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PERSPECTIVE

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Manipur Shuts Down as 24-Hour Strike Over Sangai Festival Plans Paralyzes Daily Life

IMPHAL
A 24-hour general strike imposed by the underground Kangleipak Communist Party-Military Council (Progressive) on Wednesday brought normal life to a standstill across Manipur, as the outfit protested the state government's plan to hold the Sangai Festival from November 21 to 30.

The shutdown had its most severe impact in the five valley districts, where markets, business establishments, schools, colleges, and banks remained closed throughout the day. Imphal's major commercial hubs - Khwairambazar, Paona and Thangal markets, Bir Tikendrajit Market, and the iconic Ima Keithel - all downed shutters, leaving the city centre deserted.

Public transport was completely off the roads, and both interstate and inter-district bus services were suspended, effectively cutting off Manipur by land routes. Key roads across the valley wore a deserted look, with only security vehicles seen moving through strategic points.

Air connectivity, however, remained unaffected. Government offices witnessed very low attendance, though essential services such as healthcare, water supply, electricity, and religious activities were kept outside the strike's purview.

In a statement, KCP-MC (Progressive) Information and Publicity Secretary Maikhumba Meitei said the bandh was a symbolic protest against holding a state festival when Manipur continues to grapple with the fallout of ongoing ethnic violence.

WHO SAID WHAT

Sri Sathya Sai Baba's message transcends boundaries of time and place.

“Love all SERVE ALL”

His teachings of compassion, service and universal love continue to guide people across the world.

~ Narendra Modi, PM

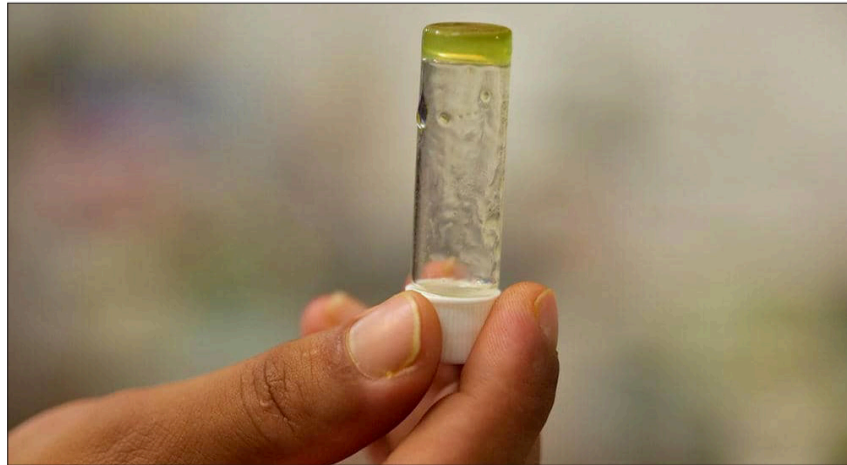
IIT Guwahati develop gelator material to detect fuel adulteration, tackle oil spills

GUWAHATI
Researchers from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Guwahati have developed a novel material that can detect adulteration or contamination of kerosene in petrol. The developed material also holds the potential to selectively absorb oil from water and solidify it.

The findings of the research have been published in the prestigious journal Chemical Engineering in a paper co-authored by Prof Gopal Das, of the Department of Chemistry of IIT Guwahati, along with his research scholars, Rubi Moral and Oiyao Appun Pegu.

Oil spills in oceans are among the most damaging environmental disasters in the world and lead to the loss of marine life, coastlines, and livelihoods that depend on them. According to the Oil Tanker Spill Statistics, 10,000 tonnes of oil spilled into the oceans and seas globally in 2024.

Oil spreads quickly and widely on water, making cleaning a challenging task. Use of chemical absorbents or other steps, which includes burning the oil, to tackle it often lead to secondary pollution.



To address this challenge, the IIT Guwahati research team has developed a Phase-Selective Organogelator (PSOG) molecule, a special class of safe materials. The PSOG was designed to undergo a hierarchical supramolecular self-assembly process which ultimately leads to oil gelation. It can trap oils such as kerosene

and diesel through a self-assembly process, similar to how soap molecules organise themselves in water. Once they trap the oil, they form semi-solid gels that can be easily removed without disturbing the water below. “Our developed PSOG possesses a unique ability to selectively form gel only in presence of some specific oil samples, namely kerosene and diesel,

among a vast range of studied organic solvents as well as oil samples. Moreover, such a highly selective PSOG might also be useful in targeting some specific oil samples from a complex mixture of different oil samples, and recovery of the same from different water bodies. So, this work might give a new direction in the future developments of PSOGs for water remediation as well as detection of different fuel adulteration,” Prof Das said. Another potential use of the developed organogel is to detect the adulteration of kerosene. “In India, especially among low-income groups, kerosene is sometimes adulterated with petrol to reduce the running cost of automobiles or household cooking. This is a dangerous combination as the adulterated fuel is highly flammable and has caused multiple kerosene stove explosion accidents in the country,” Prof Das said. As the next step, Prof Das and his team aim to advance the research towards detecting various types of fuel adulteration. Additionally, the team is also working on enhancing the efficiency of the detection process by refining the design and functionality of the gelator molecule.

After the UK, Ireland named country partner for Hornbill Festival 2025

DIMAPUR
After the United Kingdom, Ireland has become the country partner for the Hornbill Festival 2025 in Nagaland.

Irish folk music, theatre, and the legacy of peace and reconciliation will take centre stage at this year's flagship international cultural festival of Nagaland.

Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio and Ambassador Kevin Kelly of the Irish Embassy in India made a joint announcement in this regard at Nagaland House in New Delhi on Tuesday.

Speaking at the event, Kelly said, “Ireland's partnership with the Hornbill Festival reflects the growing depth of Ireland-India relations and the shared commitment to cultural collaboration and peace-building dialogue. We hope that the people of Nagaland enjoy the best of Irish art, culture, and theatre, and that the connections we make at Hornbill Festival

2025 lead to even greater collaboration in the future.”

Highlighting Nagaland's support for the collaboration, Rio said, “Nagaland is honoured to welcome Ireland as our country partner for this year's Hornbill Festival.”

He added that Ireland's rich culture, heritage, and artistic traditions resonate deeply with “our own,” making this partnership both meaningful and special.

“We see immense potential for expanded collaboration across culture, tourism, education, creative industries, youth exchange, sustainable development, and people-to-people engagement. Ireland's participation will greatly enrich the festival and strengthen the bonds between our peoples,” he said.

Rio concluded, “We look forward to celebrating this friendship and forging new pathways of cooperation in the Land of Festivals.”

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RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat to visit Manipur for first time since 2023 ethnic violence

‘BHARAT & HINDU ARE SYNONYMOUS’: RSS CHIEF BHAGWAT IN GUWAHATI

GUWAHATI
RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat will arrive in Manipur on November 20, marking his first visit to the state since ethnic violence erupted in May 2023.

According to RSS state general secretary Tarunkumar Sharma, Bhagwat will be in Manipur for three days as part of the centenary celebrations of the organisation.

During his stay, the RSS chief will hold a series of interactions with citizens, entrepreneurs, youth leaders and representatives of the Janajati (tribal) community.

On the day of his arrival, he will attend a programme at Konjeng Leikai in Imphal to meet entrepreneurs and prominent individuals, followed by a separate session with tribal leaders from the hill districts on November 21.

RSS functionaries confirmed that visits to relief camps—where thousands displaced by the violence have been sheltering for two years—



are not part of the current schedule, noting that the trip is primarily an internal organisational engagement.

Manipur has witnessed severe ethnic clashes between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities since 2023, resulting in more than 260 deaths and widespread displacement.

The state has been under President's Rule, with the assembly

placed under suspended animation after the resignation of Chief Minister N. Biren Singh.

Addressing a gathering of intellectuals, scholars, editors, writers, and entrepreneurs during his visit to Assam, as part of the RSS's centenary celebrations, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Dr Mohan Bhagwat elaborated on the Sangh's civilizational vision, contemporary national concerns, and the ongoing programmes across the Northeast.

Dr Bhagwat emphasised that anyone who takes pride in Bharat and loves the nation is a Hindu, irrespective of personal modes of worship. He said that Hindu is not merely a religious term but a civilizational identity rooted in thousands of years of cultural continuity. “Bharat and Hindu are synonymous,” he said, adding that India does not need an official declaration to be a Hindu Rashtra.

Explaining the foundational philosophy of the RSS, Dr Bhagwat said

that the organization was not created to oppose or harm anyone but to focus on ‘Vyakti Nirman’ (individual character-building) and contribute to making Bharat a Vishwaguru. He urged people to understand the Sangh by visiting a ‘shakha’, rather than depending on preconceived narratives. “The methodology to unite Bharat amidst diversity is called the RSS,” he said.

He spoke in detail about the five key social transformations – Panch Parivartan: social harmony, ‘Kutumb Prabodhan’ (family awakening), civic discipline, self-reliance, and environmental protection. Among these, he placed special emphasis on strengthening the family institution, urging every family to retain stories of their ancestors and instill responsibility and cultural pride in the younger generation.

Icons such as Lachit Borphukan and Srimanta Sankardev should inspire all Indians, despite the fact they having been born in a particular province, but they are our national icons,” he said. Addressing concerns about demographic changes and cultural protection in Assam, Dr Bhagwat called for confidence, vigilance, and firm attachment to one's land and identity.

He spoke about issues such as illegal infiltration, the need for a balanced population policy including a three-child norm for Hindus, and the importance of resisting divisive religious conversions. He also advised responsible use of social media, especially among youth. Dr Bhagwat highlighted the significant role of RSS swayamsevaks in the freedom struggle, recalling Dr Hedgewar's imprisonment in the Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, and the contributions of countless swayamsevaks across the country during Quit India Movement in 1942. The session concluded with Dr Bhagwat urging all sections of society, especially the distinguished citizens present, to work collectively and selflessly for nation-building.

