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VOLUME:1, ISSUE 640 | SILCHAR FRIDAY, DECEMBER 05, 2025. EAST AND NE INDIA EDITION | e-mail: krctimes@gmail.com , www.krctimes.com

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**PERSPECTIVE**

A single conversation with a wise person is better than ten years of study.

**LINOKA K ACHUMI CROWNED MISS NAGALAND 2025**

KOHIAMA

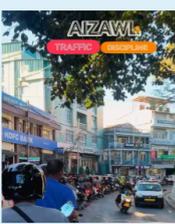
Linoka K Achumi was crowned Miss Nagaland 2025 on Thursday night at a dazzling grand finale in Kohima, drawing thunderous applause from a packed audience attending the Hornbill Festival celebrations.



Organised by the Beauty & Aesthetic Society of Nagaland in partnership with the Departments of Tourism and Higher Education, the annual pageant showcased exceptional young talent from across the state-blending culture, fashion and creative expression with festive splendour. Linoka emerged as the star of the evening, securing the title along with two special honours—Miss Multimedia and Miss Talent-making her one of the most decorated contestants of the night. Bendanliena was adjudged first runner-up, while Christina H Yeptho claimed the second runner-up position.

The 2025 edition of Miss Nagaland reflected the unity, identity and artistic heritage of the Naga people, with contestants representing a vibrant fusion of tradition and contemporary confidence. The night glittered with celebration and pride as young women took centre stage, embodying both cultural richness and modern ambition.

**WHO SAID WHAT**



**Civic sense in the North East is remarkable- calm traffic, discipline, and respect for the road. If we want this across India, we need new habits: teach it early, follow it at home, enforce it consistently and celebrate good behaviour. If one region can do it, whole country can.**

~ Harsh Goenka, Chairman, RPG Enterprises

**IIT Guwahati develops advanced epoxy coating for long-term steel protection in marine environments**

GUWAHATI

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Guwahati have developed an advanced corrosion-resistant epoxy coating designed to significantly extend the life of steel structures exposed to seawater and high-salinity conditions.

The study, led by Prof. Chandan Das of the Department of Chemical Engineering along with research scholar Dr. Anil Kumar, has been published in Advanced Engineering Materials.

Corrosion is a major factor behind structural degradation, particularly in offshore platforms, coastal bridges, port installations and marine pipelines. Over time, exposure to salt, moisture and pollutants weakens metal surfaces and has historically been linked to major industrial disasters such as the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy and the 1992 Guadalajara explosion. It also poses risks to the environment, aquatic life and public health.

Conventional barrier coatings provide only temporary protection, often developing microscopic cracks that eventually allow corrosive agents to seep in. To improve performance, global research has increasingly focused



on incorporating nanomaterials that strengthen epoxy-based coatings.

The IIT Guwahati team has taken this approach a step further by devel-

oping a nanocomposite blend using reduced graphene oxide (RGO), zinc oxide (ZnO) and polyaniline (PANI) - a unique combination not previously

tested for marine corrosion protection. Zinc oxide nanorods were first grown on RGO sheets and subsequently coated with polyaniline. This composite was then integrated into an epoxy system and evaluated through multiple characterization techniques.

According to the researchers, the new formulation outperformed standard epoxy coatings. It exhibited stronger adhesion, formed a dense and uniform protective film over steel surfaces, and reduced the rate at which salt and moisture penetrated the metal - a critical advantage for long-term durability.

The coating is expected to benefit industries including shipbuilding, offshore energy, port logistics and coastal engineering.

"Incorporating the RGO-ZnO-PANI nanocomposite into epoxy coatings offers a promising approach to achieving long-term corrosion resistance in harsh marine environments," Prof. Das said. "Our next step is to assess the coating's durability, real-world performance, and life-cycle impact."

The research marks a significant advance in India's efforts to strengthen infrastructure resilience in coastal and marine zones.

**Scindia Begins Nagaland Tour, Pushes NE Development Agenda**



KOHIAMA

Union Minister for Communications and DoNER, Jyotiraditya M. Scindia, arrived in Nagaland on for a three-day visit, during which he will inaugurate multiple projects, lay foundation stones for new initiatives and attend cultural programmes at the Hornbill Festival.

Speaking to the media on arrival, Scindia said Prime Minister Narendra Modi remains "firm in his resolve" to accelerate growth and

infrastructure expansion across the Northeast. He said the Centre's Act East, Act Fast and Act First policy has yielded "rich dividends," pointing out that nearly 10 per cent of gross budgetary support-over ₹1 lakh crore annually-has been allocated to the region.

The minister said the ongoing development programmes aim to unlock the Northeast's potential, which PM Modi has referred to as the nation's "Ashtalakshmi." He added that the DoNER Ministry continues to in-

vest in projects that respect and celebrate cultural diversity, including the distinct identities of Nagaland's 17 tribes.

Calling Nagaland a symbol of India's capability and cultural strength, Scindia praised the Hornbill Festival as a showcase of heritage, creativity and emerging aspirations. Before beginning official engagements, he visited the Kohima World War-II cemetery to honour the 1,420 soldiers who lost their lives in battle.

On Friday, Scindia will lay foundation stones for a series of DoNER-supported connectivity and infrastructure projects, and attend a traditional stone-pulling ceremony in Touphema village, the native place of Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio. He is also scheduled to visit the Hornbill Festival at Kisama later in the day.

The minister will wrap up his tour on Saturday after visiting the Heirloom Naga Centre in Dimapur, before returning to New Delhi.

Scindia's visit comes amid the Centre's continued push to develop the Northeast as a key cultural and economic hub, with emphasis on connectivity, livelihoods and regional integration.

**Manipur govt pushes MoCA for more helicopters, lower fares & new helipads**

IMPHAL

The Manipur Government has urged the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA), Government of India, to advise helicopter companies to increase the number of machines in order to meet the high inter-district demand for air services.

Anurag Bajpai, Additional Chief Secretary (ACS-Transport & TCI), Government of Manipur, stated this in an official communication after he recently met the Secretary of MoCA in New Delhi.

In the statement, Bajpai urged MoCA to note that both companies—Pawan Hans and Global Vectra Helicorp Limited (GVHL)—are currently operating only one machine each.

He also highlighted that Pawan Hans charges higher fares than GVHL for the same sortie, violating the agreement with MoCA under the RCS UDAN scheme.

The ticket fare of GVHL is around Rs 2,500 per person, whereas Pawan Hans charges around Rs 3,500 per person.

The ACS suggested that

Pawan Hans should consider operating on all routes, as GVHL does. He also requested the Secretary, MoCA, to consider sanctioning helipads at Kamjong, Senapati, and Ukhrul districts as a special case.

Additionally, he drew the Secretary's attention to the long-pending request of the Government of Manipur to rename Imphal International Airport as Bir Tikendrajit International Airport.

In this context, Anurag Bajpai chaired a comprehensive review meeting in Imphal on Thursday, attended by the Airport Authority of India (AAI) project team, State PWD, State Transport Department, and all executing agencies.

The meeting finalised an action plan to fast-track key works, including the early inauguration of the cargo terminal, expedited PWD construction of the six-lane approach road from the National Highway to the New Integrated Terminal Building (NITB), and timely completion of all pending NITB activities by 2026.

**Manipur government issues warning against intimidation, vows strict action on anti-social groups**



IMPHAL

The Manipur government has issued a strong warning to anti-social elements and organisations allegedly involved in intimidation and activities aimed at disturbing public peace. Authorities said police have already begun action against those issuing threats or attempting coercion, stressing that such behaviour constitutes a direct challenge to the state and its citizens.

Officials reiterated that no group or individual-regardless of legal or proscribed status-has the authority to impose illegal decrees, enforce restrictions on cultural or artistic practices, or deliver punishments outside the law. Any attempt to disrupt normalcy will invite

firm legal consequences, the government stated.

Citizens have been urged to report cases of threats, extortion, coercion or suspicious conduct to local police without delay. The Home Department's Anti-Extortion Cell is operating a 24x7 toll-free helpline (1800-202-3326) to receive complaints, with authorities assuring full confidentiality for informants.

Reaffirming its stance on maintaining peace and order, the state government appealed for public cooperation and unity in countering unlawful activities. It also emphasised that efforts to restore harmony and stability will continue, with strong action promised against those seeking to undermine safety and public order in Manipur.

