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PERSPECTIVE

Beauty is how you feel inside, and it reflects in your eyes. It is not something physical.

Manipur Governor meets ex-servicemen on Armed Forces Flag Day 2025

IMPHAL

The Governor of Manipur, Ajay Kumar Bhalla, met with retired Army officers and Armed Forces personnel on the occasion of Armed Forces Flag Day 2025 at the Conference Hall of Raj Bhavan in Imphal.

Lieutenant General K. Himalay (Retired) ceremonially pinned the Armed Forces Flag on the Governor, symbolising respect and gratitude for the gallant soldiers.

During the interaction, the Governor and ex-servicemen paid tribute to Armed Forces personnel who have made supreme sacrifices for the nation. The Governor was briefed on various welfare activities and initiatives undertaken by the Rajya Sainik Board, Manipur, for the benefit of ex-servicemen and their families.

A delegation of 20 ex-servicemen, led by Lt Gen Kh Singh (Retd), called on the Governor.

During the meeting, the Governor and ex-servicemen also paid respects to the martyrs, Veer Naris, and other Armed Forces personnel who laid down their lives for the nation.

The Governor was informed about the welfare activities and initiatives carried out by the Rajya Sainik Board, Manipur, to support ex-servicemen and their families.

Col Gopendra Singh Puyam (Retd), Secretary of the Rajya Sainik Board, Manipur, expressed gratitude to the Governor for his support and acknowledged the contributions of the Armed Forces.

WHO SAID WHAT

I am aware of the pain that the people of Manipur have gone through following the unfortunate violence. I want to assure you that taking care of the concerns of the people of Manipur is highest priority for us.

~ Smt Droupadi Murmu, President of India

President Murmu Signals Commitment to Peace, Says Manipur's Concerns Come First

PRESIDENT MURMU UNVEILS RS 1,387 CR DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu met and interacted with Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Imphal, Manipur, on Thursday.

During the interaction, President Murmu assured them that the Government stands with them at all times to address their needs. She said the Government is working to secure the homes and livelihoods of internally displaced individuals from Manipur.

The President also assured the IDPs that the Government of India is taking necessary measures to facilitate their progress towards an environment of peace and sustained prosperity in the state.

"President Droupadi Murmu met and interacted with a few Internally Displaced Persons in Imphal. She assured that the Government stands with them at all times to address their needs. She affirmed that the Government is working to secure their homes, livelihoods, and the future of their children. She further



assured them that the Government of India is taking necessary measures to facilitate their progress towards an environment of peace and sustained prosperity. She also expressed upon them the need to strengthen harmony," said Rashtrapati Bhawan.

Earlier, President Droupadi Murmu expressed condolences to the families of the deceased in the Arunachal Pradesh road accident, in which 21 construction workers are feared dead.

In an X post, President Murmu

wished a speedy recovery to the injured.

"Saddened to learn about the loss of lives in a road accident in the Anjaw district of Arunachal Pradesh. My thoughts and prayers are with the bereaved families. I wish a speedy recovery to those injured," the X post read.

On December 8, a truck reportedly skidded off a hilly stretch of the Hayuliang-Chaglagam road in Arunachal Pradesh's Anjaw district and fell into a deep gorge. According to officials,

at least 21 people from Assam's Tinsukia district are feared dead. Police said that 22 people, including the driver, were travelling in the mini-truck to Hayuliang for construction work.

Imphal: Manipur, on Thursday, December 11, 2025, marked a historic milestone as President Droupadi Murmu inaugurated and laid the foundation for a wide range of transformative development projects across the state on the first day of her maiden visit.

The President laid the foundation stones for 14 projects worth Rs 1,180 crore and inaugurated 12 projects constructed at a cost of Rs 207 crore at various locations across the state.

Officials organised the significant event as part of the reception for the President at the City Convention Centre in Imphal.

The projects include modern student hostels, new healthcare facilities, upgraded water supply systems, power expansion works, improved tribal and police infrastructure, women-led market spaces, tourism initia-

tives, and major connectivity projects. Each initiative reflects a unified commitment to progress, inclusivity, and long-term growth.

With new investments across education, healthcare, agriculture, power, water, urban development, policing, sports, heritage, and livelihoods, these projects aim to pave the way for a stronger and more resilient Manipur.

Earlier, when President Murmu arrived at Imphal International Airport around 1 pm, Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla warmly welcomed her.

On Friday, she will attend the Nupi Lal observance to honour the courageous Manipuri women who led two historic agitations against British colonial rule.

After the function in Imphal, she will travel to the Senapati district, where she will address a public gathering and lay foundation stones for additional projects aimed at strengthening development initiatives in the hill district.

SC Grants Bail to Manipur 'Conspiracy Case' Accused



NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on December 11 granted bail to Moirangthem Anand Singh, accused of links with Myanmar-based rebel groups and conspiring to exploit ethnic unrest in Manipur to wage war against India, after he spent over two-and-a-half years in pre-trial detention.

A bench comprising Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta cited the prolonged incarceration and the lack of progress in the trial. The judges also noted that Singh's co-accused had already secured bail and observed

that the circumstances and the time he had already spent in custody made them "inclined to grant bail."