Tripura showcases organic farming model at global expo in Dubai



AGARTALA
Tripura's progress in organic farming took the global stage this week as Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Minister Ratan Lal Nath presented the state's success story at the Middle East Natural & Organic Products Expo (MENOPE) 2025 in Dubai.

The event, held at the Dubai World Trade Centre, brought together organic producers, buyers, and investors from around the world. Tripura's participation attracted strong interest from international delegates impressed by the state's organic products, including the GI-tagged Queen Pineapple, aromatic rice varieties like Kalikhasa and Harinarayan, Bird's Eye Chilli, Gandharaj Lemon, White Sesame, and Foxtail Millet.

Minister Nath highlighted that Tripura now cultivates over 26,400 hectares of certified organic farmland managed by 26,800 farmers. He said the state has become one of India's leading examples of sustainable agriculture, crediting consistent policy support and a strong farmer network.

Fifty-three organic farmers' producer companies have been formed to help farmers market their produce globally by streamlining aggregation, processing, branding, and direct sales. “Tripura's organic farming initiative has become a driver of rural transformation and export potential,” Minister Nath told attendees.

The Queen Pineapple, with a natural sweetness level of 16 to 20 Brix, and the state's black rice with high antioxidant content drew particular praise from buyers and food industry representatives. International interest also extended to Tripura's organic ginger, turmeric, and foxtail millet—products in growing demand across Europe, the Middle East, Japan, and Southeast Asia.

Minister Nath also promoted Tripura's emerging non-traditional export products such as agarwood, agar oil, and bamboo shoots, describing them as part of the state's broader strategy to integrate traditional resources into modern markets.

He invited global buyers and investors to participate in the Organic Buyer-Seller Meet scheduled in Tripura in January 2026, encouraging deeper trade links and investments in the state's expanding organic sector.

Manipur govt calls for strong public participation in ‘Sangai Festival’

IMPHAL
Manipur Chief Secretary Puneet Kumar Goel has appealed to the people of the state to wholeheartedly participate in the 10-day Sangai Festival, which will kick off on November 21.

The festival, which was suspended in 2023 following the outbreak of ethnic violence, is set to make a comeback this year after a two-year hiatus.

The Sangai Festival is Manipur's largest annual tourism event, showcasing the state's cultural heritage, traditional crafts, indigenous games and diverse cuisine.

However, the event faces opposition, with several internally displaced persons (IDPs) and civil society organisations announcing a boycott—a stance that has now been endorsed by the Manipur Congress.

In a statement, Goel said that while the relief and rehabilitation of IDPs remains the state government's top priority, organising the Sangai Festival is also crucial for reviving economic activity and creating market linkages for local artisans, entrepreneurs, craftsmen, and farmers. He emphasised that the event could boost trade, investment, and wider exposure



for Manipur.

Responding to the concerns of groups calling for a boycott, Goel underscored the government's continued support for affected families. He noted that the state is currently allocating Rs 18 crore each month toward monetary assistance and the management of relief camps for IDPs.

The chief secretary further said that the Centre has allocated Rs 523 crore under a Special Relief Package, which includes Rs 180 crore for housing restoration and Rs 250 crore for rebuilding public assets—such as health centres, community halls, water supply systems, and schools—in areas where IDPs are set to be resettled.

Goel said the festival is intended to highlight Manipur's rich art, culture, indigenous sports, and its strengths in tourism and IT, helping to rebuild the state's image both nationally and internationally.

“The state government fully acknowledges the immense hardship faced by our people, especially the IDPs,” he said, adding that significant measures have been undertaken to provide immediate relief as well as long-term rehabilitation.

“The state government appeals to the people of Manipur to participate with enthusiasm in the Sangai Festival 2025,” the statement concluded.



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AI IS REWRITING INDIA'S GROWTH MAP

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has rapidly evolved from a frontier technology to a defining force shaping the trajectory of nations, industries, and economies. For India, the world's largest democracy with an unmatched digital population and a vibrant startup ecosystem, AI represents more than technological advancement, it signifies an extraordinary economic opportunity. As the nation aspires toward the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, achieving sustained 8 percent annual growth is essential, and AI has emerged as the most potent catalyst for this transformation.

Global estimates suggest that AI will add between \$17 and \$26 trillion to the world economy over the next decade. India, with its robust STEM talent pool, expanding R&D ecosystem, and pioneering digital public infrastructure, is positioned to capture a significant share of this value. Recent assessments indicate that AI could contribute an additional \$500-600 billion to India's GDP by 2035, purely through productivity gains and efficiency improvements. This marks a decisive shift in India's growth narrative, from incremental progress to exponential, innovation-led acceleration.

One of India's greatest strengths is its vast and diverse data ecosystem. With platforms like Aadhaar, UPI, Account Aggregator, DigiLocker, and the upcoming IndiaAI Mission, the country is building what many experts describe as the world's richest and most inclusive data infrastructure. This gives Indian innovators an opportunity to build AI models that reflect real-world diversity, linguistic, cultural, socio-economic, and geographic, something few other nations can match.

This data advantage is transforming the financial sector. Indian banks and fintech companies are rapidly adopting AI-driven solutions that improve credit scoring, detect fraud in real time, automate compliance, and personalize customer engagement. As banks evolve into "bionic institutions," blending human judgment with machine intelligence, the benefits will extend far beyond efficiency. AI will deepen financial inclusion, expand credit access for small businesses, and help bring millions more into the formal financial fold. By 2035, AI-led financial innovation is expected to generate billions in value while transforming India's banking architecture.

Manufacturing, a crucial pillar for any aspiring global power, is undergoing a powerful AI-enabled shift as well. Predictive maintenance, digital twins, AI-based quality control, robotics, and real-time supply chain optimization are not just buzzwords, they represent a transformation in how Indian factories operate. AI can increase manufacturing productivity by up to 20 percent, making Indian goods globally competitive. Visionary approaches like establishing AI-ready industrial parks with clean energy access, high-performance computing, robotics testing zones, and 5G-enabled industrial corridors can redefine India's industrial capabilities. If executed effectively, these initiatives will position India as a global hub for smart, AI-integrated manufacturing.

In pharmaceuticals, AI is dramatically reducing the time and cost associated with drug development. Traditionally, creating a new drug takes more than a decade and requires over a billion dollars in investment. AI can compress these timelines by up to 70-80 percent, enabling faster discovery, design, and testing of molecules. India, already a global leader in generics, now has the chance to make a significant leap into innovative drug discovery. By investing in genomics, computational biology, and biotech R&D, India can shift from being the "pharmacy of the developing world" to becoming a powerhouse in medical innovation, exporting both generics and novel molecules to global markets.

The automotive sector, too, is witnessing a profound transformation. India is on track to become one of the largest markets for software-enabled vehicles, with AI powering everything from driver-assistance systems and safety features to predictive maintenance and connected mobility solutions. By 2035, more than 18 million software-assisted vehicles could be on Indian roads. AI-led design tools and digital testing environments are expected to cut R&D costs and timelines dramatically, helping India enhance its share of the \$500 billion global auto components export market. If supported with the right infrastructure, such as 5G-enabled corridors, testing parks, and semiconductor development, the Indian automotive industry can emerge as a global champion.

However, the path ahead is not without challenges. Data privacy concerns, digital disparities, lack of advanced compute infrastructure, regulatory gaps, and a shortage of AI-skilled professionals could slow progress if not addressed promptly. Ethical AI deployment, transparent governance structures, and robust cybersecurity frameworks will be essential to ensure that public trust remains intact. Equally important is the need to reskill and upskill India's workforce. AI must empower workers, not displace them. A national skilling mission aligned with AI readiness, covering students, professionals, and industry leaders, can ensure that India's demographic dividend becomes a technological dividend.

India's approach to AI must remain grounded in inclusion. The true power of AI lies not merely in advanced laboratories or metropolitan technology hubs, but in its ability to uplift small farmers, micro-enterprises, rural communities, and informal workers. By integrating AI with digital public infrastructure, India can democratize access to high-quality services, in finance, healthcare, education, agriculture, and transport, ensuring that technology benefits every citizen, not just a privileged few.

As nations race to lead the AI era, India has a unique chance to define a model of growth that is fast, inclusive, ethical, and globally competitive. The steps taken over the next five years will determine whether India becomes a global AI leader or lags behind in a world moving at unprecedented speed.

To ensure balanced and widespread AI adoption, India should develop a National AI Readiness Index that evaluates every state on parameters such as infrastructure, skilling, innovation, governance, and industry adoption. Updated annually, this index would promote healthy competition among states, guide targeted investments, and ensure that AI-led growth reaches every region of the country. With such a framework, India can accelerate its journey toward becoming a truly AI-powered Viksit Bharat.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"But remember, this power of the people on top depends on the obedience of the people below. When people stop obeying, they have no power."

- Howard Zinn

THE NOWGAM BLAST AND THE HIGH COST OF VIGILANCE

SANJEEV DOGRA

On the outskirts of Srinagar, the shattered remains of the Nowgam Police Station stand as a stark reminder of a cruel paradox. The very explosives seized to protect society ended up killing those who were safeguarding it. Late on the night of 14 November 2025, an accidental explosion ripped through the station, claiming nine lives and injuring more than thirty. Those who died were not bystanders to conflict; they were its quiet professionals, police personnel, forensic experts, revenue officials and a civilian tailor, the foot soldiers of an unseen war against terror. Their sacrifice forces us to confront a difficult, but necessary, question: in our attempt to secure justice and protect the nation, are our systems and safeguards fully aligned with the risks our frontline personnel face?