GUWAHATI

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the death of celebrated Assamese singer Zubeen Garg is working round the clock to complete its charge sheet ahead of the court-mandated deadline. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has directed investigators to file the document between December 6 and December 12, well before the December 18 limit.

The SIT, headed by Special DGP (CID) Munna Prasad Gupta, has been intensifying evidence compilation since Garg's death in Singapore on September 19. Main investigating officer Rosie Kalita reportedly worked at the CID headquarters until 3 am, as part of a nine-member team tasked with finalising documents and witness statements.

According to the Chief Minister, the investigation is complete and nearly 3,500 pages of paperwork have been prepared. A high-level review with the Advocate General was held to verify the legal framework before filing. Sarma stressed that delay beyond December 18 could potentially allow the accused to seek bail, necessitating urgent completion of the charge sheet.

The inquiry is being treated as a murder case. The SIT has been examining whether criminal conspiracy or negligence contributed to the 45-year-old singer's death, which occurred while he was attending the North East India Festival in Singapore. The incident stunned fans

across Assam and led to more than 60 FIRs being registered statewide.

The charge sheet will outline evidence against seven individuals currently in judicial custody - including festival organiser Shyamkanu Mahanta, the singer's manager Sidharth Sharma, cousin and DSP Sandipan Garg, drummer Shekharjyoti Goswami, co-singer Amrit Prabha Mahanta, and PSOs Paresh Baishya and Nandeswar Borah.

Investigators have recorded statements from nearly 300 people, among them complainants, witnesses and Garg's wife, Garima. The report will also include forensic analyses, inputs from Singapore Police and medical authorities, alongside findings from doctors in Assam.

Financial irregularities have emerged as a significant angle in the probe.

Transactions exceeding ₹1.1 crore were reportedly detected in accounts belonging to Garg's personal security officers, prompting deeper scrutiny of the artist's management and financial ecosystem.

The SIT recently received key documents from Singapore authorities, including toxicology test outcomes and the final post-mortem opinion. While preliminary findings overseas do not point to foul play, Indian investigators continue to explore the possibility of deliberate wrongdoing - marking a noticeable difference in assessment between the two countries.

The Union Home Ministry has already granted approval for proceed-

ings under Section 208 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita. Chief Minister Sarma has also indicated that the state will request a fast-track court from the Gauhati High Court to accelerate trial proceedings.

As Assam awaits clarity on the investigation that has captivated public attention, the SIT is pushing toward a critical filing that could determine the course of justice for one of the region's most beloved cultural voices.

She encouraged the families to utilise the funds prudently, noting that stability and community restoration depend on sustainable resettlement. The DC also highlighted the benefits for children returning home, who will now be able to resume schooling. Scholarship assistance under Mission Vatsalya is set to be credited soon to eligible students.

The departure event saw the presence of ADM Bishnupur Toijam Opendro, SDO Nambol T. Shyamkumar and other key officials. At Waroiching, the reception and security arrangements for the returnees were overseen by Superintendent of Police Th. Shangkar Deba.

Later, in her role as District Mission Director of MSRLM, DC Elangbam also distributed Community Investment Fund cheques worth ₹16.5 lakh to 11 Self-Help Groups under Shingel Nura VLF at the Mini Secretariat Complex, Bishnupur-reinforcing the administration's parallel focus on livelihood revival and rural empowerment.

**Welcome Micheal Yanthan**

**Member Organising Committee, NEIR 2026**

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VOLUME:1, ISSUE 640

## PUTIN VISIT

Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to India is being closely watched by world leaders on two counts. Russia is engaged in a heavy war in Ukraine since 2022. While the latest peace talks are being carried out as Putin has just threatened Ukraine, "roll back or be ready to be wiped out". At the same time, serious efforts are being made at the behest of America to end the war. Talks are being held regularly with multiple formulas and options to bring about a ceasefire. The American President Donald Trump put a 28-point plan on the table to end the war. After first round of discussion in Geneva last month with Ukrainian President and his delegation, the plan was reduced to 19 points. However, New Delhi will be the centre of the world attention this week for Modi-Putin bilateral meeting.

An op-ed critical article in a leading Indian newspaper titled, "World wants the Ukraine war to end, but Russia does not seem serious about peace", written by Philipp Ackermann, Thierry Mathou and Lindy Cameron, the Ambassadors of Germany and France respectively, and Cameron, the British High Commissioner in Delhi. In a strongly worded article, they have accused Russia of an unprovoked war on Ukraine, raised the violation of fundamental international principles of national sovereignty and territorial integrity. They hinted that Russian appetite for territorial expansion and global destabilisation goes beyond Ukraine. The article read, "Russian fighters are making dangerous and escalating incursions into European space".

Characterising Putin's invasion of Ukraine as a humanitarian catastrophe and sets a precedent for small independent countries to be vulnerable to such aggressions from bigger powers. They have cited examples of forcible transfer and deportation of children to Russia. They wondered how Russia has escalated the aggression since the latest peace talks began by launching 22 of his largest air attacks and the last week alone, 1200 drones and over 60 cruise and ballistic missiles.

The article ends by reaffirming their countries' unwavering commitment to support Ukraine both with military and non-military means. The Ministry of External Affairs has issued a mild reaction suggesting that such articles, just on the eve of a visit of foreign dignitary to India as an invited guest, is "unusual and unacceptable diplomatic practice".

America has been highly critical of India's buying of Russian oil despite the war and the sanctions. President Donald Trump had imposed additional 25% tariffs on Indian exports to USA. In his inimitable temperamental style, he had said, "India and Russia, two dead economies, cannot make any impact". In the meantime, Indian purchase of Russian crude oil has dipped since last August. It was 17% less by September and could fall to a record low in December.

India was buying 1.8 m barrels per day (cbpd) crude oil. It is estimated to be 60,000-65,000 bpd in December. Indian refineries including the one owned by Ambani have begun reducing their purchase of Russian oil to avoid violation of American, European and British sanctions. According to Helsinki-based Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CRECA), India has been the second largest importer of Russian oil preceded by China with 7.75 b USD.

Let us scan what is on Putin's mind during his two-day visit to India, 4-5 December; what does he seek to achieve? How does India navigate its foreign policy while deepening ties with Russia? Some analysts anticipate strengthened ties and closer collaboration, while quite a few others including myself are sceptical of Russia's intentions of meeting potential benefits, and are questioning the current partnership.

To read between the lines of two statements, one by Dmitry Peskov, the Kremlin spokesman in a virtual press interaction with Indian media, and another by the President Putin himself, Peskov said, "We are looking forward to ensuring our rights to sell to those who want to purchase oil and their rights to buy our oil". He added that Russia is willing to address India's concern over the ballooning trade deficit. India's trade deficit stood at record high as India 68.7 billion, India exported to Russia \$5 billion worth goods in trade and imported 63.7 billion out of 68.7 b total trade in 2024-25. Bulk of the trade consisted of India's purchase of Russian oil and defence items under the 'Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership'.

Putin said about the purpose of his visit, "main part of the plan on India visit is to elevate cooperation with India and China to qualitative new levels". He added that "he would discuss expanding Indian imports to Russia". What raises the hackles of analysts and strategists is Putin hyphenating India and China. Since early this year because of Trump's tantrums, New Delhi seems to be moving closer to Russia and China. One would have thought the bonhomie with the latter (China) is symbolic and for optics. But Putin's statement indicates a possible Troika (India-China-Russia) vis-à-vis USA and Europe.

That is risky and serious shift in India's foreign policy since the first NDA government under Vajpayee and even 10 years of Manmohan Singh which marked a steady growth in India-America bilateralism. The jury is still out whether Narendra Modi can balance the two rival blocks America and Europe vs Shino-Russian forever-pact. I tend to believe that it will be a hard and tortuous path to tread upon. New Delhi will have to eventually choose either or.

On bilateral issues, Putin will be co-chairing with Modi the 23rd India-Russian annual bilateral Summit. The annual bilateral Summit between the two countries began in 2000. During the visit, talks will include renewed cooperation in trade, defence, energy, political, economic, scientific and people-to-people ties. New Delhi is likely to ask for the safe return of Indian nationals recruited in Russian military.