The top court's decision overturns the Delhi High Court's April 2 ruling, which had denied bail citing concerns over Singh fleeing or influencing witnesses amid what the High Court termed a "volatile situation" in Manipur.

Singh was arrested in September 2023 after authorities intercepted a vehicle carrying him and four others in Manipur. Officials alleged the group possessed weapons, some reportedly looted from a police armoury, and were dressed in camouflage. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) described the case as part of a "transnational conspiracy" involving Myanmar-based rebel groups.

While granting bail, the Supreme Court instructed Singh to comply with conditions set by the trial court and warned that the order could be reviewed if he was found to be delaying proceedings.

The NIA opposed Singh's bail, emphasising the seriousness of the allegations and the cross-border nature of the plot. Singh's defence also countered that the evidence supporting the conspiracy charge was insufficient and pointed out that other accused in the case had already been released.

North East Black Day Against CAA Marked in Kohima



DIMAPUR

The Naga Students' Federation (NSF), under the banner of the North East Students' Organisation (NESO), observed the North East Black Day against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) at Naga Solidarity Park in Kohima on Thursday. The federation marked the day by hoisting black flags and organising a rally to reaffirm its opposition to the Act.

Chairing the programme, NSF general secretary Kenilo Kent described the CAA as unjust and discriminatory. He asserted that the legislation poses a direct threat to the indigenous communities of the Northeast. Moreover, he emphasised that their homeland represents more

than just territory; it embodies their identity, culture, and history.

Delivering the keynote address, NESO secretary general Mutsikhoyu Yhobu reminded the gathering that the entire Northeast observes this day because the Government of India passed the CAA on December 11, 2019. He said NESO had consistently opposed the imposition of the Act in the region. However, despite repeated objections from student bodies and indigenous communities, the Rajya Sabha passed the Act on this very day, prompting NESO to declare December 11 as North East Black Day.

Yhobu further said NESO continues to demand that the Government of India refrain

from implementing the CAA in the Northeast to safeguard indigenous populations. He urged the people to stand united and resist the Act to protect their identity and rights.

Speaking at the event, NSF president Mteisingding reaffirmed that the federation will persist with its protest until the Act is scrapped. He also expressed gratitude to the leaders of the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) for joining the protest in Kohima.

Addressing the gathering, Nabam Gandhi, AAPSU vice president (protocol), said the union firmly rejects the CAA, arguing that it endangers the culture, traditions, customs, and natural resources of the Northeast.

SIT Files Chargesheet in Zubeen Garg Death Case; Four Accused Face Murder Charges

'Will Be Punished as Per Law': Assam CM Reacts to SIT Chargesheet in Zubeen Garg Death Case

GUWAHATI

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the death of Assam's celebrated singer and cultural icon Zubeen Garg has filed a comprehensive chargesheet before the Chief Judicial Magistrate, Kamrup (Metro), marking a major development in the nearly three-month-long investigation. Garg's sudden and suspicious death on September 19 had triggered widespread shock, public grief, and mounting calls for a transparent probe.

Senior advocate Bijan Mahajan, briefing the media, said the SIT has submitted a 3,500-page chargesheet detailing evidence, witness accounts, and forensic findings. "Four of the seven arrested individuals have been charged with murder under Section 103 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)," Mahajan stated. Those facing the most serious charges - which carry the maximum punishment of death or life imprisonment - include:

- Siddharth Sharma, the singer's manager
 - Shekharjyoti Goswami, drummer
 - Amrit Prabha Mahanta, co-singer
- The chargesheet was prepared by SIT investigators Rosy Kalita, Moromi Medhi, and Naba Deka, and is being seen as a pivotal step in a case that has captured the attention of Assam and the wider Northeast.
- Mahajan added that Sandipan Garg, Zubeen's cousin and a suspended APS officer, has been charged under Section 105 of the BNS, which deals with culpable homicide not amounting to murder. Depending on the extent of intention or knowledge established in court, the section allows imprisonment ranging from five to ten years, with the possibility of life imprisonment in aggravated cases.
- In another significant finding, the SIT has charged the singer's two Personal Security Officers - Paresh Baishya and Nandeswar Borah - with criminal breach of trust, indicating potential lapses or misconduct in their duties at the time of the incident.

With the chargesheet formally placed before the court, the high-profile case now moves into its next judicial phase, where the evidence and charges will be tested in court. The proceedings are expected to be closely watched as Assam awaits clarity on the circumstances behind one of its most heart-breaking and controversial deaths in recent years.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday reiterated that anyone found responsible for the death of singer Zubeen Garg "will be punished as per law," hours after the Special Investigation Team (SIT) submitted its chargesheet before the Chief Judicial Magistrate Court in Guwahati.

Speaking to reporters, Sarma said that several suspects had already been arrested and that the matter was now firmly in the hands of the judiciary. "The legal process will take its course. Whoever is guilty will face punishment as prescribed under the law," he asserted.

The SIT's filing marks a crucial point in the probe into the death of the beloved Assamese singer, which was initially reported as an accidental

drowning in Singapore on September 19, 2025. The Chief Minister, however, has consistently rejected that version. Both in the Assembly and in public statements, Sarma maintained that evidence gathered by investigators indicated a "plain and simple murder" involving one primary perpetrator and several accomplices.

