisations involved in sanctions evasion, describes both tankers as part of the "shadow fleet," vessels used to evade sanctions imposed on Russia following its 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

The United States sanctioned the 'Virat' in January this year, followed by the European Union, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and Canada. The EU sanctioned the Kairos in July this year, followed by the U.K. and Switzerland.

The first incident occurred when the Gambian-flagged Kairos caught fire approximately 28 miles (45 kilometres) off Turkey's Kocaeli province. Turkey's Directorate General of Maritime Affairs

said the blaze was caused by "an external impact", without providing further details. The Kairos was sailing empty towards Russia's Novorossiysk port when it was struck.

Kocaeli Governor İlhami Aktas said all 25 crew members aboard the Kairos had been safely evacuated and that "a large fire is taking place". He added that efforts to extinguish the flames were continuing.

He declined to comment on whether the vessel may have hit sea mines, stating that authorities would issue "a clearer statement" once investigations were completed.

Within an hour of the Kairos incident, authorities reported that a second tanker, the Virat, had been "struck" while sailing about 35 nautical miles off the Turkish coast. Earlier reports cited heavy smoke in the engine room.

All 20 crew members were safe and no evacuation request was made. Maritime authorities had initially mentioned a fire aboard the Virat but later clarified that the ship was not ablaze on Saturday, although the crew reported explosions.

The minister said the events took place within Turkey's exclusive economic zone and that Ankara was in contact with relevant counterparts "to prevent a recurrence and to ensure navigational safety".

Haberturk television reported that the tankers may have been attacked by drones operating on the water's surface, although officials have not confirmed this.

The maritime authority posted distant video showing smoke rising from

the area where the Kairos burned. VesselFinder data showed the Virat was anchored north of the Bosphorus on Nov. 4, not far from its last reported location.

The Kairos' last logged position was on Nov. 26 south of the Dardanelles Strait, which links the Aegean Sea and the Sea of Marmara.

OpenSanctions notes that the "shadow tanker fleet continues to provide multibillion-dollar revenues for the Kremlin bypassing sanctions, disguising its activities under the flags of third countries, using complex schemes to conceal owners and poses significant environmental threats".

The Virat, built in 2018, uses "irregular and high-risk shipping practices" and has previously sailed under the flags of Barbados, Comoros, Liberia and Panama. The Kairos, built in 2002, was formerly flagged as Panamanian, Greek and Liberian.

Ukraine's military intelligence service, the GUR, says on its website that both ships visit Russian ports and have a history of shutting off their automatic identification systems, which transmit a ship's position. The vessels have also docked at ports in China, Turkey and India, among other locations.

Ukraine has successfully targeted Russian shipping during the war, particularly using explosives-packed marine drones, although such operations have largely been limited to the northern Black Sea.

Turkey has not attributed responsibility for Friday's incidents, with investigations ongoing.

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GUWAHATI

The 9th Chalachitram National Film Festival kick starts at Jyoti Chitraban film studio premise in Kahilipara locality, as Dr Sunil Mohanty, Asom Khetra prachar pramukh of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, inaugurated the annual two-day festival on 29 November 2025 by lighting sacred lamps in front of Bharat Mata's portrait and also three cultural icons of Assam including Bharat Ratna Dr Bhupen Hazarika, whose year-long birth centenary celebrations continue, Zubeen Garg (as a tribute to him, special screening of 'Mon Jai' was organised) and flutist Deepak Sarma.

Addressing the distinguished gathering, Dr Mohanty insisted that a powerful media like cinema must not be used for earning money with entertainment alone, rather it has a major role to play fostering nationalism and paying homage to thousands of years of India's civilisation and cultural heritage.

He appreciated the initiative of Chalachitram by providing space for short duration films with the central theme of 'Our Heritage, Our Pride'



Remember when people had diaries and got mad when someone read them? Now they put everything online and get mad when people don't.

which will go a long way in raising voices against social discrimination, protecting environment, en-

hancing civic senses and family values.