Another significant deal would be the signing of an Agreement in order to enable India's skilled and semi-skilled professionals to work in Russia which is desperately short of man-power in various sectors. Formal negotiations on such an Agreement started with signing of the TOR in August 2025. India's new Consul General in Russia's Yekaterinburg will deal with the mobility issues of such workers going to Russia.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

"A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle."

- Erin Majors

# GITA-INSPIRED DIPLOMACY: A NEEDONOMICS LENS ON MODI-PUTIN STRATEGIC DIALOGUE



PROF. MADAN MOHAN GOEL

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi gifted a copy of the Bhagavad Gita in Russian to President Vladimir Putin upon receiving him at the Delhi Airport, it symbolized more than diplomatic courtesy. It reflected India's civilizational confidence and its commitment to drawing upon ethical wisdom in global statecraft. For the Needonomics School of Thought, this gesture resonates deeply with the message that economics, diplomacy, and defense cooperation must be guided not by greed or coercion, but by the eternal principles of duty, balance, and mutual respect.

In a world where transactional diplomacy often overshadows values-based relationships, the Modi-Putin engagement stands out as a reminder that trust is the true currency of international cooperation. As both leaders deliberate on strategic issues—from defense cooperation to energy partnerships—the framework of Gita-Inspired Needonomics offers a powerful, ethical lens through which mutual interests can be pursued without fear, favor, or external pressures, including the tariff-driven threats historically associated with Trump-style protectionism.

#### Symbolism of the Gita Gift

The Gita is not merely a spiritual text; it is a guide to moral clarity, righteous action, and a balanced approach to solving complex problems. Presenting it in Russian to President Putin sends a subtle yet meaningful message: India's diplomacy draws strength from its civilizational ethos and believes in sharing wisdom that transcends borders.

For Needonomics, this symbolizes sahaaj samvaad—the natural dialogue that emerges from shared principles. It also reflects the belief that global partnerships are strongest when grounded in ethical foundations rather than transactional bargains.

Trust as Foundation of Strategic Cooperation

India and Russia share a long-standing partnership spanning defense, energy, space, and nuclear cooperation. However, in the shifting global geopolitical landscape, trust becomes the most valuable asset. Gita-Inspired Needonomics emphasizes trust without blind attachment—a principle rooted in nishkama

karma (duty without selfish motive).

This principle encourages nations to engage in partnerships that fulfill legitimate needs rather than feed strategic greed. In this context:

- Defense cooperation becomes a means of ensuring mutual security and stability, not a platform for arms race profiteering.

- Energy partnerships are pursued to meet real developmental needs, not for monopolistic control.

- Military technology collaboration is guided by strategic complementarity rather than political compulsion.

Thus, the Modi-Putin deliberations represent more than diplomatic agreements—they are an expression of trust built on decades of cooperation and shared strategic interests.

#### Needonomics vs. Tariff Terrorism

Needonomics School of Thought openly critiques coercive economic practices, including the phenomenon often referred to as "tariff terrorism"—the use of arbitrary economic pressure to force political concessions, as witnessed in certain phases of the Trump administration's trade policies.

#### Under Needonomics:

- Nations engage based on fairness, equity, and mutual need—not fear or intimidation.

- Trade and defense cooperation are not hostage to tariff threats or punitive measures.

- Negotiations focus on value, not dominance.

In this worldview, Modi-Putin cooperation stands in contrast to coercive diplomacy. It is built on madhyam marg, the middle path that balances national interest with global responsibility.

#### Gita-Inspired Principles for Modern Diplomacy

Several Gita-based guiding principles align seamlessly with India-Russia cooperation under Needonomics:

1. Nishkama Karma (Duty without selfish motive)

Diplomatic decisions must be guided by national duty and global ethics, not political greed or immediate gains.

2. Samatva (Balance and fairness)

Balanced, non-exploitative agreements ensure long-term stability in defense and energy cooperation.

3. Swadharna (Acting according to one's righteous role)

India seeks strategic autonomy; Rus-

sia seeks reliable partners. Each fulfills its role without undue external influence.

4. Aparigraha (Non-hoarding)

Defense collaboration prioritizes appropriate capability-building rather than excessive militarization.

These principles ensure that cooperation remains sustainable, ethical, and need-based.

#### Defense Cooperation Through the Lens of Needonomics

Defense collaboration between India and Russia has historically included joint development, technology transfer, and training. Under Needonomics, such cooperation must:

- Address genuine security needs
- Promote self-reliance (Atmanirbharta)

- Avoid dependency traps
- Encourage innovation for peace and deterrence, not aggression

The Gita's message encourages preparedness without aggression—"Yuddhasya yuddham," meaning fight only when needed. For India and Russia, this translates into responsible defense cooperation rooted in mutual respect and collective security.

#### Beyond Transactions: Toward Ethical Statecraft

Gita-Inspired Needonomics calls for a shift from "transactional geopolitics" to "transformational partnerships." The Modi-Putin engagement offers a model for how ethical diplomacy can shape modern international relations.

#### Their partnership reflects:

- Strategic trust despite global realignments
- Mutual respect grounded in historical ties
- Shared values such as multipolarity, sovereignty, and peaceful cooperation
- Sensitivity to national needs rather than competitive dominance

This approach aligns with the ethical economics of Needonomics, where relationships are built on cooperation, not coercion.

A Diplomacy of Wisdom and Balance

To conclude, gifting of the Bhagavad Gita in Russian is more than a ceremonial act. It symbolizes a deeper invitation to conduct diplomacy through wisdom, ethics, and shared understanding. As India and Russia engage on issues of global importance, Gita-Inspired Needonomics offers a framework that promotes

fairness, mutual trust, and responsible action.

In an era where tariff terrorism and coercive geopolitics often disrupt global harmony, the Modi-Putin relationship demonstrates how nations can instead choose ethical engagement, grounded in civilizational values and guided by genuine needs. Through this blend of ancient wisdom and modern strategic thinking, India sets a compelling example of how diplomacy can be both principled and pragmatic.

Prof Madan Mohan Goel  
Propounder Needonomics & Former Vice-Chancellor (Thrissur)

### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

**Assam's culture is close to my heart. Proud to see a new Kalakshetra taking shape in Nagaon. Soon to be a vi DWOW.mp4 brant hub for Bihu, Bhaona, music, theatre & dialogue, may it inspire creativity and keep our artistic spirit alive for generations. ~ Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM Assam**



## Transforming India's Labour Landscape: Labour Codes for a Vikshit Bharat

DR PRADEEP KUMAR JENA

In a landmark development, Government of India has implemented four Labour Codes with effect from 21st November 2025, bringing labour reforms enacted by the Parliament into reality. Following this, different views and news articles have surfaced in media on its impact, driving the debates and discussions on this pertinent issue. This piece is aimed to clear some of the confusions being created on the efficacy of the Codes. The Government has consistently strived to uphold the dignity of labour through various labour laws and strong social security framework. However, in order to bring about economic transformation among the labour class, availability of meaningful employment opportunities is a prerequisite and in a labour-surplus economy like India, it is unrealistic for Government to generate employment for all. This is where the private sector plays a crucial role provided enabling socio-legal framework and progressive, forward-looking labour laws are in place that reflect the aspirations of a 21st-century India.

For decades, India's labour ecosystem was governed by 29 central laws—many of which date back to the pre-independence era. To overcome the challenges of multiplicity, complexity and outdated provisions and in line with the recommendations of the Second National Commission on Labour (2002), the Government of India initiated one of the most far-reaching reforms in the country's labour history by enacting four comprehensive Labour Codes—the Code

on Wages, 2019, the Code on Social Security, 2020, the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020. Remarkably, these reforms mark a major milestone with right sequencing after the 1991 liberalisation and structural adjustment policies; bringing a modern, innovation-driven framework for progressive labour ecosystem and industrial growth.

The Labour Reform: Through rationalisation and modernisation of previous labour laws, the four Labour Codes have significantly streamlined the regulatory framework. The number of sections has been reduced from 1,228 under the previous 29 Acts to just 480, while the number of rules has come down from 1,436 to 351, forms from 181 to 73 and registers from 84 to merely 8. This significant consolidation and harmonisation will enhance both ease of living for workers and ease of doing business for employers across the country.