While the full contents of the chargesheet have not yet been made public, officials familiar with the investigation said it consolidates months of forensic examinations, witness testimonies and digital evidence. The case, already one of the most closely watched in the state, is expected to draw intense public attention as court proceedings move forward.

The death of Zubeen Garg, a cultural icon whose influence spans music, cinema and activism, has sparked widespread emotion across Assam. With the chargesheet now filed, the judicial phase of the case is set to begin, and clarity on the circumstances surrounding his death is eagerly awaited by fans and the public alike.

Welcome Dr. Shelley Arjun

Member Organising Committee, NEIR 2026

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THE ENIGMA THAT IS PAKISTAN

India has for long attempted to project Pakistan as a state sponsor of terrorism, a dangerous nuclear power as also a nation on the verge of economic collapse. However, a lot has changed in recent months, despite Pakistan surviving on a collection of IMF bailouts and facing internal insecurities. Its relations with its two major neighbours, India and Afghanistan, may be at an ebb but its ties with nations which matter, US and China, are far better than before.

Trump speaks of his admiration of the Indian PM and Pakistan's failed marshal in the same sentence. He terms PM Modi as 'a very good friend,' and Asim Munir as his 'favourite field marshal.' India faces higher tariffs than Pakistan, indicating that the US favours Pak to India.

The US-Pak bonhomie has been growing since Islamabad nominated him for the Nobel peace award for stopping Operation Sindoor, an act India denies. Simultaneously a group of 44 lawmakers in the US demand sanctions on senior Pak officials for 'escalating campaign of transnational repression and worsening human rights.' Pakistan's growing offensive actions against Afghanistan is to win favour of the US.

The Middle East, where India cultivated its economic and diplomatic ties to offset the influence of Islamabad, has seen Saudi Arabia inking a defence pact with Rawalpindi. It makes Pakistan a major player. It provides Pak with financial security, though Saudi-Turkey tensions would be difficult for Islamabad to navigate.

Pakistan is all set to participate in the ISF (International Stabilization Force) in Gaza, based on Trump's peace plan. It no longer criticizes Israel as it used to. These actions indicate that Pakistan is working to align with US plans for the region. China, with whom India has been attempting to restore its ties provided Pak with all inputs during Operation Sindoor. Pakistan is Beijing's natural ally, as both are India's adversaries. This despite the CPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor) not moving forward, targeting of Chinese workers by groups within Pak and Islamabad moving closer to the US.

Turkey, where India sent a field hospital and aircrafts filled with aid when it faced a devastating earthquake in early 2023, today ignores India moving closer to Pakistan. Afghanistan, which was expected to be Pakistan's client state is now an avowed enemy and an Indian ally. This implies Pakistan faces threats on both its major borders, India and Afghanistan. Meanwhile multiple European nations, including Sweden and Finland are closing their embassies in Pakistan claiming them to be 'strategically pointless.' The same countries are expanding their consulates in India. This displays diminishing value of Pak for Europe, while rising for India. The IMF's Governance and Corruption diagnostic for Pakistan mentions, 'corruption is a persistent feature of Pakistan's governance landscape, with significant adverse effects on economic growth, investment, and public trust.' For years Pakistan has promised to mend its rules to reduce corruption, but failed. Yet the IMF continues providing loans to Pak.

Internally, the 27th amendment has removed the independence of the judiciary. Pakistan may be heading towards a military state with Asim Munir, the failed marshal, controlling the armed forces and nuclear assets, while being granted immunity from all legal challenges.

Yet there has been silence from across the world, less the UN Human Rights chief, Volker Turk, who mentioned that the amendment has been issued, 'without broad consultation and debate with the legal community and wider civil society.' This is because the world has either always accepted Pakistan to be a military ruled state or it is inconsequential.

The TTP (Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan), closely aligned with the Afghan Taliban, as also Baloch freedom fighters, have increased their attacks on Pakistan's security forces. Each year is worse than the previous. Pakistan's western provinces are almost beyond the control of its security forces. Pakistan's attempts to force Afghanistan to reign them in have failed, despite it launching air and drone strikes on their supposed bases in Afghanistan. In desperation, Pak has begun accusing India of supporting them, over which it has no proof.

The Pak army has banned the Islamist Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), whose recent riots left 13 dead and scores injured. The TLP was the baby of the Pak army, which has been dumped once it fulfilled its purpose, something very common in Pak.