Organized by Chalachitram, a subsidiary of Vishwa Samvad Kendra-Assam, the CNFF-25 plans to showcase over 30 short features and documentaries in both competitive (confined to north-eastern film makers) and only screening categories. 'Aham Bhartam' (directed by Bharat Bala) was screened as the opening film of the unique festival, whereas 'The First Film' (directed by Piyush Thakur) is selected as the closing one, to be screened on 30 November. The preview committee comprising award winning director Jhulan Krishna Mahanta, veteran filmmaker Bibhu Dutta and accomplished cinematographer Hiten Thakuria has selected the package of film-works for screening at the festival, said CNFF secretary Bhagawat Pritam. A jury board consisting of renowned filmmaker, critic & writer, Vijaykrishnan, national award winning filmmaker Maipaksana Haorongbam and leading sound designer & mixer Debajit Gayan have selected the winning films for declaration in the closing ceremony. The winners will be honoured with trophies, certificates, and cash prizes in the presence of State legislative assembly speaker Biswajit Daimary, eminent cultural personality Pranjal Saikia and a number of distinguished film personalities, other dignitaries and cine-goers, informed VSK Assam secretary Kishor Shivam.

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No matter the season, the wetland is the park's spine.

Pobitora is a paradise for bird-watchers, but even if you don't know the names, the experience stays with you. You hear the calls before you see the wings. The wetlands are full of movement—teal, pintails, herons, egrets, and dozens of smaller species flicking between the reeds.

The park draws migratory birds from Central Asia and Siberia every winter. They arrive in loose, scattered formations that settle over the marshes like living brushstrokes. For many visitors, the rhinos get the spotlight, but the birds reveal the park's subtler layers.

They show you how differently life expresses itself when space is shared rather than claimed.

Pobitora doesn't exist in isolation. Villages wrap around the park like a human boundary—Muduki, Gendamari, Gerimari, and a handful of others. Their fields extend to the forest edges. Their cattle graze near the park. Their daily lives overlap with wildlife in ways people from cities rarely experience.

Conflicts happen, especially when rhinos stray into farmland or elephants wander too close at night. But communities here have learned to coexist because they understand how much the park supports their economy. Homestays, guiding jobs, jeep safaris, small eateries—all of these depend on tourists who come for the

the park's future. Today, Pobitora stands as an example of how conservation works best when villages are part of the solution, not outsiders to the process.

A safari here feels different from larger parks. The tracks are narrower. The grass towers above the jeep in certain stretches. The sightings come faster, but never feel rushed. You move slowly because the landscape asks for patience, not speed.

Sometimes you turn a corner and find a rhino standing still on the road, unbothered by your presence. Sometimes a herd of wild buffalo grazes in open grassland with quiet authority. Sometimes you see a mongoose dart across the path or a hog deer lift its head and freeze for just a moment before disappearing into the green.

The encounters feel closer, more intimate, almost conversational.

One of Pobitora's quiet strengths is how easily it lets you step out of Guwahati's noise. You leave the city's rush, cross the Brahmaputra's floodplains, pass through villages and farmland, and suddenly you're in a different world.

It's close enough for a day trip. But it's deep enough to make you forget the city exists.

Pobitora doesn't try to impress you with scale or drama. It simply shows you what it is—beautiful, compact, bustling with life, and shaped by the cooperation between people and wilderness.

There's an honesty to that. It's not selling a grand adventure. It's giving you a real one.

Pobitora National Park proves that conservation doesn't need endless land or extravagant infrastructure. It needs commitment, balance, and communities that believe the forest deserves to survive.

It's a park where the rhino isn't



counters.

And because the park has worked hard to protect them—through village cooperation, anti-poaching units, and controlled grazing—Pobitora has become one of Assam's most successful conservation stories.

Pobitora isn't just grassland. It's a mosaic. Wetlands curve into reed beds. Open fields rise into wooded patches. Marshes hold entire microhabitats of birds and amphibians. The water gives everything life. Migratory ducks crowd the lakes.

rhinos.

The connection isn't romantic. It's practical. And that practicality has helped Pobitora survive.