It is important to underline at the outset that the Nowgam blast was not an act of terrorism in the conventional sense. It was a tragic accident in the aftermath of a successful counter-terror operation. The explosion took place while forensic and police teams were examining more than 300 kg of unstable explosive material, part of an approximately 360-kg cache of chemicals, including ammonium nitrate and related compounds, seized in coordinated raids in Faridabad in the days preceding the incident. These operations had exposed a sophisticated "white-collar" terror module linking Jammu & Kashmir and Faridabad, allegedly involving highly educated professionals and with suspected links to banned outfits. The same network is under investigation for a car bombing near Delhi's Red Fort on 10 November 2025, where a vehicle loaded with an ammonium-nitrate-based device exploded, killing and injuring several people.

In Delhi, the explosives were employed as a deliberate weapon of terror. In Srinagar, the explosives now in state custody became the source of an unintended disaster. Together, these two events reveal the extended danger curve of terrorism: the threat does not end with seizure; it continues through transport, storage and forensic examination. How we handle seized explosives can be the difference between a quiet operational success and a public tragedy.

With the benefit of hindsight, it does appear that certain risks were underestimated. The key decision was to transport nearly the entire bulk of highly unstable explosive material, about 360 kg from Faridabad to a police station in a populated urban area. Officials have explained that the case's legal locus lay in Jammu & Kashmir and that a strict chain of custody was required so that evidence remained accessible to the jurisdiction handling the main investigation. This logic is understandable from a procedural and legal standpoint, especially given the complex, inter-state nature of the case. The officers involved were working within the framework, guidance and infrastructure available to them.

However, the episode highlights a broader systemic gap between legal procedure, investigative requirements and contemporary safety norms. India's Ammonium Nitrate Rules, 2012 framed under the Explosives Act, 1884 clearly stipulate that ammonium nitrate storehouses should not be located in populated areas and that large-quantity storage in such locations is to be avoided. These rules exist because history, in India and abroad, shows that mishandling or improperly storing large quantities of ammonium nitrate can be catastrophic. Seen against this background, moving and then retaining hundreds of kilos of unstable material inside an urban police station, even in an open yard shows how difficult it can be, in real-time operations, to reconcile evidentiary needs with ideal safety practices when dedicated infrastructure is limited.

A safer model for the future is now visible: a "sample-only" approach, in which small, representative quantities are taken and documented for detailed forensic analysis, while the bulk stock is safely neutralised or destroyed at or near the point of seizure, or in a designated remote facility. This does not imply that those on the ground were careless; rather, it indicates that our institutional protocols, facilities



and legal provisions need to evolve to make such safer options the default, rather than something that depends on local improvisation.

Ammonium nitrate itself is deceptively ordinary: a common fertiliser and industrial input. Chemically, however, it is a powerful oxidiser. In bulk, especially when contaminated with fuels, organic matter or other incompatible substances as often happens in improvised explosive mixtures, it can become sensitive to heat, friction, shock and confinement. Global history is littered with ammonium nitrate disasters, from Oppau in Germany (1921) to Texas City in the United States (1947), Toulouse in France (2001), Tianjin in China (2015), and the Beirut port explosion of 2020, one of the largest non-nuclear blasts ever recorded. In almost every case, the pattern is similar: large quantities stored together, in inappropriate or sub-optimal locations, with inadequate segregation and safety controls, and a relatively small initiating event, a fire, maintenance sparks, friction or contamination pushing the material beyond a critical threshold.

The Nowgam case appears to echo elements of this global pattern. Eyewitness accounts from injured policemen indicate that the explosion occurred while lac seals were being applied to sacks of explosive material, a process that involves heat. While the precise initiating mechanism is still under forensic investigation and should not be prejudged, the combination of a large bulk quantity, unstable mixed composition, and localised heat and handling during late-night sealing and sampling created conditions under which a catastrophic detonation became possible. This is less a story of individual error and more a reflection of the inherent risks when large caches of sensitive material are handled in facilities never designed for such tasks.

If we are to ensure that such a tragedy is never repeated, expressions of sympathy though essential will not be enough. The Nowgam blast calls for measured but concrete structural reforms, designed in partnership with the very police and forensic agencies that shoulder the daily burden of counter-terror work. First, India urgently needs a network of high-security regional explosives forensics facilities, each equipped with blast-resistant chambers, remote-handling robotic systems and controlled-ventilation rigs for unstable explosives and precursor chemicals. In addition to the lab at Jammu, at least one such facility should be established in Srinagar, given its strategic sensitivity and the frequency of explosives-related cases in the region. Mobile forensic units capable of on-site preliminary testing can further reduce the need to transport bulk explosives over long distances.

Second, storage and handling protocols must be reviewed and refined with a safety-first philosophy, in consultation with operational agencies. Standard Operating Procedures for seized explosives should encourage a strict "sample-only" principle:

only small, representative samples need to be retained and sent to laboratories for detailed analysis, while time-bound destruction or controlled neutralisation of bulk stocks should be the norm once legal documentation and preliminary recording are complete. Police stations or other urban administrative buildings should, as far as practicable, be avoided as locations for storing large quantities of unstable explosives, which should instead be shifted to approved, remote magazines or military-grade storage facilities that comply with blast-radius and separation norms. Before any large cache is opened, repackaged or sampled, a bomb disposal or explosives-engineering team-led safety audit should be standard practice.

Third, there is a need to invest further in training and inter-agency coordination. Frontline personnel like police, forensic staff, magistrate teams and local administrators already work in difficult conditions and under high pressure. Regular, advanced training in the properties and hazards of industrial explosives and precursors, safe handling, packaging and segregation, and emergency response and evacuation procedures would add another layer of protection around them. A shared digital platform linking police, intelligence agencies, forensic labs and regulatory authorities could ensure that everyone has real-time visibility of what has been seized, where it is stored, what its risk profile is, and what stage of forensic or legal processing it has reached. Such transparency would help commanders and investigators take informed decisions that balance operational urgency with personnel safety.

Finally, the legal and regulatory framework itself may need strengthening in a calibrated manner. The Ammonium Nitrate Rules, 2012, and related regulations largely focus on manufacture, licensing, transport and industrial storage. They now need explicit provisions for the post-seizure phase in terror and criminal investigations: clear guidance on how long bulk explosive precursors should be kept in custody, indicative norms for location and quantity thresholds for temporary storage, and mandatory documentation of disposal methods and timelines. By codifying these aspects, we would provide investigators and police forces with legal clarity and institutional backing to adopt safer practices, rather than leaving such choices to individual judgement in the midst of complex operations.

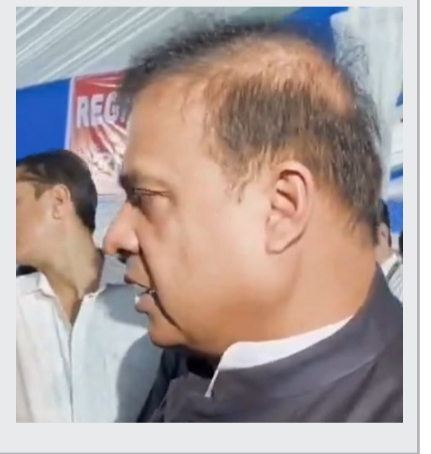
The story of Nowgam, therefore, is not one of blame; it is the story of a system under strain, trying to manage 21st-century terror threats with infrastructure and processes that have not fully caught up. The police, forensic experts and officials who died that night were engaged in difficult, high-risk work that had already prevented future attacks. Their courage and professionalism are beyond doubt. The real question for us, as a society and as policymakers, is whether we can now give such personnel the tools, infrastructure and protocols they

deserve. In counter-terrorism, the mission is not only to seize the threat but to manage it safely, intelligently and with full awareness of the risks over its entire life cycle. The Nowgam explosion is a sobering reminder that even the best investigative work can be undone by a single point of systemic weakness. As we mourn the nine lives lost, the most meaningful tribute we can offer them is an unwavering, collective determination to build a safer framework, one in which every police station, every forensic team and every family can have greater confidence that the price of vigilance will not again be so tragically high. The path forward is visible; what remains is the will, and the shared resolve, to walk it together.

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

As NRC has not been notified in Assam due to various legacy issues, the Special Intensive Revision of voters list has been temporarily deferred. However Election Commission has ordered a special summary revision of the voter lists. This will help us to weed out illegals from our electoral process.

~ Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM, Assam



Health as a right, not a Privilege Fixing the Flaws in India's Health Ecosystem

ANIRUDH

The Chairman of the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI), Mr Ajay Seth, recently expressed a significant concern regarding a key regulatory void in the nation's health insurance ecosystem, drawing attention to the bumpy ties between healthcare service providers and insurance entities. This gap — the absence of oversight over hospitals — creates a fundamental imbalance in their commercial relationship with insurers.

The principle that access to necessary medical care should be a fundamental human right, not merely a commodity dependent on wealth, is currently being undermined by this fractured system. When regulatory gaps allow commercial interests to dictate patient outcomes, the result is a massive equity deficit, trapping families in debt cycles.

While insurers operate under strict regulation, hospitals often act outside this control. This friction was validated by a government and IRDAI analysis confirming that hospitals are indeed inflating treatment costs and overcharging patients, particularly those with higher insurance covers.

This commercial tug-of-war is deeply worrying. Some hospitals typically raise costs annually by 12 to 14 percent. Costs are projected to worsen, as India's healthcare expenses are set to rise by 13 percent in 2025 (exceeding the global average of 10 percent, according to reports). Such a trend

forces insurers to hike premiums, making coverage less affordable. The lack of standardised procedure costs turns hospitals into arbitrary pricing centres, further damaging the financial stability of ordinary citizens.

The patient is caught in the middle through higher policy costs and risks of partial claim settlements. This double whammy hits patients hardest, impacting the average policyholder who faces stress and anguish when claims are delayed or only partially settled.

Patient inconvenience includes avoidable delays in discharge, sometimes waiting hours for final claim approvals, and facing pressure for cash deposits even with a cashless policy.