Imran Khan, Pakistan's most popular leader, remains behind bars, while his PTI is under pressure and being sidelined, its symbol banned and its only provincial government in KP (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) under threat of being displaced by President's rule. Imran remains the only individual capable of challenging the powerful military, while others, including the current leadership bow before it. Fear of protests, which could turn violent, forced the government to permit Imran's sister to visit him in jail. Internally, Pakistan faces multiple challenges, security, political and economic. Instead of dealing with its own problems, it continues to foster terrorist groups against both, India and Afghanistan. Major terrorist attacks on India have been responded to by military power, which have had limited deterrence. The latest being Operation Sindoor. Pak paid heavily in its short conflict with India in Operation Sindoor. Its main airbases and strategic assets suffered unprecedented damages, while it lost a collection of aircraft. Its border posts and HQs located close to the LoC were also destroyed. Pakistan's own media released a list of over 150 dead in Indian strikes. To preserve the standing and reputation of its armed forces, Pakistan, alongside China, launched an information warfare campaign claiming fictional damages to Indian assets. All through the campaign there was no mention of what were their own damages. The narrative played was solely destruction of some of India's Rafale aircraft. This won support across the globe, including in the US. The US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, a US Congress mandated body, mentioned in its latest report, 'Pakistan's military success over India in its four-day clash showcased Chinese weaponry.' It boosted Pakistan and China's claims, ignoring the failure of Chinese military equipment.

India has attempted to sideline Pakistan diplomatically but not been very successful. Since withdrawing from Afghanistan, the US ignored Pak. Today the nation has a growing relationship with the Trump administration, while India's deteriorates. Its increasing role in West Asia provides it with some leverage. These are nations and regions which matter. For India, Pakistan remains an enigma. Every time it believes it has contained Pak, it bounces back.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

It is not the mountain we conquer, but ourselves."

- Sir Edmund Hillary

Japanese Investment in India May Go Up



SUBRATA MAJUMDER

Japan's new Prime Minister and the first female Prime Minister Sanao Takaichi is unlikely to be moved by the historic gender inequality. She is not a staunch supporter for gender equality because of her social conservatism and opposition to key reforms. She has long opposed legislation that would have allowed married couples' separate surnames.

During the eight year period of late Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (2012-2020), Prime Minister Sanao Takaichi played key role in development of digital economy, smart city projects and cyber security in India. Given India's rising stake in Indo-Pacific region, Japan's key support to develop technology and manufacturing partnership with India for development of alternative supply chain proved prudent for closer ties between the two countries.

Although Prime Minister Sanao Takaichi never visited India, she is understood to keep close contact with India through diplomatic channel to increase self reliance and economic revival through bilateral relation.

Notwithstanding Japan underwent a critical situation after facing USA's high tariff, mounting pressure for big Japanese investment in USA and defence burden sharing, which strained the relation between the two countries under Trump's Presidency, India and Japan steadily deepened their strategic partnership, expanding collaboration in infrastructure, digital economy and labour mobility.

Prime Minister Sanao Takaichi's primary focus on anti-China move, which stems from Shinzo Abe's strategic shift in Japanese investment to India and other Asian countries from

China, is a case in point. In a recent statement in Japanese Diet (Parliament), she stated that a Chinese attack or blockade of Taiwan could constitute a "survival threatening situation" for Japan.

Till now, China and ASEAN were the prime destinations for Japanese investment in Asia. Given the global tension deepening, leading to geo-political turmoil, Japanese investors vowed to shift to India, leaving behind China.

Japanese investment made a steep downturn in China and erratic trend in ASEAN in the post Abe period. Japanese investment in China dropped by 70 percent, from US\$11,024 million in 2020 to US\$3,305 million in 2024 and in ASEAN -4 (Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and Philippines), increased marginally from US \$ 7686 million in 2020 to US\$ 9249 million in 2024. In contrast, Japanese investment in India surged by 267.0 percent in the post Abe period, from US\$ 1,570 million in 2020 to US\$5,341 million in 2024. These unfold India as the second single biggest nation for receiving Japanese investment after Singapore in Asia.

The seeds of new era of India-Japan relation were sown with diversification from bilateral to multilateral during Abe period. The relation extended for a joint partnership for economic development in third countries, such as development of AAGC project (Asia Africa Growth Corridor) and the joint cooperation for development of Chabahar Port in Iran. The new era gave strong backbone to India-Japan special strategic and global partnership in political dynamism.

India was hailed by Deloitte, Japan, CEO Keinichi Kimura, as an

important and attractive destination for Japanese investment. Its massive domestic market, young talent and its strategic location, which link to Middle Eastern and African market, enamour its significance for investment. These leased out to Japanese investors a new global landscape for investment in China+1 strategy and diversify supply chain and reduce dependence on single country.

Caught in the crossfire between USA's MAGA and Japan's historical political conflicts with China, India emerges a new economic ally for Japan. It opened new opportunity for Japan to combat Trump's threat of tariff war and reduce dependence on China for supply chain.

India's growth relies on domestic demand, unlike China. Japan relation with China, which emerged as close economic ally for low cost workshop, despite historical political bitterness, went into despair with unfolding of COVID pandemic. Japanese government granted huge subsidy to encourage Japanese companies to disperse their manufacturing sites from China to other Asian region. This paved the way for India to capitalize China+1 strategy. Japanese investors dragged their feet from China and started pouring investment in India. India emerged 4th largest economy in the world in 2024-25, from 10th in the world in 2014-15. It demonstrates average growth in GDP by 6.5 per cent a year during the decade, despite hindered by COVID 19 pandemic. The growth trajectory vies India's dream to be 3rd biggest economy by 2028, overtaking Germany and Japan, according to Morgan Stanley.