One of the most notable reforms under the Code on Wages is the universalisation of minimum wages, making them applicable to all employees across both the organised and unorganised sectors, which was restricted to specific 'scheduled employments' under the previous Acts. The 'floor wage' to be determined by the Central Government will reduce the regional imbalance as the states can't set the minimum wage below the nationally defined threshold. Another progressive change is the replacement of the traditional labour 'inspector' with

the 'inspector-cum-facilitator' with the mandate to guide and create awareness, marking a clear shift away from the rigid and often criticised "inspector raj". Furthermore, all four Codes have decriminalised minor offences and introduced compounding provisions for first-time violations, signalling a move from a punitive to a corrective and trust-based regulatory approach.

The Industrial Relations (IR) Code introduces the concept of Fixed Term Employment (FTE), ensuring that fixed-term workers receive the same benefits as permanent employees, including gratuity after one year of service.

This reform provides industries with much-needed flexibility to hire according to operational requirements while safeguarding the rights and welfare of workers. This will reduce contractualisation. The 14-day notice period before strikes and lockouts by the workers will promote industrial peace and harmony, which under the previous law was applicable only to public utility services. This change will encourage the resolution of disputes through dialogue and negotiation rather than disruption. Additionally, the Code provides statutory recognition to trade unions, something missed out in the media analysis, through the 'Negotiating Union' or 'Negotiating Council', thereby strengthening collective bargaining mechanisms and promoting labour welfare. The Code also revises the threshold for prior government approval in cases of retrenchment, lay-offs, and closures from the existing 100 workers to 300 workers in

factories, mines, and plantations.

The most ambitious reform carried out in this process is through the Code on Social Security, that formally recognises the gig and platform workers for the first time. With this, India becomes one of the first countries in the world to extend legal and social protection to this emerging work force. It also provides for the creation of a Social Security Fund with multiple financing mechanism to support unorganized including the gig and platform workers through various welfare schemes, thereby taking a major step toward inclusive and equitable labour welfare.

Likewise, the OSH code that governs the provisions related to workplace safety, welfare, and working conditions of the workers introduces single registration, single license and single return—a major step toward ease of doing business in the country with license validity for five years. Importantly, it promotes gender equality by allowing women to work in all sectors and during night shifts, with their consent and adequate safety measures. It also mandates free annual health check-ups for workers and the issuance of appointment letters to all employees leading the way to formalization. Additionally, the Code raises the applicability thresholds, thereby reducing the compliance burden on smaller establishments. For instance, for the applicability of contract labour, the threshold increased from 20 to 50, for applicability of factory provisions, from 10 to 20 workers and 20 to 40 workers (with and without power respectively).

# Rail, Road and Air Push Has Made Northeast India's Growth Engine: Sarbananda Sonowal

NEW DELHI

Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal on Thursday credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi for what he termed a "historic transformation" of the Northeast, saying the region has moved from decades of isolation to the forefront of India's economic and strategic expansion.

Addressing the media in the national capital, Sonowal said the last ten years have witnessed an "unprecedented shift" in policy focus, connectivity and infrastructure. "For decades the Northeast stood at the margins of development. Today, under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, it stands as a rising growth engine for the nation," he remarked, calling the Prime Minister "the grand architect of a new and resurgent Northeast."

Connectivity at the Core of Growth



The minister said a revolution in transportation across rail, road, air and waterways has been central to the region's resurgence. Key railway upgrades now integrate Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Manipur and Mizoram into the broad-gauge rail network,

while the Bhairabi-Sairang line, inaugurated in June 2025, and the Bogibeel bridge continue to enhance access to interior districts.

Work is underway to link all remaining northeastern capitals-Nagaland, Manipur, Sikkim and Megh-

laya-by rail. The Agartala-Akhaura cross-border link with Bangladesh, operational since 2023, is fast emerging as a strategic international corridor for trade and mobility.

On road transport, Sonowal highlighted the development of over 11,000 km of highways and strategic routes during the past decade, including the Shillong-Nongstoin-Tura corridor and connectivity improvements to Kohima, Itanagar and Gangtok.

Air transport, he said, has undergone a "remarkable expansion," with the number of operational airports growing from nine in 2014 to 19 today. Airports at Hollongi and Pakyong have been added to the grid, while terminals in Tezu, Agartala, Rupsi and others received upgrades under the UDAN regional connectivity scheme. New heliports and water aerodromes are also improving last-mile accessibility across hilly and riverine terrain.

Investments & Industry Push

Sonowal recorded large-scale investments as a major indicator of change. The Numaligarh bio-refinery, based on bamboo resources, has opened new opportunities for local farmers since the refinery's ₹22,594-crore expansion. The centerpiece of the new industrial profile, he said, will be the ₹27,000-crore semiconductor assembly and testing facility at Jagiroad, projected to manufacture 15 billion chips a year and generate around 27,000 jobs.

Organic farming and bamboo-based enterprises have also received a boost, with farmer producer organisations helping integrate the region into national and international markets.

Peace, Culture & Geopolitics

The minister attributed improved stability in the region to peace accords with the Bodo, Karbi, Bru and

other groups, and noted that the reduction of AFSPA coverage by nearly 75% since 2014 has created a more conducive environment for development.

He said the Northeast is also witnessing a cultural resurgence, citing the national recognition accorded to Dr Bhupen Hazarika, celebrations of Lachit Barphukon, and UNESCO World Heritage inscription for Assam's Maidams. Under the Act East Policy, Sonowal said the region is positioning itself as India's gateway to Southeast Asia through new trade corridors, integrated check posts and multimodal logistics hubs.

"The story of the Northeast today is the story of a confident and rising India," Sonowal concluded, adding that Prime Minister Modi's more than 70 visits to the region demonstrate "governance that walks to the doorstep of the people."

## Tribal Students' rally in hills, opposing government's move to grant ST status to six communities

SUSHANTA ROY

**DIPHU:** Hundreds of tribal students and youth from across Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong districts staged a massive protest rally in Dokmoka today against the Assam government's proposal to grant Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to six major communities of the state.

The day-long mass rally, organized jointly by the Karbi Students' Association (KSA), Karbi Students' and Youth Council (KSYC), Indigenous Tribal Peoples' Karbi Anglong (ITPKA), All Tiwa Students' Union (ATSU), Karbi Anglong Youth Association (KAYA), Karbi Unemployed Youth Association (KUYA) and several allied organizations.

The rally saw participants carrying banners, placards "NO - ST STATUS TO 6 COMMUNITIES" while raising slogans against the state government's move. The protesters warned of intensified agitation across the hill districts and beyond if the Assam government and the Centre proceed with the proposal without consulting the existing Scheduled Tribes. They demanded immediate withdrawal of the move and urged all recognized tribal organizations of the state to unite against what they called "a systematic attempt to erode tribal identity and rights." Similar protests and solidarity programs have been reported from Haflong of Dima Hasao district, which was organized by the All Tribal Students' Organization of Dima Hasao.

In both protests the tribal student bodies have announced that the agitation will continue until the government officially scraps the proposal to include the six communities in the ST list.

## Illegal coal mining persists in Meghalaya despite HC monitoring, says interim report

SHILLONG

Illegal coal mining and transportation continue unabated in Meghalaya, despite the appointment of a one-man monitoring committee by the High Court and assurances from the state government to curb such activities.

In his 34th interim report, Brojendra Prasad Katakey, former judge of the Gauhati High Court, highlighted that coal mining and movement of illegally mined coal persist in several areas, particularly in the East Jaintia Hills district.

He has directed authorities to increase patrolling in identified hotspots to curb these unlawful operations.

The report instructed the Deputy Commissioners and Superintendents of Police in each district to personally supervise all entry and exit points to prevent illegal coal transportation. Officials

are required to submit detailed monthly reports on action taken and progress to the Chief Secretary or a designated Additional Chief Secretary.

Katakey also raised serious concerns over a shortage of 40,554.72 metric tonnes of inventoried coal at Coal India Limited depots in East Jaintia Hills. He ordered the Secretary of the Mining and Geology Department to conduct an inquiry and submit the findings within two weeks.

The committee further directed the Meghalaya government to immediately release funds for the demolition of illegal coke oven plants, as previously mandated by the High Court.

So far, authorities have identified 16 illegal coke plants in East Jaintia Hills and 17 in West Khasi Hills. Until demolition, the Deputy Commissioners and SPs of these districts must ensure the plants remain non-operational.