Constant financial uncertainty is fundamentally eroding the social contract of health coverage. Urgent regulatory intervention is now a mandatory step to restore faith and ensure basic human dignity during medical crises.

The scale of consumer discontent is reflected in official figures: The Insurance Ombudsman received 53,230 complaints in FY 2024 alone, with a substantial 54 percent pertaining specifically to the health insurance sector.

Compounding this, India's health-insurance penetration remains low — a 2025 Lancet study revealed that 70 percent of Indians do not have health insurance. This market struggle is evidenced by the annual growth in health insurance premium income slowing sharply to 9 percent in 2024-25, down from over 20 percent a year ago, as fewer policies are renewed. Escalating

unaffordability represents a national health security risk, pushing treatment out of reach for the aspiring middle class, and highlighting the urgent need for price discovery mechanisms in the health sector.

This crisis has compelled the government to initiate structural reforms to rein in costs and improve transparency. To address this systemic imbalance, the government plans to bring the existing National Health Claims Exchange (NHCE) — a key digital platform — under the joint supervision of the Finance Ministry and IRDAI.

The move signals a recognition that government oversight is necessary to ensure fair pricing. Strict oversight is intended to improve the collective bargaining power of insurance companies and enforce greater standardisation in billing and claims processing. This move is a critical first step towards enforcing equity, ensuring the final hospital bill reflects actual medical necessity, rather than the maximum amount an insured patient can afford.

For long-term improvement, hospital management must look into structural challenges such as the need for transparency in hospital billing and a fair grievance redressal system for patients. These measures include clearly defining 'reasonable and customary' charges.

Looking beyond India, successful models in developed countries implement systems that introduce standardisation and central pricing. European nations, for example, widely use

mechanisms like Diagnosis-Related Groups (DRGs). Under the DRG system, the hospital receives a fixed, predetermined fee for a specific diagnostic group. This structure incentivises hospitals to be efficient and avoid unnecessary procedures, translating into more predictable costs for insurers.

In Germany, for instance, this system is highly effective, allowing government-backed sickness funds to wield strong, consolidated bargaining power against hospitals.

The success of the DRG model lies in introducing financial accountability and equity into the payment mechanism. Centralised regulation provides a powerful blueprint for India to transform its market from one based on profit maximisation to one focused on transparent, sustainable patient care.

Achieving this required systemic reform necessitates the full commitment to the principle that Health is a Right, Not a Privilege. By addressing the fundamental regulatory imbalance, adopting lessons from global best practices, and enforcing strict supervision over billing via platforms like NHCE, the Indian health insurance ecosystem will achieve the equilibrium needed to protect patients and promote long-term financial stability.

Ultimately, this process is designed to narrow the gap between affordability and access, thereby making universal basic health coverage — where access is not determined by income — a fully attainable goal.

Manipur Sangai Festival 2025: Security Tightened as Preparations Push Forward Amid Widespread Boycott Calls

IMPHAL

Security measures in Manipur intensified on Tuesday as central forces and the Manipur Police bomb squad, accompanied by sniffer dogs, carried out routine anti-sabotage checks across Imphal ahead of the proposed Manipur bandh called by an insurgent outfit opposing the Sangai Festival's organisation. With the 12th edition of the Manipur Sangai Festival 2025 set to unfold across two major venues in Imphal, authorities have expanded layers of security in response to escalating boycott calls from civil society groups and displaced communities. Despite the heightened tensions, festival preparations including elaborate installations, temporary stalls, and large stage structures continue at full pace at Hapta Kangleibung and the Bheigvachandra Open Air Theatre.

COCOMI convenor Khurajam Athoubal appealed to the public to abstain from attending the event, arguing that holding a cultural festival while Manipur remains mired in an unresolved crisis for more than two



and a half years is inappropriate. He urged the government to divert festival funds-estimated at around ₹15 crore-toward improving conditions for thousands of internally displaced persons living in relief camps across the state. Adding to the pressure, the proscribed Kangleipak Communist Party-Military Council (Progressive) has announced a 24-hour general strike on November 19 to protest the festival. In a statement, KCP-MC (Progressive) Information and Publicity Secretary Maikhumba Meitei

said the group is boycotting the event and warned that if the President's administration fails to restore free movement for Meiteis along national highways by December 3, 2025, the outfit will enforce a month-long bandh. The group clarified that essential and emergency services including media, hospitals, medical care, water supply, fire services, and religious activities would remain exempt during the shutdown. Meanwhile, authorities have deployed a significant number of security personnel across

both venues, with most of the construction work at the Sangai Theme Park, stalls, and performance areas nearing completion. The festival is scheduled to run from November 21 to November 30. Opposition to the event continues to mount, especially from organisations representing internally displaced persons (IDPs). Groups such as the Churachandpur Meitei United Committee, the Committee on Protection of Meitei Victims, Moreh (COPMeV), and several other civil society organisations have rejected the festival, arguing that festivities cannot coexist with ongoing humanitarian suffering.

A wide coalition of civil society bodies including COCOMI, PANDM, IPSA, ACOAM-Lup, IPAK, KSA, ERDO, Kangla Mei, KIL, CLK, SWA, LOYALUP, MIKAL, AKSIL, and AN-DOK has also endorsed the boycott call. The Sangai Festival returns this year after a two-year suspension resulting from the ethnic violence that erupted on May 3, 2023, which claimed over 260 lives and displaced more than 60,000 people.

AIMIM Rules Out Alliance in Assam After Ajmal Hints at Possible Tie-Up

GUWAHATI

The All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) on Monday categorically denied reports suggesting it was preparing to enter Assam's political arena or forge an alliance with any party in the state, dismissing the speculation as "blatantly false". In a statement posted on X (formerly Twitter), the party said, "Neither has AIMIM decided to start operations in Assam, nor enter into alliance with any party in the state." The clarification came a day after All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) chief and former MP Badaruddin Ajmal publicly hinted that an electoral understanding with AIMIM president Assaduddin Owaisi could be explored ahead of the next assembly elections. Ajmal, speaking to reporters on November 17, claimed that both leaders were in regular communication and that "everything is possible". Making his first major political appearance after months of illness, Ajmal

described Owaisi as a "brother" and said the two might even campaign together. He also stated that the AIUDF, which previously won four seats, is now aiming for "forty", setting an unusually ambitious target for the party.

Declaring that he was ready to return to full-time political activity, Ajmal asserted that the current political environment was favourable for a strong electoral contest. He said the AIUDF plans to field candidates in about 35 constituencies and vowed "not to allow the BJP to benefit".

AIMIM's prompt rebuttal has raised questions over whether any concrete discussions between the two parties took place, despite Ajmal's public comments suggesting a possible thaw or collaboration. For now, AIMIM has made its position unmistakably clear: no expansion into Assam, and no alliance with anyone in the state.

President Droupadi Murmu awards North Tripura for Water Conservation Excellence

NEW DELHI

A major boost to local water management efforts has come as North Tripura District secured the top spot in the North East & Hilly Zone under the Ministry of Jal Shakti's Jal Sanchay Jan Bhagidari (JSJB) campaign. President Droupadi Murmu presented the award to District Magistrate Chandni Chandran during a ceremony at Vigyan Bhavan in New Delhi.

The district's performance stood out for the construction of more than 11,000 water conservation structures between February and May 2025, a scale of work that earned it a Rs 2 crore prize. Officials described the achievement as a significant step towards long-term water security in a region that relies heavily on community-driven resource management.

Sepahijala district also received national recognition, securing the National Water Award 2024 in the Best District (North East Zone) category. The award was accepted by District Magistrate and Collector Dr Siddharth Shiv Jaiswal.

Administrations from both districts credited the results to close coordination between government departments, consistent support from public representatives, and active participation from local communities. Officials extended thanks to all contributors, noting that the collective effort helped the districts achieve this national milestone.

Arunachal Pradesh to hold panchayat and municipal elections on December 15

KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

ITANAGAR: Arunachal Pradesh will go to the polls on December 15 for simultaneous panchayat and municipal elections, the State Election Commission announced on Saturday. State Election Commissioner Rinchin Tashi outlined the schedule, saying the process begins on November 17 with the formal notification. Candidates can file nominations until November 24, scrutiny will be held on November 26, withdrawals close on November 29, and counting is set for December 20.

More than 83 lakh voters are eligible this time, including 7.59 lakh for panchayat bodies and 72,438 for municipal councils. Women form a slight majority in the panchayat electorate. The state currently has 27 zilla parishads with 245 constituencies and 2,103 gram panchayats covering 8,181 seats. The Itanagar Municipal Corporation has 20 wards, while the Pasighat Municipal Council has eight.

Upper Subansiri district accounts

for the highest number of panchayat voters at 38,764, while Dibang Valley has just 3,854. In the civic polls, Itanagar's ward 19 has the largest voter base at 5,106, and Pasighat's ward 6 the smallest with 812.

To conduct the elections, the commission will set up 2,171 polling stations for panchayat voters, along with 67 stations for the IMC and 12 for the PMC. Municipal bodies will use EVMs, while panchayat elections will be held through ballot boxes. More than 40,000 personnel are being deployed, including about 15,000 polling staff. The SEC will also assign 29 general observers—one to each district and one each to the IMC and PMC. Additional security measures will be put in place in sensitive areas of Tirap, Changlang, and Longleng.

With the poll dates announced, the Model Code of Conduct is now in force across Arunachal. Tashi called on political parties and citizens to maintain calm and support free, fair, and peaceful elections.

44th NEIHA Session Begins at Bodoland University, Bringing Scholars From Across Northeast Together

KOKRAJHAR

The 44th Annual Session of the North East India History Association (NEIHA) commenced today at Bodoland University, marking a major academic event for the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) and the wider Northeast. The three-day conference, being held from November 17 to 19, has drawn renowned historians, researchers and academicians from across the region and beyond.