India has special investors' attractions, amid the high tariff war

and protectionism in the world. Unlike China and Japan, local demand is the trigger for companies' profitability in India. According to a survey by JETRO, It has been forecasted that increase in local demand will be the pillar for profitability in 2025 for Japanese companies in India.

Eventually, spurt in automobile industry growth in India, driven by local demand is a case in point. Indian passenger vehicle industry, which is dominated by Japanese investment, is the 4th biggest manufacturer in the world.

Its growth is tied to local demand. Over 90 percent of passenger vehicles produced in the country is sold in the domestic market.

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

The jihadists who spend day and night abusing Western countries and "Jewish-Christian infidels," the jihadists who keep their knives sharpened to kill non-Muslims—these are the very people who use social media the most. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and so on. They report the accounts of those they dislike, those who are progressive and opposed to jihadism. And the social-media authorities believe the jihadists and wipe out the accounts of free thinkers. Meanwhile, the jihadists dance in celebration. Today they destroyed my Instagram account, and I saw the jihadists rejoicing over it. How did they blow up my account? They copied my photos from my ID and pasted them into their own accounts, backdated. Then they reported that I had committed copyright violation. Since this is considered outside Instagram's policy, my account was removed. How easily these uneducated people can fool such a huge industry. I've certainly not failed to submit complaints, yet I see no attempt to educate or make the bots more discerning. #Facebook #Instagram #Meta @Meta

~ Taslima Nasreen, Author



VIKSIT WOMEN FOR A VIKSIT BHARAT: BUILDING ON EDUCATION GAINS

SURYAPRABHA SADASIVAN, SASMIT PATRA

When the Government of India released a report titled Children in India 2025, one statistic stood out quietly but powerfully: at the secondary school level, girls are now marginally ahead of boys in enrolment. The Gender Parity Index at this stage is close to 1.1, meaning that in many classrooms across the country, girls slightly outnumber boys.

Add to this the sharp fall in secondary school dropout rates from 13.8 percent in 2022-23 to 8.2 percent in 2024-25 and the steady decline in child marriage, and a clear story emerges. India's long-term investment across levels—national policies, state innovations, and community leadership in educating its daughters is paying dividends.

This progress reflects years of sustained policy action, with state-level innovations that build on broader policy priorities to strengthen outcomes for girls. This includes initiatives such as free cycles in several states including Jharkhand, hostels for girls in Madhya Pradesh, and Odisha's ANWESHA scheme, which has supported over 22,000 disadvantaged children including girls in better-equipped urban schools since 2015.

Equally significant is Odisha's Mission Shakti, one of the largest women's self-help group movements in the country, which shows how women's collective leadership can inspire

adolescent girls. Philanthropies and companies have also complemented government action by piloting adolescent programmes, funding digital classrooms, and supporting safe transport. Together, these efforts have created an environment where families see girls' education as both possible and valuable.

But enrolment is only the first step. The next challenge is ensuring that girls who remain in school can also transition smoothly into higher education, vocational training, and meaningful work. Without this transition, the current gains risk being short-lived.

First, strengthening the bridge from school to higher education. The government can expand transport subsidies, hostel facilities, and targeted scholarships, especially for rural girls. District administrations could consider establishing cluster colleges in semi-urban centres to expand access to higher education beyond distant cities. Digital platforms like DIKSHA and SWAYAM have the potential to reduce the rural-urban gap by bringing quality content to smaller towns.

NGOs, philanthropic organisations, and corporates can support bridge courses and remedial learning to ensure that first-generation learners do not fall behind. Initiatives like Odisha's Mo School Abhiyan, which mobilises alumni to adopt schools, fund infrastructure, and mentor students illustrate how community ownership can reinforce this bridge by

combining academic support with aspirational role models.

Second, linking education with employability. The National Education Policy 2020 calls for greater integration of vocational education and flexible pathways, but implementation needs to accelerate. State skill missions could establish regional hubs linked to local economies and create mechanisms for collaboration with employers. A promising example is India's first skill impact bond, a public-private initiative that uses outcome-based financing to link training with job opportunities, with more than half of its participants being women. Models like this show how sustainable skilling can be designed with gender at the centre.

Just as important is aspiration: girls need to see pathways into careers beyond traditional roles. Mentorship networks linking female professionals with schools and colleges can expand horizons and provide tangible role models, ensuring education translates not only into employability but also ambition.

Third, ensuring safety and agency. The report reminds us that adolescent girls remain especially vulnerable. In 2022, over 62,000 underage girls were registered as victims of sexual offences. Addressing this requires multi-layered action. The government can integrate school and transit safety audits into the Nirbhaya Fund framework, ensuring improvements are not ad hoc, but systematic. Strengthening police

and judicial training can expedite the disposal of such cases.

Digital safety modules can be integrated into school curriculums. Panchayats can activate child protection committees to monitor unsafe areas, supported by simple mobile reporting tools. NGOs and philanthropies can strengthen accessible helplines like Childline 1098 by expanding them to WhatsApp and SMS, ensuring girls are aware of their rights and how to seek timely help.