## Assam Congress Unveils Public Outreach Campaign to Shape 2026 Poll Manifesto

GUWAHATI

The Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) will launch a statewide outreach drive titled Rajior Padulit Rajior Congress (People's Congress at the People's Doorstep) on December 6 in Dibrugarh, aiming to reconnect with citizens at the grassroots and place public concerns at the centre of its 2026 election manifesto.

APCC president Gaurav Gogoi, along with senior party leaders, will formally inaugurate the campaign, which will run both on-ground and digitally. The operational lead has been assigned to Bhupen Bora, with coordination by Debabrata Saikia. The manifesto drafting process will be supervised by MP Pradyut Bordoloi, chairperson of the Manifesto Committee.

Citizens' Inputs to Shape Vision Document

At the heart of the drive lies a state-wide collection of public feedback through specially designed Aspiration Boxes. These



will gather inputs from tea garden labourers, farmers, students, SHG collectives, women's groups and rural communities across Assam.

The aspirations received will be compiled and assessed to shape the party's Vision Document and its 2026 poll manifesto. "From Sadiya to Dhubri, from Barak to Brahmaputra - Assam is one community," Bordoloi said. "Congress will listen and work to fulfil people's expectations. Beginning in Dibrugarh, we aim to rebuild an Assam free from fear and corruption."

During the launch ceremony, tea tribe unions, student bodies, SHG members and farmer representatives will submit their sug-

gestions, symbolically marking the start of the feedback process. Party workers and senior leaders will also contribute entries to underscore shared ownership of the campaign.

3,000 Collection Boxes Planned Across 35 Districts

After the Dibrugarh launch, booth-level, mandal-level and district units will install Aspiration Boxes in marketplaces, bus stands, community halls, school gates, playgrounds and tea garden labour lines. The campaign will gradually expand to all 35 districts, with more than 3,000 boxes to be placed in phases. MP Rakibul Hussain is overseeing publicity and outreach.

Senior leader Ripun Bora is managing execution, while AICC in-charge Jitendra Singh will monitor coordination between organisational layers.

Campaign Targets Public Grievances

The outreach comes at a time of rising public dissatisfaction over unfulfilled promises under the BJP government. Key concerns cited by the party include recurring floods, stalled ST status demands, low tea worker wages despite earlier commitments, women's safety gaps, maternal mortality, school dropout rates, trafficking, weak rural healthcare, and continuing human-animal conflict.

With this campaign, the Congress hopes to return citizen feedback to the centre of policy planning, signalling a manifesto built from ground realities rather than top-down projections.

The initiative will begin in Dibrugarh on December 6 before scaling statewide ahead of the 2026 Assembly election.

## Assam Minister Ranoo Pegu Confirms Talks on ST Status; CCTOA to Submit Report in One Month

GUWAHATI

A fresh round of discussions on the long-pending demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to six communities in Assam began today with the Coordination Committee of Tribal Organisations, Assam (CCTOA) holding a key consultation with Tribal Affairs (Plains) Minister Ranoo Pegu at Janata Bhawan.

The meeting is seen as the first step in a month-long engagement between the state government and tribal bodies, potentially shaping major policy decisions on one of Assam's most sensitive sociopolitical issues.

Following the discussion, CCTOA Chief Coordinator Aditya Khakhlari and ABSU president Dipen Boro said the organisation has handed over its recommendations and objections to the minister.



Khakhlari added that the body has requested one month to thoroughly study the report submitted by the Group of Ministers (GoM) before responding with final observations.

"Minister Ranoo Pegu listened to our concerns and explained the contents of the GoM report. We will now examine it in detail with the help of

Bodo intellectuals, legal experts, and former legislators before the next round of dialogue," Khakhlari told the press. He noted that the second phase of talks is expected after one month, following which CCTOA plans to seek meetings with the Chief Minister and Union Home Minister.

Khakhlari reiterated that the rights and protections of existing Scheduled Tribe communities must remain unaffected by any expansion of ST status. The organisation also highlighted likely implications of the proposal on competitive exams, higher education quotas, and government job reservations.

The development comes days after the Assam Cabinet decided on November 30 to review the GoM's recommendations for including six more communities under the ST category.

Confirming the meeting, Minister Pegu wrote on X that he briefed the delegation on the proposed safeguards for existing ST groups. He also stated that CCTOA has agreed to constitute an expert panel and submit its findings within a month, paving the way for the next round of negotiations.

## Fourth day of Hornbill Festival showcases vibrant array of traditional performances from various Naga tribes

KOHIMA

Marking the 4th day of the Hornbill Festival 2025, a cultural show took place at Naga Heritage Village, Kisama, Kohima on Thursday. The day's cultural line-up showcased a vibrant array of traditional performances from various Naga tribes, a press release said.

The programme was hosted by Metsubo Jamir, Minister for Rural Development & SIRD, and co-hosted by Mhathung Yanthan, Advisor for Agriculture. Special guests included Alope Singh, Managing Director of Air India Express, and Surabhi Varma Garg, IRS, Principal Chief Commissioner of Income Tax (NER), Guwahati.

The Konyak Cultural Troupe presented Alea-Boa, a dance associated with the Aoleang festival, celebrated after the sowing season to mark the New Year.

The Sumi Cultural Troupe performed Aphilo Kuwo, a traditional warrior dance recalling the valour of victorious fighters during the headhunting era. The Kuki Cultural Troupe showcased Khulkon Lam, depicting the legendary migration of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo people from the subterranean world to the surface in search of fertile land.

The Phom Cultural Troupe presented Moolum Shou, a powerful song expressing emotions of vengeance and hatred after vic-



tory over enemies. The Rengma Cultural Troupe demonstrated Khuli, an indigenous bamboo flute music traditionally played by young boys in the Morung at dawn.

The Pochury Cultural Troupe performed Eh-ho Eh-ho, a dance by men of high social standing, highlighting strength and warrior pride during Feast of Merit celebrations.

The Tikhir Cultural Troupe sang Nongtukukia, a pre-harvest song celebrating growth, life, and gratitude for nature's gifts. The Lohla Cultural Troupe performed Ekhyo Sha-

ru, a victory dance praising warriors who defended their village from enemy threats.

The Sangtam Cultural Troupe showcased Khuya Jing Tsoh, a folk dance imitating the movements of a jumping crow, reflecting their close connection with nature.

The Yimkhiong Cultural Troupe presented Kehu-Elokhe, a traditional chant sung during festivals, communal gatherings, and celebrations. The Ao Cultural Troupe showcased Shuzung Saiba, the Entada or Matchbox Bean Game traditionally played by village children, symbolising unity and joy.

The Chang Cultural Troupe presented Lo-Chia, a spirited folk dance celebrating beauty, camaraderie, and community pride. The Chakhesang Cultural Troupe performed Nyekro Kuvu Li, a work song sung while breaking soil clods during the farming season to make labour easier through collective singing.

The Garo Cultural Troupe demonstrated Wapong Piksuaso, a traditional sport where participants attempt to uproot bamboo using their bare hands to test strength.

The Khiamniungan Cultural Troupe showcased E-Khik, an act and song by women depicting the extraction of nettle fibre and the communal work culture associated with

traditional textile production.

Concluding the line-up, the Kachari Cultural Troupe performed Swdwmstri Mwsana, symbolising the mythical mastery of all folk dances, reflecting women's aspiration to preserve cultural knowledge and heritage.

On the other hand, the Department of Industries & Commerce in association with Nagaland Industrial Development Corporation (NIDC) launched the Buyers & Suppliers Meet 2025 at Bamboo Hall, Naga Heritage Village, Kisama, Kohima on Thursday.

The two-day meet commenced after a short official launching programme with Advisor for Industries & Commerce, Hekani Jakhlu as the Special Guest.

Speaking at the launching programme, Hekani expressed her honour in joining the inaugural Buyers & Suppliers Meet 2025 under the RAMP Project of the Ministry of MSME, Government of India and welcomed the buyers, industry leaders and entrepreneurs, noting their shared commitment to strengthening India's MSME ecosystem and showcasing Nagaland's vibrant enterprises.

She highlighted Nagaland as the Land of Festivals, where culture and craftsmanship inspire innovation. The state's weavers, artisans, farmers, food processors and startups, she said, embody resilience, creativity and the enduring Naga spirit.