The inaugural programme opened with a welcome address by Dr. Subung Basumatary, Registrar of Bodoland University, who emphasised the significance of hosting NEIHA's annual session on the campus and extended warm greetings to the delegates.

Delivering the inaugural speech, Prof. B. L. Ahuja, Vice-Chancellor of Bodoland University, praised NEIHA's enduring contribution to historical scholarship in Northeast India. He urged scholars to embrace in-



terdisciplinary methods to better understand the region's layered histories, cultural diversity and complex social trajectories.

Prof. Amena N. Passah, General Secretary of NEIHA, presented the association's annual report. She reaffirmed NEIHA's mission to promote rigorous historical research, document indigenous and community-based histories, foster academic collaboration and strengthen collective understanding of the Northeast's cultural and historical landscape.

A special address was delivered by Assam Legislative Assem-

bled Speaker Biswajit Daimary, who highlighted the importance of preserving the heritage of Northeast India through scholarly work and deeper engagement with local communities. He said such academic gatherings play a crucial role in shaping informed perspectives about the region's past.

The session included the introduction of the President-Elect by NEIHA President Prof. Salam Irene, followed by the Presidential Address by Prof. Sudhir Kumar Singh. In his address, Prof. Singh outlined strategies to enhance NEIHA's academic visibility, ex-

pand research networks and provide greater support to emerging scholars in the region.

The inaugural day also saw the release of the NEIHA Proceedings along with several newly published books, reflecting the association's continued commitment to enriching and diversifying research on Northeast India.

The programme concluded with a vote of thanks by Dr. Joydip Narzary, Local Secretary of the organising committee, who acknowledged the contributions of dignitaries, participants and the university administration in successfully opening the session.

In the second half of the day, scholars presented research papers on themes spanning regional historiography, identity and community narratives, linguistic traditions, and contemporary socio-political issues. Presentations and discussions will continue over the next two days, with the annual session set to conclude on November 19.

Assam CM flags 'conspiracy' to keep Zubeen Garg drunk for financial exploitation

GUWAHATI

With the Special Investigation Team (SIT) days away from submitting its chargesheet against seven accused in the circumstances leading to the death of cultural icon Zubeen Garg, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday alleged a deliberate conspiracy to keep the singer intoxicated for financial exploitation.

Speaking to reporters after donating blood on the occasion of Garg's 53rd birth anniversary, Sarma said, "The inquiry has indicated that the singer was never into alcoholism and was made to consume alcohol by his close ones."

According to the Chief Minister, investigators have found that Garg "did not like to drink but was made to consume alcohol so that the simple



man can be manipulated". Sarma said this was allegedly done "to loot his finance and property".

"The chargesheet will lay out

these findings in detail once it is filed. Alcohol was not Zubeen's identity. When people desired to use him, they made him get drunk," he said, recounting that during his meetings with Garg, the singer "was never drunk".

The Chief Minister criticised what he described as a "false narrative" glorifying alcohol as a way of paying tribute to the late musician. "Many people after his death spread the idea that he should be paid homage through alcohol. That's a complete lie. Garg's legacy lies in his music and humanitarian work," he said. Sarma urged the youth to honour him through social contributions such as blood donation and planting his favourite nabor saplings. The developments came on the day the Ministry of Home Affairs granted the long-pending sanction required

under Section 208 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), a mandatory approval for prosecuting offences committed outside India. The alleged crime took place in Singapore and without this clearance, the SIT had been unable to legally file the chargesheet. With the sanction now approved, SIT chief Munna Prasad Gupta said the team is targeting December 10 to complete the chargesheet. Investigators have already examined forensic evidence, obtained material from Singaporean authorities, and recorded statements from over 100 witnesses. In the run-up to the filing of the chargesheet, today's remarks mark Sarma's second such disclosure. Earlier, at an event in Jamugurihat on November 3, the Chief Minister had described the events leading to Garg's death as "murder".

UPA era marked by scams; BJP will form government in Bengal soon, says Tripura CM

AGARTALA

Tripura Chief Minister Dr. Manik Saha on Tuesday said the UPA era was marked by widespread corruption and major scams, asserting that the BJP is poised to form the next government in West Bengal to end what he described as "jungle raj."

He was speaking at a programme in Takarjala under the West District, where 135 voters from 42 families joined the BJP.

Welcoming the new members, Dr. Saha said they had made the right decision at the right time, which he believed would further strengthen the party. He highlighted the BJP's expanding footprint across India, noting that the party is now forming governments in most states.

He credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership for driving welfare initiatives for the nation, the Northeast, and Janajati communities, including the formation of the DoNER Ministry to accelerate the region's development.

The Chief Minister said he would be travelling to Bihar to

attend a swearing-in ceremony and remarked that the state, once associated with "goonda raj and corruption," has witnessed significant change under the NDA government. "People don't want goonda raj, jungle raj, and corruption," he added.

Reflecting on governance under the UPA, he said the country had suffered several scams and lacked strong leadership. In contrast, he said, the Modi government has ensured national security and strengthened the country. "Before 2014 there was unrest across the country, including in the Northeast. But after 2014 everything has changed," he said. Dr. Saha also criticised certain groups in Tripura for allegedly misleading and provoking people, urging them instead to join the BJP. He said the party is committed to the welfare of indigenous communities and claimed that during the CPIM rule, Tripura had witnessed violence and fear. He concluded by expressing confidence that the BJP would soon form the government in West Bengal to restore peace and end "jungle raaj."

Inside Assam's Mushroom Boom: How a Humble Crop Is Powering an Innovation Wave

GUWAHATI

Mushroom cultivation—once a modest, low-profile activity in Assam—is steadily transforming into a dynamic, innovation-led enterprise, driven by rising demand for healthy foods and a surge of local entrepreneurship. What began as a livelihood option for small farmers has grown into a vibrant ecosystem of value-added products, community training programmes and region-wide market linkages.

In Guwahati's Lalmati locality, one such enterprise stands out for redefining what a simple agricultural product can become. From fresh and dried mushrooms to powders, biscuits, chocolates, noodles and an ever-growing range of pickles, the farm has demonstrated how value addition can turn a single crop into an array of high-value products with strong regional demand.

For founders Kanaklata Das and Anuj Kumar Saikia, the journey started a decade ago with a straightforward mission: to popularise mushroom cultivation across the Northeast and make it a viable source of income for rural households.

"We began with raw and dried mushrooms," Kanaklata recalls, "but slowly we explored how many different items could be



created from them. Today we produce raw mushroom, dried mushroom, mushroom powder, biscuits, and six kinds of pickles."

Their now-famous pickle range includes bhut jolokia mushroom, chilli mushroom, pineapple mushroom, tamarind mushroom, coconut mushroom, and garlic mushroom varieties. The team has also developed mushroom protein powder, chocolates, and noodles, products that are ready for market launch after extensive trials and testing.

Since 2016, the duo has been travelling across Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Meghalaya, training villagers—especially women—in mushroom cultivation. Their work goes far beyond technical training; they help farmers sell their produce, create market linkages, and build a network where benefits flow back to the entire community.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought their

momentum to a halt, but they restarted from scratch soon after restrictions eased. "We rented land in Guwahati and rebuilt step by step," Kanaklata says. "Today, the farm employs around 12 people, but we hope to expand to 45 bighas and create employment for nearly 200."

Their products have drawn enthusiastic responses at exhibitions and trade fairs across the country. "Our items have reached Nagaland, Manipur, Dimapur, Gujarat, Delhi, and Meghalaya," she says. They also run a retail outlet in Bhetapara, and their participation in Advantage Assam drew praise from international visitors. "Guests from abroad really enjoyed our mushroom-based food items," she recalls proudly.

For many families, mushroom farming is a rare opportunity to start a business with minimal investment. "With just Rs 5,000 to Rs 10,000, anyone can begin mushroom cultivation,"

says co-founder Anuj Kumar Saikia. He adds that around 1,000 women trained by them are now earning Rs 15,000 to Rs 20,000 per month, turning mushrooms into a dependable income source. Over the last ten years, the duo has trained nearly 10,000 people across the Northeast. Currently, they are active in districts near Guwahati—Nalbari, Barpeta, Nagaon, Morigaon, and Goalpara—where they continue to train new farmers and supply high-quality mushroom seeds sourced from West Bengal, Siliguri and Cooch Behar.

Starting out requires only basic materials. "Rice husk, polythene, bamboo and good-quality mushroom seeds—that's enough for anyone to begin cultivation at home or on a small plot," Anuj explains.

Mushrooms are increasingly being recognised for their nutritional benefits. "They are rich in protein and helpful for people with diabetes, cancer, high blood pressure, and even constipation," Anuj says. As health-conscious consumers shift toward natural, nutrient-rich foods, the demand for mushroom-based products is expected to climb even higher.

From a simple crop once grown quietly in backyards, mushrooms have become a symbol of Assam's grassroots innovation—a product that empowers communities, strengthens rural livelihoods and opens new pathways in food entrepreneurship. The state's mushroom boom is only beginning, and its ripple effects are already being felt far beyond the farms where it began.

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PM Modi launches commemorative coin, stamps at Sathya Sai Baba centenary in Puttaparthi



KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

ANDHRA PRADESH: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday marked the centenary of Sri Sathya Sai Baba by unveiling a 100 commemorative coin and a set of postal stamps at Prasanthi Nilayam. The event drew thousands of devotees and students to the Hill View Stadium, where the Prime Minister spoke at length about the spiritual leader's legacy of service.

Modi described the centenary as a blessing for the country and said Sathya Sai Baba's message of love, harmony, and selfless work had shaped millions of lives. He urged the audience to draw strength from Baba's motto of Love All, Serve All, calling it an idea that still fits India's cultural fabric and development goals.