Pobitora's revival didn't happen because of one big decision. It happened through steady, long-term work. Local youth trained as wildlife guards. NGOs built awareness programs. Forest staff patrolled relentlessly. Community groups discouraged poaching and provided early warnings when animals strayed out. This shared ownership changed

a symbol—it's a neighbour. Where wetlands cradle more life than you expect. Where villagers, guards, and wildlife share a space that could have fractured long ago but didn't.

To understand Assam's conservation spirit, start here. A small park with a big heartbeat, alive with creatures that thrive because people chose to protect them.

Spend a morning in Pobitora and you'll see why this place matters—quietly, powerfully, and without needing to prove anything.

The NEIR-2026 events will begin with the rally flagging off at Manas National Park on January 11, and continue the next day with activities scheduled at Pobitora National Park on January 12. The national park (Pobitora) sits barely an hour from Guwahati, yet it feels like you've crossed into a world that doesn't operate on the city's clock. It's small, almost deceptively so, especially when you compare it with giant names like Manas or Kaziranga. But size isn't the measure here. What matters is density, rhythm, and the sheer audacity with which this tiny forest sustains more wildlife than anyone expects.

Set in the outskirts of Guwahati, this landscape is often cited as a conservation success, especially for the protection of the one horned rhino.

The sanctuary covers the Rajamayong Reserve Forest and the Pobitora Reserve Forest. The Rajamayong hills support a wide range of wildlife including leopard, capped langur, porcupine, and pangolin.

Pobitora's grasslands are known for regular sightings of the greater one horned rhinoceros, wild water buffalo, monitor lizard, and wild boar. More than 375 bird species have been recorded here, which makes it a strong draw for birdwatchers.

Pobitora also serves as a source population for the Indian Rhinoceros

as Vision 2020 initiative. Eight rhinos were moved from here to Manas National Park as part of the effort to rebuild rhino numbers in the region.

On paper, that makes it look like an afterthought in Assam's chain of protected areas. But the moment you enter, that perception disappears. The grasslands stretch out in clean, open lines. The wetlands shimmer. Birds circle lazily in the sky. And everywhere you look, the landscape feels elastic, like it's holding far more life than its boundaries suggest.

The truth is straightforward: Pobitora has one of the highest concentrations of one-horned rhinoceroses on the planet. Dozens of them live here, which means your chances of spotting one aren't just good—they're almost guaranteed.

This is the park's signature. It doesn't make you wait, it doesn't test your luck, it simply delivers.

Pobitora is a rhino place. At dawn, you see them grazing in the tall elephant grass, their silhouettes emerging through the mist like ancient creatures moving at their own pace. Some stand knee-deep in the marshes. Others walk with slow confidence down mud tracks. You feel their weight before you hear them.

The park's small size means rhinos are never too far. You don't need to chase them across vast distances. They live, breathe, graze, and wallow in tight proximity, and that intimacy changes how you experience them. These aren't glimpses. These are en-





BARAK FESTIVAL

JANUARY 10-12, 2025

ACTIVITY PROGRAM



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 Trekking | Canyoneering | Sport Climbing | Disaster Management Technique | Water Sports
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 Potential, Issues and Challenges of Barak Valley by different stakeholders.
 Includes: MOUs, and 20 general discussion topics for development, awareness, awareness, environment, and awareness programs.
 Participation through invitation only. Different rewards are provided.



10 JAN
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10 JAN
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 All can participate online and send a video clip on Poems, Songs and Dance Performances, Bengali, English, Hindi & Manipuri. Last Date: 31st December 2024.



10 JAN
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 Media Conclave: Media Conclave, Workshops, and the Film, Talks and Conferences are part of the 'Barak Festival 2025'. Theme: 'One for All, All for One'.
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10-12 JAN
Science Studio
 Real 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.

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

10-12 JAN
Book Bank
 #NoLikeCampaign Book Bank 2025 | Donate | Reuse | Recycle

10-12 JAN
Book Club
 Meet Authors, Publishers, Read & Discuss, Buy and Sell Books

10-12 JAN
Painting Carnival
 Water Colour and Paint and Draw with Campaign

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'

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

10-12 JAN
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