She emphasised that the Meet is more than a marketplace, saying it is a catalyst for collaboration and long-term partnerships. With twenty-four buyers from across India and twenty-two MSMEs from Nagaland, the event offers a strong opportunity to build a lasting, scalable relationship.

## Manipur observes 4th Sankirtana Day, Aribam Syam Sharma urges cultural protection and documentation

IMPHAL

Manipur marked the 4th Sankirtana Day with a state-level celebration at Chandrakirti Auditorium, Palace Compound, Imphal, where renowned filmmaker and cultural icon Aribam Syam Sharma presided as chief guest and called for stronger institutional measures to safeguard the state's priceless artistic heritage.

The annual event jointly organised by the Department of Art and Culture, Manipur State Kala Akademi, Manipur University of Culture, Pala Loishang, Shree Shree Govindaji Temple Board and Manipur Nata Sankirtana Apunba-brought together scholars, students, gurus, performers and cultural custodians.

"Sankirtana must be protected for the future"

In his keynote remarks, Syam Sharma described Manipur as "a magnificent land with a radiant creative soul," noting that while Sankirtana traditions exist across many parts of India, the Manipuri form is distinct in rhythm, emotion, spirituality and performance language.

He underscored the urgent need to preserve the essence of Sankirtana, warning that global recognition secured through its inscription on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) list in 2013 could diminish if its traditional depth is diluted.

Sharma proposed:

"creation of a memorial space dedicated to departed Sankirtana gurus,

formation of a committee

for systematic protection of traditional art forms, and

upgrading Sankirtana Day into a full-fledged festival with documentation as a core component.

Government acknowledges cultural responsibility

Art & Culture Commissioner H. Gyan Prakash, IAS, credited Syam Sharma for his pivotal role in achieving UNESCO status for Manipuri Sankirtana and reaffirmed the government's commitment to safeguarding cultural assets through policy support and institutional collaboration.

Gurus honoured, performances showcase living tradition

The observance featured felicitations of distinguished gurus, including Sangeet Natak Akademi Awardees, followed by performances of Nupi Pala (female Sankirtana) by students of Manipur University of Culture and Sankirtana by MANS, reaffirming the continuing vibrancy of the tradition.

Among dignitaries present were former Art & Culture Commissioner M. Joy Singh, Director K. Dinamani Singh, and Kala Akademi Secretary Sunanda Thokchom, alongside scholars, artists and invited guests.

An intangible heritage carried across generations

Recognised by UNESCO in 2013, Manipuri Sankirtana-comprising devotional singing, drumming and dance dedicated to Lord Krishna-remains central to Manipuri Vaishnavite life. Performed in both Nupa Pala and Nupi Pala forms, it accompanies rituals from birth to death and stands as one of the strongest cultural identifiers of the Meitei community.

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Quest!

At work, forcing a smile even when you are upset results in emotional exhaustion, poorer physical health, and decreased job satisfaction.

## Russia has always stood by India in good and bad times: Union Minister Piyush

NEW DELHI

Union Minister of Commerce & Industry, Piyush Goyal, stated that Russia has always been "India's Sukh Dukh Ka Saathi," meaning a companion in both good and bad times, at the India-Russia Business Forum held on Thursday in New Delhi.

Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office of the Russian Federation, Maxim Oreshkin, was the keynote speaker at the event.

"India-Russia trade has made remarkable strides, with volumes nearing USD 70 billion, yet immense potential remains untapped, as India's share in Russia's imports is still under 2 per cent, a figure that does not capture the true ambition of our partnership. Our shared focus is to foster more balanced and mutually rewarding trade, aiming to exceed USD 100 billion by 2030, driven by stronger Indian exports. We see particularly promising avenues for collaboration in consumer goods, food and agriculture, pharmaceuticals and medical supplies, telecom and electronics, industrial components, and the mobility of skilled talent," Goyal said.

The India-Russia Business Forum was organised around the theme "Sell to Russia" and focused on pathways to expand India's exports to the Russian market, with the objective of achieving more balanced bilateral trade, generating new opportunities for business and investment, and promoting shared, sustainable growth in both economies.

Piyush Goyal and Maxim Oreshkin led the thematic session. Rajiv Ranjan Singh, the Minister of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, Rajesh Agrawal, Commerce Secretary, Amit Agrawal, Secretary, Department

of Pharmaceuticals, S Krishnan, Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and IT, NS Rao, Secretary, Ministry of Textiles, and other senior officials from the Government of India were part of the gathering.

The Russian side was represented by Maxim Reshetnikov, Minister of Economic Development, Oksana Lut, Minister of Agriculture of the Russian Federation, Maksut Shadayev, Minister of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media and Alexey Gruzdev, Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade. Senior business leaders from both sides who took part in detailed discussions that covered sectors such as energy, minerals, engineering goods, automobiles and transport equipment, agriculture and food processing, pharmaceuticals, information technology, digital services and financial solutions.

Referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks, Goyal noted that "no matter how low the temperature dips during the Russian winter, the India-Russia friendship will always remain full of warmth."

Recalling the first summit meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Vladimir Putin in 2014, Goyal said that during that meeting, the two leaders had set a target of achieving USD 30 billion in bilateral trade by 2025.

Goyal noted that the target has already been achieved and, in fact, India and Russia today have twice that level of trade. He emphasised that while reaching USD 70 billion is a significant milestone, the current pattern of trade needs to be more balanced.

He stressed the need to bring greater diversity into the bilateral trade basket, both in terms of products and sectors, to ensure more

equitable and sustainable growth.

Goyal underlined that there is a vast range of offerings from India that can meet Russian requirements, just as there are many areas in which India can benefit from Russian strengths.

He said there is "so much to offer between both countries" and added that India sees enormous possibilities to increase its exports to Russia.

Goyal highlighted that by working together, particularly through stronger participation of the business communities in both nations, the "untapped potential" in the trade relationship can be fully realised.

He expressed confidence that collaborative efforts will help address the trade imbalance in the near future and enable both sides to reduce and eliminate existing barriers, create enabling conditions for business, and open up new opportunities for companies on both sides.

He underlined that the India-Russia relationship, honoured as a "Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership", is time-tested and resilient. He said this partnership has withstood global uncertainties and has consistently reflected unwavering solidarity between the two nations in support of each other's people and economies.

Goyal said that India is poised to grow from a USD 4 trillion economy today to USD 30-35 trillion by 2047, when the nation celebrates 100 years of independence.

He highlighted India's successful navigation of global headwinds, including the pandemic, geopolitical tensions and supply shocks, and noted that India is now among the world's top five economies, soon to become the third-largest.

## President Putin, PM Modi have set target of USD 100 billion by 2030: Russian official Maxim Oreshkin

NEW DELHI

As Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in India on his two-day state visit, Maxim Oreshkin, Deputy Chief of Staff in the Russian Presidential Executive Office, said that President Putin and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have set the target of 100 billion USD by 2030.

Speaking to reporters, Maxim Oreshkin said, "President Putin and Prime Minister Modi have set the target of 100 billion USD by 2030. So this is the target we are working on. And we believe that the key source of this and that increase will come from India's export of goods and services going to Russia."

Putin is on a two-day State visit to India. He will hold the 23rd India-Russia Annual Summit with PM Narendra Modi in Delhi on December 5.

Earlier, Russian Minister of Economic Development Maxim Reshetnikov said that Russia wants to increase the supply of Indian goods to its market.

"In terms of our trade relations, Russia is interested in increasing our trade exchange. We are interested in increasing supplies of Indian products in the Russian market, and are interested in balancing trade. Because nowadays Russian goods are much more in the Indian market than Indian goods in the Russian market," Reshetnikov said.

"We are very interested in buying Indian products. We are grateful for the organisation, for this event, for the active participation and there are many ministers from both sides. This is such a significant event. That will lead to the accomplishment of the talks of our leaders, which is trade exchange of USD 100 billion," he added.

Earlier, Russian Finance Minister Anton Siluanov expressed confidence that Russia and India can reach their shared goal of achieving USD 100 billion in trade turnover by 2030, citing rapid growth in recent years and expanding cooperation across multiple sectors.