The gains we celebrate today are the result of steady investments in primary education, maternal and child health, and girl-focused programmes over decades. They show how persistence in policy and initiatives across Centre and the states, complemented by community and private efforts, can create change at scale. The challenge now is to consolidate these advances and build on them by making secondary-to-tertiary transitions smoother, ensuring skills match the economy, and creating safe environments where girls can thrive. The story of India's girl child is shifting from one of marginalisation to resilience and possibility. Today's 15-year-old girls will be in their thirties at the peak of their careers when the nation marks 100 years of independence. Supporting them now, through accessible higher education, relevant skills, and enabling environments is not just a matter of fairness. It is one of the smartest investments India can make.

Arunachal Pradesh: 21 construction workers from Assam feared dead as minitruck plunges into deep gorge

GUWAHATI

At least 21 people hailing from Assam's Tinsukia district are feared dead in an accident in Arunachal Pradesh's Anjaw district, officials said.

According to the police, 22 persons, including the driver, hailing from Tinsukia district of Assam, were travelling in a minitruck which was plunged into a deep gorge on the Hayuliang-Chaglagam road in Arunachal Pradesh's Anjaw district.

Mayank Kumar, Senior Superintendent of Police of Tinsukia district, told ANI over the phone that, as per the information received from the authority of Arunachal Pradesh, 21 people were feared dead and one person survived.

"All persons are hailing from the Tinsukia district of Assam," Ma-



yank Kumar said.

The truck reportedly skidded off the hilly road and fell into a deep gorge. The accident occurred on December 8. According to the reports, the people were travelling to

Hayuliang for construction-related work.

According to the District Disaster Management Officer (in charge), one survivor has been retrieved so far and handed over to the Assam

administration following medical treatment.

Nang Chingni Choupoo, DDMO (in-charge) for Anjaw District, Arunachal Pradesh, told ANI, "The incident occurred in Chaglagam Circle in Anjaw district of Arunachal Pradesh, located at the India-China border. It happened on the night of December 8. We received the report on the night of December 10. Even the locals were not aware that an incident had occurred there. It is steep and narrow there. The cause of the incident is yet to be ascertained. We have one survivor, as per whom the vehicle had 22 labourers. It was a minitruck which overturned."

"A search and rescue operation is underway there by the Army, ITBP and District Administration. NDRF has been requisitioned. The rescue team has reached there, and the operation is ongoing. We are yet

to retrieve the people on board. We think we will retrieve just the bodies. We have handed over the survivors to Assam after treatment," the DDMO (in charge) added.

Search and rescue operations are underway. More details are awaited.

The Indian Army launched a large-scale search and rescue operation in Arunachal Pradesh's Chaglagam region after a truck carrying 22 workers from Tinsukia plunged off a cliff on December 8, 2025.

The accident occurred near KM 40 on the Hayuliang-Chaglagam road, and the sole survivor, who reached the Chipra GREF Camp, alerted authorities.

A team of 18 bodies has been spotted 200 meters below the road, and rescue efforts are underway to retrieve them. The Indian Army, along with the civil administration,

police, and other agencies, is working tirelessly to locate the missing individuals and provide assistance.

"On 11 December, Spear Corps mobilised multiple Search and Rescue columns, medical teams, GREF representatives, local police, NDRF personnel and the ADC Hayuliang. At 1155 hours, after four hours of intensive search and rope descent, the truck was spotted around 200 metres below the road near KM 40 in a re-entrant, inaccessible and not visible from helicopters or the road due to dense tree cover and thick foliage. Eighteen bodies have been sighted and are being retrieved using belay ropes," read the Army PRO release.

The challenging terrain, with dense tree cover and thick foliage, is hindering rescue efforts. The accident underscores the risks workers face in remote areas and the bravery of the rescue teams involved.

Assam CM Warns of "Demographic Invasion" in Assam, Says Identity Politics Now a "Survival Compulsion"

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday sounded a strong warning over what he termed a potential "demographic invasion" in the state, asserting that unchecked population trends could fundamentally alter Assam's social and cultural landscape.

Speaking at the Agenda AajTak event, Sarma claimed that the indigenous Assamese community faces an existential threat from decades of migration-driven demographic shifts. He argued that if current trends continue, Assam's Muslim population - which he estimated at around 38 percent in 2021 - could rise to 40 percent by 2027. The community, he said, has maintained a steady decadal population growth rate of 4.5 percent since 1961. "If the Muslim population crosses 50 percent, others won't remain. Only they will remain," Sarma said, warning that such a demographic tipping point would have profound cultural and political consequences for the state. The chief minister also weighed in on voting patterns, contending that his political support among Muslims - particularly the "Miya" Muslim community - remains limited due to ideological differences rather than governance issues. Recalling an exchange with a resident, Sarma said the man praised the government's work but admitted he still would not vote for him.

"He told me he would even give me a kidney if needed, but he still wouldn't vote for me," Sarma said. "This shows votes are for ideology, not schemes."

Framing identity politics as unavoidable in the current climate, Sarma said demographic pressures had placed unprecedented strain on Assam's land, resources, language and cultural heritage.

Tripura CPI(M) Files Defamation Case Against Former CM Biplab Kumar Deb Over 'False and Malicious' Remarks

AGARTALA

The Communist Party of India (Marxist), Tripura's principal opposition party, has filed a defamation case against former Chief Minister and sitting Lok Sabha MP Biplab Kumar Deb, accusing him of making fabricated and derogatory allegations aimed at tarnishing the party's reputation.