The Prime Minister high-

lighted the charitable work carried out by the Sathya Sai organisations over the decades, from free medical services to drinking water projects that now cover more than 3,000 km of pipelines. He also recalled the massive relief operations undertaken during the 2001 Bhuj earthquake. Modi pointed to the Trust's financial support for girlchildren under the Sukanya Samridhi Yojana, noting its scale: more than four crore accounts with deposits exceeding 3.25 lakh crore.

He used the platform to reiterate his pitch for Vocal for Local, saying that stronger local economies were central to the Viksit Bharat vision. As part of the programme, he handed over 100 Gir cows to economically weaker families through the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust, linking the gesture to the government's

Rashtriya Gokul Mission. Modi said similar efforts in Varanasi had helped the region breed more than 1,000 Gir cattle and referred to the growing global presence of Indian breeds, including in Rwanda. Modi arrived at the Sri Sathya Sai International Airport in the morning and traveled by road to the Prasanthi Nilayam campus. Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan, IT and HRD Minister Nara Lokesh, and Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust Managing Trustee RJ Rathnakar received him on arrival.

Before heading to the main ceremony, Modi offered silent prayers at Baba's Maha Samadhi. Across Puttaparthi, the district police placed the town under tight security with extensive digital surveillance.

Nowgam blast: Experts, leaders question storage of 3,000 kg explosives in residential police station

SRINAGAR

Security experts and political leaders have raised serious questions over the handling and storage of nearly 3,000 kilograms of explosives at Nowgam Police Station in a densely populated area, following a devastating blast during sampling that killed nine people and injured 32 others.

Former J&K police chief S P Vaid said explosives should never be stored in residential areas. "Established guidelines require explosive materials to be kept in isolated and safe locations. I don't know whether the guidelines were followed in this case," he said.

The ammonium nitrate kept at the station is highly sensitive and can detonate easily. "It can explode if it comes in contact with water or a spark. Even striking a match while sealing it can trigger an explosion," Vaid added.

Around 2,900 kg of ammonium nitrate, seized after busting an interstate white-collar militant module, had been stored in the police station where the original case was registered. On Saturday evening, a massive explosion occurred during sampling, shattering the surrounding area.

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said an investigation is underway. "We are hopeful to get answers about the large quantities of explosives kept here, under what circumstances they were brought and stored, and how they were being handled," he said.

Relatives stage a protest demanding the mortal remains of Mohammad Shafi Parry, a tailor who was killed in an accidental explosion which ripped through



Nowgam police station on late Friday night, in Srinagar, Saturday, Nov. 15, 2025. At least nine people were killed and 32 others suffered injuries in the incident, according to officials.

PDP leader Iltija Mufti questioned why such a large quantity of ammonium nitrate was stored in a crowded locality for four days. "It is negligence on the part of the police. There should be an inquiry into why such a large quantity of explosives was kept in a police station in a densely populated area for so many days," she said.

Mufti also criticised the presence of civilians during the sampling. "Why were civilians, including the Naib Tehsildar, taken there

when they don't know how to seal ammonium nitrate? This was extremely dangerous and an accident waiting to happen."

She said that there was a huge lapse of judgment, and heads should roll.

National Conference MP Ruhullah Mehdi called the incident a "big lapse" and demanded a thorough investigation. "Handling highly explosive material with insensitivity and unprofessionalism must be probed. Responsibility should be fixed at every level. They should prove it was an accidental blast, and if so, justice for the victims means holding accountable those whose negligence led to this tragedy," he said.

BJP leader Ravindra Raina also called for a detailed inquiry into the incident.

The victims include SIA Inspector 37-year-old Asrar Ahmad Shah R/o Kupwara; 33-yr-old Arshad Ahmad Shah, a Crime Branch photographer from Kulgam; Javid Mansoor Rather, 40, a crime photographer from Tral, Pulwama; Naib Tehsildar Muzaffer Ahmad Khan, 33, R/o Soibug, Budgam; Suhail Ahmad Rather, a chowkidar R/o Natipora, Srinagar; Tailor Mohammad Shafi Parry, who had been called to police station to assist in sample collection; and constables Aijaz Ahmad, Mohammad Amin and Showkat Ahmad Shah of FSL, Srinagar.

INTERNATIONAL

For US conservative media, NYC Mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani quickly becomes attack target

WASHINGTON

New York City's incoming mayor, Zohran Mamdani, hasn't taken office yet. But he's already the new avatar of evil for conservative media figures.

He's been called "downright sinister" and "incompatible with America."

His labels include "commie", "Marxist", "jihadi sympathiser" and "seething leftist". Fox News' Laura Ingraham warned her viewers not to be fooled by "smiling socialists who rule like Soviet tyrants."

A New York Post post-election cover that depicted Mamdani holding aloft the Soviet Union's hammer and sickle symbol sold out on newsstands by noon and was offered on e-Bay for \$75. By the end of the day, the Post was selling baby onesies and commemorative plates emblazoned with the cover.

Already, conservative outlets see Mamdani joining Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Nancy Pelosi and Hillary Clinton as someone guaranteed to make their audiences' blood boil. And by doing so, they can help Republicans in the midterm elections.

"It's very clear that he's going to be the No. 1 target of right-wing media for the foreseeable future, well into 2026," said Howard Polskin, publisher of the Righting, a newsletter that follows conservative media. "He's colorful, controversial and not afraid of a fight."

The head of an outlet that Polskin regularly monitors, the Daily Signal, said Mamdani is likely seen as a threat because his appeal to working-class Americans who feel left behind by the economy is similar to that of President Donald Trump, although they have different ideas about how to handle that.

"Remember years ago there was Nancy Pelosi who was the bogeyman

for Republicans," said Rob Bluey, president and executive editor of the Daily Signal. "I think Mamdani is probably going to be the new person. I think that's why you see a lot of emphasis on him in conservative media."

In the Washington Examiner, editor-in-chief Hugo Gurdon saw ominous signs in Mamdani's election night victory speech. "He was downright sinister, glorying not just in his achievement but in having laid low his vanquished enemies and stuck it to others besides. He took off his smiling campaign mask and revealed his venomous self," Gurdon wrote.

Newsmax's Rob Schmitt called Mamdani the "mayor for the foreign-born. We have flooded the country with diversity, and diversity delivered us Zohran."

In an interview, Schmitt said he wasn't quite ready to anoint Mamdani as a deliberate target for the conservative media. "A go-to bogeyman makes it sound like it's manufactured," he told The Associated Press. "whereas we are just appropriately concerned about people that are speaking or trying to push an ideology that is destined to not work."

The Post recognized Mamdani as a target of interest well before the election. Between Oct. 27 and Nov. 5, he was the subject of seven of the tabloid's covers.

One, headlined "Mam-Child," depicted Mamdani in a little boy's overalls to illustrate a column warning that the city wasn't a toy to hand to a "baby like Zohran."

Another front page blared "Not Zo Fast" to herald a tightening race in the polls. Election Day's lead headline was "Trump to New York: Keep the Commie Out."

Mamdani reached out to the White House post-election for a meeting with Trump and the pres-

ident said Sunday that "we'll work something out."

Mamdani's status as a member of the Democratic Socialists of America and his Muslim background are behind many of the conservative media attacks. Asked on NBC's "Meet the Press" this spring whether he was a communist, Mamdani said, "No, I am not."

Webster's defines socialism as a political theory where the community or government owns and controls the production and distribution of goods. Communism, advanced by revolutionary Karl Marx, is considered a step beyond, where private property and capitalism no longer exist.

Many of Mamdani's critics make no distinction. "Commie takeover in the Big Apple," one Fox News onscreen headline read.

"They elected a communist," WorldNet Daily wrote. "Communist, not socialist," Trump said in a "60 Minutes" interview last month. "Communist. He's far worse than a socialist."

Some Jewish groups have expressed skepticism about Mamdani, who has supported Palestinian rights and criticized Israel's attack in Gaza as genocide. But he has denounced Hamas's Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel and said he will work to combat antisemitism.

Republicans have a clear interest in seeing more American Jews — traditionally a group that leans toward Democrats — switch over. But that doesn't account for some of the hostility seen in the media.

The National Review said Mamdani's win meant "it's open season on New York Jews." Megyn Kelly said the tenets of Islam are inconsistent with American values and Muslims should not be elected mayors or governors. Podcaster Michael Savage called him a "Marxist jihadist sympathizer."

Far-right conspiracy theorist Laura Loomer baselessly claimed that Mamdani would encourage Muslims to commit political assassinations to acquire power and silence critics.

Mamdani's staff did not return messages from The Associated Press. In the waning days of his campaign, he spoke out against some of the religious-based attacks on him.

"I thought that if I behaved well enough or bit my tongue enough in the face or racist, baseless attacks all while returning back to my central message, it would allow me to be more than just my faith," he said.

"I was wrong. No amount of redirection is ever enough."

Some of the attacks reflect a common theme in politics and the media — not unique to Mamdani — to associate all members of a political party with the beliefs of one who could be depicted as on the fringe.

The Daily Signal wrote after his election that Mamdani "is now the putative leader of his party."

The Victory Girls conservative blog used an illustration of the incoming mayor in a military uniform. "The socialists are coming, and Mamdani is just the beginning," the blog wrote. "If we ignore them, we will all be in big trouble."

"He's the new AOC in the sense that they have found someone who is relatively unknown that they get to define and hold up as the example of what it means to be a Democrat," said Angelo Carusone, president of the liberal media watchdog Media Matters for America.

Carusone said he's not sure if Mamdani will become a villain of the conservative media on the level of a Clinton or Pelosi, but he can understand the urgency. "If you don't check him now," Carusone said, "he's going to capture the young people."

China to halt Japan seafood imports amid spat over Takaichi's Taiwan remark



NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said it cannot pass "blanket orders" protecting doctors involved in protests in the aftermath of the rape and murder of a trainee doctor at the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata.