In an interview with Russian Media outlet Izvestia, Siluanov pointed to the opening of VTB Bank's new flagship



office as a concrete step toward strengthening the financial infrastructure needed to support rising trade volumes.

"Today's event, the opening of the VTB bank flagship office, is just one step towards achieving this goal. The more opportunities there are for settlements, the simpler trade and economic relations will be carried out. Therefore, today's event is just another step, I repeat, towards achieving this goal," he said.

He also underscored Russia's ongoing efforts to carry out the President's directive to increase imports from India.

"We are currently engaged in implementing the task set by the President regarding increasing imports from India. Therefore, in order to solve these issues, such significant events as today are very important. The simpler the settlements are, I repeat, the greater the turnover, trade turnover, investments, and tourist trips between our countries will be," he said.

Russian First Deputy Prime Minister

and co-chair of the India-Russia Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Cooperation, Denis Manturov, described the USD 100 billion goal as "truly ambitious," noting that realising it would require coordinated efforts from governments, businesses and financial institutions in both countries.

"We support the business circles by creating the necessary conditions and a favourable climate for expanding Russian-Indian cooperation," he told ANI, citing regular meetings of the Intergovernmental Russian-Indian Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technical and Cultural Cooperation as a key platform for discussing investment projects.

"Achieving \$100 billion trade aim is a truly ambitious goal. To reach this milestone, we need to improve the quality of our bilateral trade and the structure of our trade turnover. It requires concerted efforts from governments of both states as well as businesses and

financial institutions," said Manturov.

The two-day State visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin to India will go a long way in strengthening economic co-operation, sources said on Thursday.

President Putin is travelling with a large group of businesspeople, as per government sources.

India expects to improve the trade deficit with Russia. Multiple avenues are being worked out to increase Indian exports to Russia. Exports in the field of pharmaceuticals, automobiles, agricultural products, including marine products, sources said. Indian businesses and products will gain a larger market share, and this will also boost job creation and the well-being of our farmers, sources said.

Multiple agreements and MoUs are expected across shipping, healthcare, fertilisers, and connectivity. More co-operation will also be seen in people-to-people relations, mobility partnerships, culture, and scientific collaboration, according to sources.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Zohran Mamdani and the Louvre make the list of most mispronounced words of 2025



DALLAS

From the election of Zohran Mamdani to the intrigue surrounding the jewel heist at the Louvre, keeping up with this year's news also left some Americans struggling with pronunciations. That's put both the name of New York City's incoming mayor and the famed Paris

museum on a list of the most mispronounced words in 2025.

The language-learning company Babel and closed-captioning company The Captioning Group on Thursday released a list of the words that news anchors, politicians and other public figures in the U.S. struggled with the most this year, giving an overview of the people and topics that

Americans talking.

As Mamdani made his political rise, the democratic socialist's name often was mangled. When he takes office in January, the 34-year-old will become the city's first Muslim mayor, first born in Africa and first of South Asian heritage. Babel said his name — which should be pronounced zoh-RAHN mam-DAH-nee — was most commonly mispronounced when people swapped the "M" and "N" in his last name.

Mamdani has said he doesn't mind if someone tries to pronounce his name correctly and misses but that some mispronounce it intentionally. During one mayoral race debate, he chided former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's pronunciation of his name, telling his opponent: "The name is Mamdani. M-A-M-D-A-N-I."

The theft of France's crown jewels from the Louvre in October had many people mispronouncing the name of the world's most-visited museum. Babel says the correct pronunciation is LOOV-ruh, with a very soft pronunciation on the "ruh," which can be a challenge for English speakers.

"A lot of these words come from different languages and so we have to adapt to a sound that we've never made before," said Esteban Touma, a linguist and cultural expert at Babel.

Other words and names on the list include:

— Acetaminophen, the active ingredient in the Tylenol, is pronounced uh-SEE-tuh-MIH-nuh-fen. President Donald Trump gave comedians plenty of material when he stumbled over the word

as he implored pregnant women to avoid taking the painkiller despite inconclusive evidence about whether too much could be linked to autism.

— Alex Murdaugh, the prominent South Carolina attorney who was sentenced to life in prison for the 2021 fatal shootings of his wife and son, is pronounced AL-ick MUR-dock. This year the case was dramatized in a series on Hulu.

— Mounjaro, pronounced mown-JAHR-oh, is part of a wave of diabetes and obesity medications that soared in popularity because of the weight people have lost while taking the injections.

Several words on the U.S. list, including Louvre and Mounjaro, also made the list for the U.K., which was compiled by Babel and the British Institute of Verbatim Reporters, an organization for subtitled professionals. Storm Eowyn, which battered Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland in January, put that name on the U.K. list. Babel says the correct pronunciation is ay-OH-wyn, said with a three-beat pattern.

Throughout the year, captioners note words that come up over and over as difficult to pronounce, spell or are newly emerging. Linguists at Babel also track new pronunciation challenges they see.

In a pronunciation surprise of the year, actor Denzel Washington told late-night talk show host Jimmy Kimmel that he was named after his father and their first names are actually pronounced DEN-zul. But, he said, that became confusing so his mother decided to pronounce her son's name Den-ZELLE.

MOSCOW

Russian authorities said Thursday they have imposed restrictions on Apple's video calling service FaceTime, the latest step in an effort to tighten control over the internet and communications online. State internet regulator Roskomnadzor alleged in a statement that the service is being "used to organize and conduct terrorist activities on the territory of the country, to recruit perpetrators (and) other crimes against our citizens." Apple did not respond to an emailed request for comment.

The Russian regulator also announced that it has blocked Snapchat, a messaging app for sharing photos, videos and text messages, citing the same grounds it gave for restricting FaceTime. It said that it took the action Oct. 10 even though it only reported the move on Thursday.

Under President Vladimir Putin, authorities have engaged in deliberate and multi-pronged efforts to rein in the internet. They have adopted restrictive laws and banned websites and platforms that don't comply. Technology also has been perfected to monitor and manipulate online traffic. After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the government blocked major social media like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

Access to YouTube was disrupted last year in what experts called deliberate throttling of the widely

popular site by the authorities. The Kremlin blamed YouTube owner Google for not properly maintaining its hardware in Russia.

While it's still possible to circumvent some of the restrictions by using virtual private network services, those are routinely blocked, too. Authorities further restricted internet access this summer with widespread shutdowns of cellphone internet connections. Officials have insisted the measure was needed to thwart Ukrainian drone attacks, but experts argued it was another step to tighten internet control. In dozens of regions, "white lists" of government-approved sites and services that are supposed to function despite a shutdown have been introduced.

The government also has acted against popular messaging platforms. Encrypted messenger Signal and another popular app, Viber, were blocked in 2024. This year the authorities banned calls via WhatsApp, the most popular messaging app in Russia, and Telegram, a close second. Roskomnadzor justified the measure by saying the two apps were being used for criminal activities.

At the same time, authorities actively promoted a "national" messenger app called MAX, which critics see as a surveillance tool. The platform, touted by developers and officials as a one-stop shop for messaging, online government services, making payments and more, openly declares it will share user data with authorities upon request.

Experts also say it doesn't use end-to-end encryption.

Earlier this week, the government also said it was blocking Roblox, a popular online game platform, saying the step aimed at protecting children from illicit content and "pedophiles who meet minors directly in the game's chats and then move on to real life."

Stanislav Seleznev, cyber security expert and lawyer with the Net Freedom rights group, told The Associated Press that Russian law views any platform where users can message each other as "organizers of dissemination of information." This label mandates that platforms have an account with Roskomnadzor so that it could communicate its demands, and give Russia's security service, the FSB, access to accounts of their users for monitoring; those failing to comply are in violation and can get blocked, Seleznev said. He suggested that these regulations could have been applied to both Roblox and FaceTime.

Roblox in October was the second most popular game platform in Russia, with nearly 8 million monthly users, according to media monitoring group Mediascope. Seleznev estimated that possibly tens of millions of Russians have been using FaceTime, especially after calls were banned on WhatsApp and Telegram. He called the restrictions against the service "predictable" and warned that other sites failing to cooperate with Roskomnadzor "will be blocked, that's obvious."