CPI(M) Polit Bureau member and Leader of the Opposition Jitendra Chaudhury told reporters on December 11 that the party decided to pursue legal action after Deb failed to respond to repeated demands for clarification as well as a formal lawyer's notice.

Chaudhury said Deb, while speaking at a religious programme in Gandhigram earlier this year, alleged that funds from the donation box of the Tripura Sundari Temple (Matabari) were stolen during

the Left Front government's tenure and replaced with counterfeit items.

Describing the statements as "false, baseless, and deeply hurtful to religious sentiments," the CPI(M) leader said the party had initially issued a public statement asking Deb to either substantiate his claims or issue an unconditional apology.

"When no response came, we sent a legal notice. Even then, he did not reply, leaving the party with no option but to file a defamation suit," Chaudhury said. He added that Deb had "intentionally attempted to mislead the public and malign the CPI(M) by making unfounded accusations involving a revered religious site."

Chaudhury said the party could not allow such "malicious propaganda" to go unchallenged and therefore chose to seek legal remedy.

Cachar District Administration Orders 48-hour Shutdown of Gammon Bridge on NH 6

OUR CORRESPONDENT

SILCHAR: Cachar district authorities have ordered a 48-hour shutdown of the Gammon Bridge on NH 6 after engineers flagged serious damage to its structural bearings. The closure begins at 6 PM on December 12 and will continue until 6 PM on December 14. Only pedestrians will be allowed to cross. All vehicles, without exception, are barred during this window.

The directive came after the General Manager of NHIDCL's PMU Silchar unit alerted the administration that several bearings had broken and required immediate replacement. The District Disaster Management Authority acted on the warning and invoked provisions of the Disaster Management Act to ensure the repair team can work without disruption. Officials said the decision was taken to protect commuters and preserve the bridge's structural stability.

A traffic diversion plan is now



in place. Heavy vehicles have been routed through Kalain, Khambar Bazar, Bihara, Baburbazar, and Borkhola along NH 27. Light passenger vehicles and goods carriers below 15 metric tonnes may use the Silchar Kalain road. Authorities have asked commuters to follow the prescribed routes to avoid congestion.

Emergency teams are stationed at critical points. SDRF personnel have been deployed at Siddeshwar and Latimara ghats. Police teams under the Superintendent of Police will manage crowd and traffic control at Kargil Point, Khambar Bazar, Baburbazar near the RCC bridge, and Bhangarpar near the Bailey bridge. The Circle Officer

of Katigora is supervising operations at both temporary ghats with support from CQRT members and Aapla Mitra volunteers.

Officials said the order is purely a safety measure and will remain effective until further instructions are issued. The directive was approved by the District Commissioner.

Tripura CM Credits BJP's 2023 Victory to PM Modi's "Blessings", Rejects Tipra Motha's Claims of Influence

AGARTALA

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha has dismissed assertions that the Bharatiya Janata Party's 2023 Assembly election victory was achieved with the help of the Tipra Motha Party (TMP), insisting that the mandate was secured solely due to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's popularity and leadership.

Saha's remarks came shortly after Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAACD) chief Pura Chandra Jamatia and council member Hansajoy Tripura claimed that had the TMP contested 42 seats in the 2023 polls, the BJP would not have returned to power for a second consecutive term.

Addressing a party gathering in Sotamura under Sepahijala district,



Saha said some political leaders were attempting to undercut the BJP's electoral strength by crediting the

party's victory to Tipra Motha's limited participation. He countered this argument by pointing to the BJP's 2018 breakthrough, when it ended 25 years of Left rule.

"If this was true, then how did the BJP win the 2018 state polls? Where were you during the 2018 elections? You were not seen, but the BJP defeated the communists. Our party won the elections because of the blessing of Modi. Everybody knows 'Modi Hai To Mumkin Hai'," Saha said.

He also accused the CPI(M) of indirectly influencing cadres who later joined regional outfits, adding that the BJP-led government would take a firm stand against criminal activities. Saha claimed there were attempts to disrupt the BJP's programme in Sotamura by forcing local shops to close, and said

authorities were preparing a list of individuals allegedly involved in unlawful acts.

Reflecting on the 2021 TTAADC elections, Saha said BJP workers had come under attack from regional forces, but assured that security arrangements for the upcoming polls in April next year would be robust.

Reiterating the BJP's commitment to coalition politics, Saha said the party has consistently respected its allies. "The BJP has a long tradition of honouring its allies, but it is up to others to decide whether they wish to depart. The BJP is like the river Ganga; a dip in it removes all sins," he remarked.

The BJP currently governs Tripura in partnership with the Tipra Motha Party (TMP) and the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT).

Mizoram to Host Winter Festival at Aizawl's Lammual Ground to Showcase Local Culture, Boost Tourism



AIZAWL

Mizoram is set to host a major winter festival this month, with the state government positioning culture-led attractions as a key driver of its expanding tourism sector.