A bench of Justices MM Sundresh and Satish Chandra Sharma said any order passed would amount to interference with the authority of the police. Observing that the matter cannot be heard "piecemeal", the apex court said it was inclined to transfer the matter to the Calcutta High Court.

"We are grappling with so many things and there is no end to this. It is easier for the Calcutta High Court to monitor protests. Is it possible for us to monitor the protests in Kolkata sitting in Delhi? "How can we pass blanket orders protecting doctors. The police has a right to call you," the bench observed orally.

The top court directed senior advocate Karuna Nundy, representing the Association of junior and senior doctors, to submit a table of matters pending

before the Calcutta High Court.

During the hearing, Nundy submitted that protesting doctors were being harassed by the police and were called for interrogation repeatedly.

She sought directions from the apex court that protection be given to the doctors.

The matter will now be heard after winter vacations.

The body of the post-graduate trainee doctor was found in the hospital's seminar room on August 9 last year. Kolkata police arrested Sanjay Roy, a civic volunteer, the next day.

On January 20, a Kolkata trial court awarded convict Roy "life term imprisonment till death" in the case.

The heinous crime triggered nationwide outrage and prolonged protests in West Bengal.

The apex court, even after the primary conviction, is monitoring multiple ancillary issues, including regularising the unauthorised absence of doctors.

While taking suo motu notice of the case,

the bench constituted a National Task Force (NTF) on August 20 last year to formulate a protocol to ensure safety and security of medical professionals in the wake of the crime.

In November last year, the NTF in its report — part of the Central government's affidavit — said a separate central law to deal with offences against healthcare professionals was not required. The panel said state laws had adequate provisions to address minor offences besides serious ones under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023. In a slew of recommendations, the NTF said 24 states had enacted laws to address violence against health care professionals while defining the terms "health care institutions" and "medical professionals".

Initially investigated by the Kolkata police, the case was transferred to the CBI on August 13 after the Calcutta High Court expressed dissatisfaction over the former's investigation.

The top court subsequently assumed oversight of the matter on August 19, 2024.

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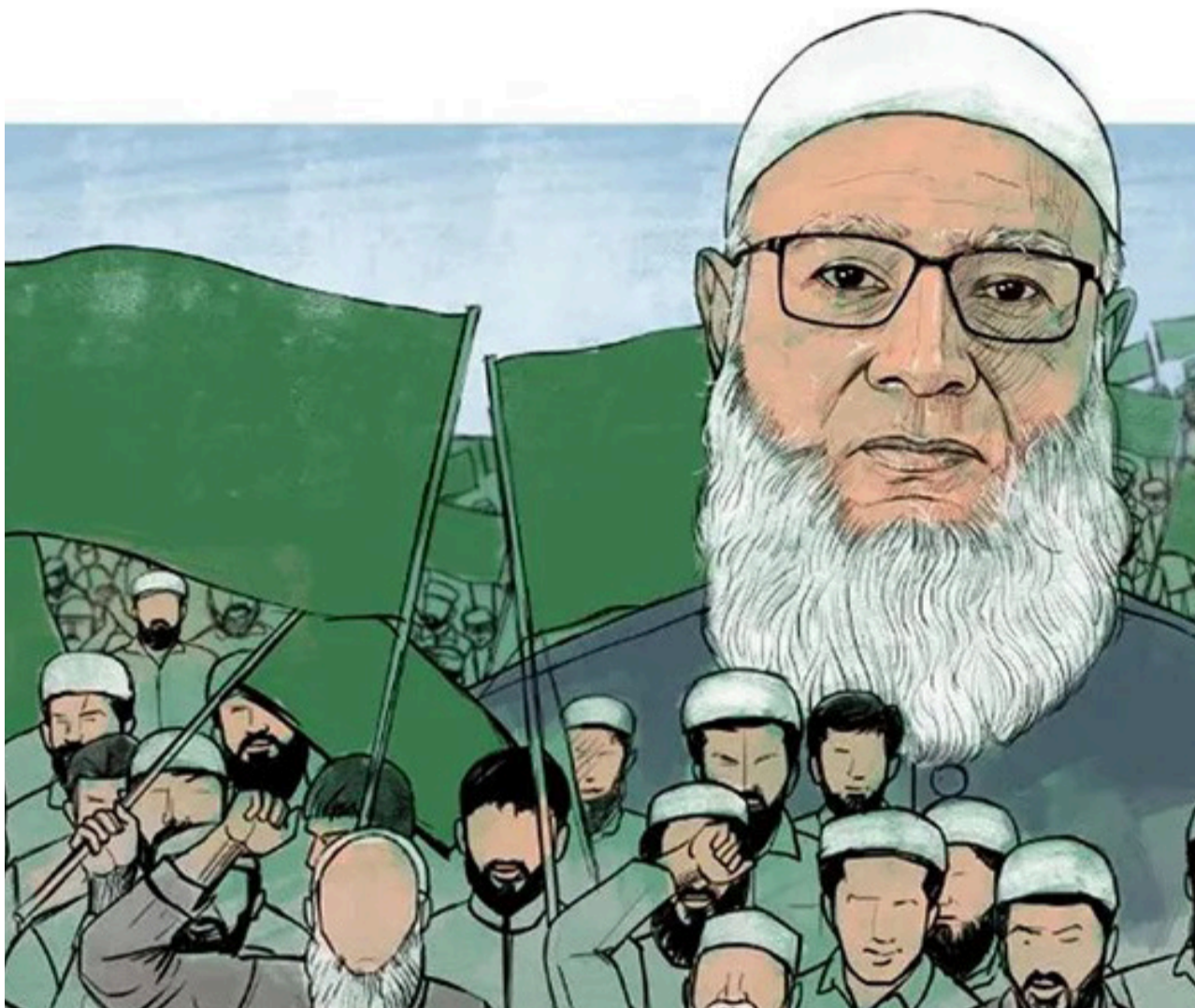
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The rhetoric and trend are strikingly similar to the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Attacks and harassment of female sportspersons have become common. Chhayanaut, a renowned cultural institution in Dhaka, has almost stopped public programmes.

Police are hesitant to permit Tagore song and dance events.

Fundamentalists openly harass women over dress. In one case, a Dhaka University employee harassed a woman for attire he deemed "un-Islamic."

When police arrested him on her sexual-harassment complaint, a mob freed him and gave him a hero's welcome. He later shared a stage with religious leaders.

What began with the ouster of feminist writer Taslima Nasreen in 1994 has now come full circle. In today's Bangladesh, secular, moderate, and pan-Bengali values are no longer promoted.

Dr Yunus and several cabinet members project themselves as symbols of secularism, but that façade is wearing thin.

For years, Yunus had never been seen offering prayers in public gatherings. Now, photographs show him

doing so.

Offering prayers is not wrong. But presiding over the country's slide into a dangerous future must be called out.

It is his government that has released dangerous terrorists from jail. During the July protests, over 4,000 sophisticated weapons were looted from police armouries; roughly 1,500 guns and thousands of rounds of ammunition remain missing.

Protesters attacked prisons and freed hundreds of high-risk inmates.

The Yunus administration has done little to recapture them.

Bangladesh has a long history of terrorism. It was on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list for six years.

The blogger killings and the 2016 Holey Artisan attack were carried out by ISIS affiliates. After the July protests, ISIS flags appeared in Dhaka on multiple occasions.

The banned Hizb-ut-Tahrir has been holding press conferences and issuing statements.

The July movement that toppled Sheikh Hasina's government is no longer seen as a spontaneous student protest—Jamaat has claimed full credit for orchestrating it.

In the words of its Deputy Chief, it was "our movement from start to finish."

The success of that movement has made Islamists highly ambitious. They already act as the de facto powerbrokers within the Yunus administration and now aim to capture power outright.

How this unfolds remains to be seen, but Bangladesh could soon pose a greater problem for the world than Pakistan. In Pakistan, power rests with the army and the judiciary retains some independence.

Dhaka, by contrast, has a weak army reliant on UN peacekeeping missions.

The trend suggests Bangladesh may soon reach new heights of Islamic extremism—and its army may be too feeble to control it.

Early in November this year, the Dr Muhammad Yunus-led Interim Government in Dhaka scrapped a plan to recruit music teachers in primary schools.

Music had been part of Bangladesh's school curriculum since Liberation from Pakistan 54 years ago.

Islamists objected to it as an "un-Islamic" practice. They want teachers for Islamic studies instead.

According to a BBC Bangla report (November 8), the religious affairs adviser in the Yunus cabinet forwarded a proposal to recruit primary teachers from Qawmi madrasas.

There are some 15-20 thousand such madrasas teaching Arabic and promoting the most fundamentalist Wahhabi interpretation of the Quran.

This is just one example of a changing Bangladesh, fast emerging as the latest hotspot of Islamic fundamentalism.

The turn was evident immediately after the July uprising, when Islamists went on a rampage destroying sculptures—including those of the

stand destroyed.

There were multiple attacks on Sufi singers, including incidents where they were forcibly shaved to conform to austere Islamic traditions.

The 90 percent Muslim-majority Bangladesh was exceptional in breaking away from the theological state of Pakistan in 1971 and creating a secular republic.

Over the decades, Islamic influence deepened. The military rulers—Ziaur Rahman and H M Ershad—inflicted the greatest damage on the secular fabric by rehabilitating Islamic politics led by the Pakistan-born Jamaat-e-Islami and by making Islam the state religion.

Yet, despite Islamist pressure, the country long upheld liberal values.

Sufi Muslims, who once spread a tolerant version of Islam in Bengal through music, coexisted with progressive Bangladeshis who drew inspiration from pan-Bengali culture and Rabindranath Tagore.

Dhaka boasted some of the finest exponents of Tagore songs—or Rabindra Sangeet, as Bengalis on either side of the border call it.

That entire edifice is now collaps-



leaders of the freedom movement against Pakistan—across the country.