## When the Air Turns Hostile: Assam's Fight for Breath in a Slowly Suffocating Sky

There was a time—only a decade or two ago—when Assam's horizons were remembered for their monsoon-washed clarity. Morning fog rising from paddy fields, tea-garden winds rustling through sal forest belts, and the easy rhythm of rain pressing against tile roofs. For many who grew up in Guwahati, the sky was a canvas of gentle blues. The very idea of air as a threat, as something hostile, would have sounded absurd.

Yet today, haze has replaced nostalgia. The fragrance of wet earth competes with the acrid sting of suspended particles. A city once shaped by river and rain now breathes with difficulty—its air thickened not by nature but by neglect. Guwahati, Assam's gateway to the Northeast, stands as a stark symbol of what happens when expanding asphalt, industrial appetite, collapsing municipal systems and public indifference converge upon a fragile valley ecosystem.

A new satellite-based national air quality assessment has placed Assam among India's growing pollution hotspots, shattering the long-held assumption that the Northeast—buffered by its hills, rainfall and greenery—remains immune. In the same moment, the Supreme Court is deliberating whether severe air pollution should be categorised as a national disaster under the Disaster Management Act of 2005—a historic debate that could redefine environmental governance across India. Assam, particularly Guwahati, finds itself uncomfortably close to the heart of that discussion.

Guwahati's Air Quality Index (AQI) routinely floats above 150, often breaching the very poor threshold and, in recent winters, even touching levels that warrant the label of "severe". For perspective, an average AQI of 50 is considered safe. Above 200, the air becomes dangerous for children, the elderly, and patients with respiratory or cardiac conditions. Above 300, even healthy lungs begin to protest.

Environmental activist Vikrant Tongad, through his organisation SAFE (Social Action for Forest and Environment), has petitioned the Supreme Court to classify any AQI above 250 as a disaster event. The demand is not rhetorical—it signals a paradigm shift. Pollution is no longer just a civic inconvenience or an urban policy glitch. It is becoming what floods, earthquakes or cyclones traditionally were: a direct threat to life, infrastructure, productivity and generational health.

To label pollution a disaster would unlock emergency response powers—school closures, vehicular restrictions, construction embargoes, immediate funding, rapid deployment of mitigation teams—measures that cities like Guwahati desperately need.

Data tells a grim story. Guwahati's annual PM2.5 concentration exceeds 100 micrograms per cubic metre—twenty times more than what the World Health Organization considers safe. Breathing here today is equivalent to smoking three cigarettes daily. Between 2020 and 2025, particulate pollution surged nearly 50%, a trend more dramatic than many industrialised metros.

The geography of the city worsens its vulnerability. Nestled in a bowl-like valley, Guwahati lacks the atmospheric ventilation enjoyed by coastal or high-altitude cities. Winter inversions trap pollutants close to the ground. Fog + dust + smoke = a static toxic dome. When the wind stops, the poison stays.

The assumption that vehicular emissions are the primary culprit has been challenged by a groundbreaking IIT Guwahati 2025 study. Road dust—the product of broken infrastructure, perpetual digging, poor drainage, and half-finished construction—accounts for nearly 28% of PM10 pollution, surpassing vehicle exhaust as the leading contributor.

This is not merely pollution—it is a portrait of institutional failure paved into the roads themselves.

Two-wheelers—which form the majority of Guwahati's traffic—pump nearly 5,000 tonnes of PM2.5 every year. Public transport remains fragmented and insufficient, pushing more citizens toward private vehicles. Four-wheelers add to the mix, but the half-million daily two-wheelers form a mobile smog factory, especially when traffic snarls stretch across arterial bottlenecks like Jaltukbari-Adabari, Zoo Road and Khanapara.

Construction may be visible progress, but poorly regulated construction is environmental regression. Most sites across Guwahati remain unbaricaded. Very few enforce mandatory water sprinkling to settle dust. Bagged cement and sand spill into open air, and trucks move uncovered. What should be sealed



If you want to be trusted, be honest.

zones of development become dust-cloud theatres. The Boragaon waste dumping ground, next to the ecologically delicate De-



por Beel wetland—the only Ramsar site in Assam—burns almost continuously. Garbage-fires release methane, dioxins, benzene and microplastics. The smoke rises invisibly by day, turns orange under sodium lamps at night, and settles silently over neighbourhoods. Few crises are as visibly ignored as this one.

Assam's air is not only polluted by Assam. The Northeast sits downstream of the Indo-Gangetic Basin, one of the most densely industrialised regions of the world. Winter winds carry industrial and agricultural emissions across Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal. Another 30-40% of winter smog blows in from Bangladesh, where brick-kiln belts and seasonal stubble burning create trans-boundary haze.

No single government can solve a crisis that travels on the wind. National cooperation, regional coordination and diplomatic engagement are necessary. Pollution in Assam is both local and imported—a toxic mix of internal negligence and external drift.

In the last five years, respiratory ailments in Assam have risen over 20%. Hospital paediatric wards tell stories statistics struggle to convey: infants wheezing at two months old, schoolchildren missing classes over chronic bronchitis, teenagers living with inhalers. The National Family Health Survey notes a more than twofold increase in acute respiratory infections among children under five.

Doctors at Gauhati Medical College no longer speak of pollution as an urban discomfort—they call it a silent epidemic. Chronic coughs, asthma spikes, skin irritation, eye inflammation, reduced oxygen absorption, cardiovascular strain—each one a quiet thief of longevity. Pollution does not shock like a flood. It erodes slowly, invisibly, over years.

Air is the one resource every citizen consumes as much as the next. There is no luxury version of breath. The rich cannot buy a different sky.

Assam is part of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), which targeted a 40% PM reduction by 2025. Yet progress lags. Action plans repeat old proposals in new files, addressing symptoms but not systemic causes. The Pollution Control Board operates with too little manpower, too few monitoring stations (barely enough for a city, let alone a state of 30 million), and limited enforcement powers.

Policies without enforcement are just literature. Guwahati needs implementation, not aspiration.

1. Declare AQI >250 as a disaster category
  - Not symbolically-administratively. Disaster classification allows:
    - Temporary shutdown of construction during smog peaks
    - Restriction on vehicle movement
    - School closures on critical days
    - Immediate emergency funding allocation
    - Deployment of crisis-response teams

Pollution is a disaster. The law must say so.

2. GRAP-style emergency response for Guwahati
  - A Graded Response Action Plan, similar to Delhi's, must be adapted for Assam's geography and traffic matrix. Key pillars include:
    - Mechanical road sweeping
    - Water-sprinkling along dust-prone corridors

- lose.
- 4. Fix the Boragaon landfill-permanently
  - Scientific bioremediation
  - Waste-to-energy or composting facilities
  - Community-level segregation hubs

Bans on open burning with surveillance enforcement

Boragaon is not just a garbage pile. It is a public health crime scene.

5. Industry Transition + Real-Time Monitoring
  - Refineries and industrial clusters—including Byrnihat and Amingaon—must transition to PNG and clean fuels. Emission monitoring must be live-streamed to regulators. Non-compliant units should face shutdown until standards are met.
6. Citizen Responsibility-The War Cannot Be Won By Government Alone
  - People must reduce vehicle dependency, segregate waste, report fires, avoid open burning, protect trees, and demand accountability. Schools must include air literacy in curriculum. Housing societies should install low-cost sensors and publish their data publicly.

A clean city is not created by regulation. It is created by participation.

There Are Signs of Hope-And They Matter

In the 2025 Swachh Vayu Survekshan, Guwahati jumped 17 places—proof that improvement is possible when political will meets public cooperation. Cities like Kanpur and Varanasi, once icons of urban pollution, have reduced particulate levels by half through strict enforcement and sustained intervention. If they can, Assam can.

This fight is winnable.

The Choice Before Assam

Every smoky morning over the Brahmaputra is a reminder that crisis is no longer abstract. It lives in every breath. But the same air—if reclaimed—can become a symbol of renewal. The Supreme Court's pending decision on classifying pollution as a disaster could mark a turning point. If Assam responds decisively, the valley could again inhale with ease. If not, generations will grow up never knowing what clear air truly smelled like.

One day, perhaps soon, Guwahati may again wake to a sky washed clean—where clouds are clouds, not chemical haze. Where mornings do not sting the eyes. Where breath is effortless, ordinary, taken for granted.

Clean air is not a luxury. It is a right. And Assam must claim it—before breathing becomes a privilege.

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