The only thing making you unhappy are your own thoughts. Change them.

ing. A year after the uprising, Bangladesh is fast sliding into a sinkhole of Islamic fundamentalism.

Bangladeshi women had played a crucial role in the country's progress: at 42 percent, their labour-force participation exceeds the South Asian average and matches several East Asian nations.

Jamaat wants to reverse that. Its chief declared that women should spend more time with their families, and other leaders openly called for stopping women from working.

Black Pottery of Manipur: A Tale of Kamal Devi's Unswerving Efforts



PROF. (DR) SUKAMAL DEB, ADVISER, NEIR, 2026

Ms Shamjetshabam Kamala Devi is the first woman from the State of Manipur who did her M. Tech in Applied Geology from Dibrugarh University, Assam, in 2004. Instead of joining a government job, which she was offered, she chose to try clay, their heritage craft, applying her knowledge of applied geology to it. That inner call transformed her into an artisan, entrepreneur, and community leader who works silently for decades to keep the legacy of Black Pottery alive.

Kamala, once a little girl from Thongjao village, 57 km from Imphal, Kakching district, known as the Land of Pottery, fell in love with the Black Pottery. She never knew that she would dedicate her life to preserving and promoting her inherent craft and eventually become a leader of climate resilience through craft.

Kamala turns around the clay constantly, shaping it into a pot with her creative hands, making a brilliant piece of black pottery. She motivates other girls and women, trains them, and supports them to be creative artisans. I visited her repeatedly, as my previous responsibilities as an official in the Government of India to develop micro-enterprises in the Northeast Region (2018 - 2022). I could hardly come across such an immaculate lady who sees the world through the lens of humanity.

The Terracotta Pottery of Thongjao, which Kamala works on, uses a mixture of red and black clay. This clay is kneaded and rolled into a wide slab. This slab is then given a cylindrical form and joined to a circular shape that forms the base. A wet cloth and fingers shape the pot's neck and rim. The outer layer is patted by a flat wooden beater (Asphuzei) with an engraved pattern is also used to pat the pots to achieve the same pattern on the surface. Continuous and clockwise movements of the expert hand and stroking are essential to the whole process. After the structure is made, it is smoothed with a kanji/cactus seed, after which the pot is baked in an open traditional kiln made of bamboo layered with rice husk. The pot is covered with straw and exposed to fire for a few days in the trapped smoke. In the kiln, some pots are placed inside other pots to prohibit the entry of air and, consequently, oxygen, which turns the clay black in colour. They also make brown-coloured pots, where the burning process is different.

In Manipur, there is another variety of Black Pottery, called Longpi Pottery or Black Serpentinite (a metamorphic rock) Pottery, a distinction of the Tangkhul Naga tribe in Ukhrul district, Manipur, which they have practised for centuries. They discovered that local clay and weathered rock from the region could be mixed to make a unique, durable pottery with a black colour. Over time, this became an important part of the cultural identity of the Tangkhul Naga community. Each of these products is filled with cultural and spiritual significance. A mortar pestle is also used in the production. Pointed metals engrave floral and geometrical patterns onto the pots before they are baked. Kamala, who belongs to the Meitei community, does not use serpentinite, the metamorphic rock; they use the special clay that is locally available and mix it with sand to make



MS KAMALA DEVI WITH STUDENTS AT ANANT NATIONAL UNIVERSITY, AHMEDABAD



STUDENTS FROM KASHMIR TRY CLAY, SUPERVISED BY MS KAMALA DEVI AT THE UNIVERSITY



MS KAMALA DEVI WITH STUDENTS AT ANANT NATIONAL UNIVERSITY, AHMEDABAD



KAMAL DEVI AT HER VILLAGE TRAINS OTHER WOMEN

the products. While baking, they use carbon (black colour), which they make by burning husk on the product to bring the black colour. The Tangkhul Naga Community uses Serpentinite to make Longpi Pottery, while Kamala does the terracotta work. This clearly distinguishes between the two varieties. The Tangkhul Naga mostly make crockery items, smaller in size and more durable than those made by the Meitei community. The serpentine and clay pressure cooker is a unique symbol of the tribal craft of the Northeast made by the Tangkhul tribe. The Meitei community makes larger pots, a pitcher or a water jar, which is globally acclaimed.

These crafts contribute to the Circular Economy. By Circular Economy, we mean a systems solution framework that tackles global challenges like climate change, biodiversity loss, waste and pollution, circulates products and materials (at their highest value) and regenerates nature. This is an example of sustainable craft; it helps to support the local community and preserve traditional handicrafts.

Pottery is one of the heritage activities in India, an iconic element of Indian art. Around 65 Lakh families or 25 million people belong to the Potter Community (2011). The roots of Pottery can be traced back to the earliest times of civilisation. It has sustained for eons and is a massive employment creator in rural areas. The ancient pottery of a country speaks facts about its civilisation. Pottery is one of those import-

ant media through which human have expressed their emotions. A piece of pottery has a visual message in its shape and colour. Pottery is the most sensual of all arts. A mass of clay touched by an artisan's genius is said to become a castle. It holds significant value in understanding cultures where the script is either absent or undeciphered. Understanding the presence of fire, cooking, storage, sedentary or migratory populations, and social stratification can all be inferred through the study of pottery. Yet, the life of a Potter remained unrecognised and under-remunerated.

Pottery wares have played a significant role in the lives of men throughout the remote past. Archaeological sites worldwide have contributed to the knowledge of pottery through the material finds of the past. Pottery was made during all three ages, the Stone, Bronze and Iron ages, yet pottery sherds are the commonest of all objects, which often provide clues to the Neolithic communities and are practically indestructible because once fired, pottery retains its form and colour for hundreds of years. Pottery is tangible and is considered to be as old as civilisation itself. It is a great source of information for anthropologists and archaeologists. Either in sherds or as a whole, pottery reflects the way of life of a community. In the Northeast, Pottery has been attested from prehistoric sites, and it's the livelihood for several communities to many of whom consider pottery to be their way of life and mostly an

exclusive job of females.

Indian Pottery, an odyssey of tradition, craftsmanship, and cultural legacy, as Kamala works on, is a rich tapestry of tradition, which is not just an art form; it's a repository of heritage, echoing the whispers of centuries. But the potters have been navigating challenges. The legacy Indian pottery stands at a crossroads, where preservation battles against the tide of modernity. Let's unravel the challenges the craft faces and make an endeavour to safeguard India's pottery heritage. The craft has not reduced its relevance in the present era of changes and will not be so in the future. The artistic minds, the environmental consciousness, affordable prices, unique features of employing women, the use of local raw materials, the promotion of rural industrialisation, and the utility of the products keep the relevance of the pottery industry unshaken.

Male-dominated traditions in Manipur, in Thongjao village, have prevented women from becoming potters. Traditionally, women are not allowed to spin the potter's wheel. Kamala Devi, however, overcame this traditional taboo most originally by replacing the potter's wheel with herself - turning around the clay constantly, shaping it into a pot with her hands!

To bring her incredible story to the limelight and acquaint the students and others, Anant National University, Ahmedabad, where I work to document and develop India's languishing craft, organised a 15-day Thongjao

Black Pottery Workshop in Jan 2025. Kamal stayed with us to conduct this enthusiastic workshop, bringing pride to Manipur and the Northeast. She is the pride of ours, the pride of mine. At the sidelines of the workshop, Kamala also trained the students from Kashmir, who were on the university campus during the Winter School organised by the university. I find a deeper meaning to this type of interaction, as it also promotes cultural integration between the two remote locations of India, Jammu & Kashmir and Manipur. It left behind an enduring happiness in me.

During ethnic strife in Manipur, I read an article published in the Economic Times, under the heading, "Amid conflict, women artisans eye e-commerce to preserve Manipur's vanishing crafts". This tells about the women's power in Manipur. Our women artisans have proven resilience; they are our hope in preserving our languishing crafts, creating livelihood, innovation and entrepreneurship at the bottom of the society. I attach my entire hopes on women like Kamala, who empower many.

The North East Integration Rally, 2026, opts for documentation of the crafts that may become extinct one day due to human indifference. Amid what is not in favour, let's identify the languishing crafts of the Northeast, let's celebrate, recognise and honour these amazing artisans, who have not given up hope, engaged in a silent struggle to preserve our identity, our culture.



BARAK FESTIVAL

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, Colleges, University Department, Individual & Group Competition.



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



11 JAN
Barak Valley Conclave
 Potential Issues and Challenges of Barak Valley by different stakeholders.
 Includes: MOUs, and Dignitaries can register for the conclave. Registration fee is not required, and presentation is required. Participation is through invitation only. Different awards are provided.

10 Jan
Barak Festival: Peace Progress & Prosperity



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.



11 JAN
5E For Success Conclave
 The 4th Annual Success Conclave is going to be held on 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 & Colleges. Extension: Seminar, Public Speaking (College). In the online event, former students of NE India Schools and Colleges can participate.

JAN'25
Online Global Fest
 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
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".
 Media Conclave: Workshops, Seminars, and Conferences for journalists, publishers, bloggers, and content creators, sponsors, guides, speakers, members.



CONCLAVE
"From School to Campus to Corporate"
 10 JAN 10 AM - 12 PM



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10-12 JAN
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Raw science out of textbooks into real-life experiences of students.

10-12 JAN
E-Sports
 Full-Blown! Don't miss! | CASH PRIZES | Trophy



10-12 JAN
Book Bank
 #NoOneLeftBehind Campaign | Book Bank | Donate | Reuse | Recycle

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

Painting Carnival
 Water Colour and Oil and Saw Paper 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 (One month) | Film from Mizoram
 Short Films from Barak Valley, NE India, W & Media Talk | Exhibitions | Meet & Greet



Barak Festival
Band Night 10 JAN
Musical Night 11 JAN



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