Tourism Minister Lalnghinglova Hmar announced that the festival will be held from December 15-20 and again on December 23 at Aizawl's iconic Lammual ground. The event will feature an extensive lineup of Mizo cultural performances while introducing new attractions designed to draw visitors from across India and abroad.

Christmas-themed events - including a costume parade and carol programme on December 23 - will transform Lammual and surrounding areas into a festive hub. The venue will also host charity stalls, children's activities and a series of live concerts featuring local artists and well-known performers such

as DJ Avanie (Mumbai), Naaz (Guwahati), Zehen (Bengaluru), and Northeast hip-hop talents Reble and Kim.

Last year's festival, held from December 14-21, attracted around 80,000 visitors, including guests from neighbouring states and overseas, officials said.

Hmar also announced two additional tourism events: a sunset celebration on December 31 at Sakawhmituai hills, located about 21 km from Aizawl, and a cherry blossom festival in Phuaibung village, Saitual district, scheduled for January 6-7.

Emphasising the crucial role of public participation, the minister urged residents to take greater interest in local sites and cultural assets. He said expanded tourism requires both national promotion and deeper community involvement.

Mizoram is currently implementing tourism projects worth ₹349.91 crore, including the PM Ekta Mall in Aizawl and a heritage and cultural centre in Champhai. A statewide "tourism calendar" is also in the works to help travellers plan their visits around major annual events.

Officials reported continued growth in tourist arrivals, with more than 5.2 lakh visitors entering the state during the 2024-25 fiscal year - a 139.5 per cent increase from the previous year. The surge has been partly attributed to the new railway line inaugurated in September, which has significantly improved access to the hill state.

Assam CM Sarma launches distribution of bicycles to Class IX students

DIBRUGARH

In an attempt to make the daily commute of the students faster and safer, especially those belonging to rural and interior areas, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma launched bicycle distribution programme under the Chief Minister's Special Scheme for 3,10,081 students of Class IX from government and provincial schools at a programme held at Dibrugarh district on Thursday.

Of the total number of students, there are 1,34,432 male students and 1,75,608 female students. The scheme also includes tea garden model schools and Adarsha Vidyalayas. Its main goals are to increase school enrollment, raise regular attendance, and reduce the student dropout rate. Speaking on the occasion, CM Sarma said that though aim in life of different people are different, they need to study up to a certain level to achieve their goals.

He said that in Assam, six percent of enrolled students leave school four to five years after admission. Later, at the VIII standard, another eight percent leave their school. As a result, 14 percent of students drop out between primary school enrollment and Class VIII.

Quest!

In the next 30 seconds, you will, on average, produce 72 million red blood cells, shed 174,000 skin cells, and have 25 thoughts.

He added that at the higher secondary level, the dropout rate reaches forty percent. He said that if forty percent of a society can't complete their education, there is little possibility that their dreams will be fulfilled.

The Chief Minister said that every child carries a hidden talent. Only a suitable environment nurtures that talent, and educational institutions can create that environment.

The Chief Minister moreover, said that the students who leave school at the high school level because of financial hardship, lose the chance to utilise their talents. To address this problem, the government took several initiatives to ensure that no child leaves school because of poverty. Based on these efforts, the government is providing free textbooks, uniforms, and midday meals.

He said that when a student moves to secondary school, he or she often needs to travel a long distance to attend classes. To ease this burden, the government introduced this scheme for providing free bicycles to students in Class IX.

The Chief Minister said that the government has also made college enrollment free for students. At the higher secondary level each girl now receives Rs 1000 per month through the Nijut Moina scheme. At the undergraduate level Rs 1250, and at the post-graduate level Rs 2500.

He added that the government will soon launch a similar scheme for boys.

CM Sarma said that along with finan-

cial aid to help students continue their studies, State government has taken several other steps to improve the academic environment. He said that the government has started constructing school buildings at a cost of Rs 7-8 crore for each school. The government has also set up schools to support the education of students in tea garden areas. CM Sarma, moreover, said that several new colleges, medical colleges, and engineering colleges are under construction in the state. He moreover said that Assam has set up a semiconductor manufacturing unit, as the plans are on the anvil to set up a unit to manufacture mobile phones.

He added that to help the new generation find new avenues, the government has taken several steps that include industrial development, improvement of agriculture, growth of horticulture, and development of veterinary services. He said that for the past five years, the government has been working relentlessly for the betterment of students of the state. The Chief Minister, expressing his happiness, said that these steps have started giving positive results.

Referring to the successes of sportspersons like Simu Das, Lovlina Borgohain, Hima Das, the Chief Minister said that Assam has many examples that show how people can rise to great heights through willpower and focus.

To inspire the students present at the event, CM Sarma also cited the example of the famous scientist and inventor Thomas Alva Edison. He said that before Edison succeeded in inventing the electric bulb, he

failed almost ten thousand times.

He added that many people try to climb Mount Everest each year, even though they face the risk of death. He said that people reach the summit because they face challenges in life.

The Chief Minister urged the students to study regularly and take part in sports, physical exercise, prayer, and household work that help their parents. He also asked every student to maintain discipline. He said that people who hold on to discipline never face defeat.

He asked the students to respect their parents. He said, "The mobile phone in our hands should not be used only to scroll through Facebook or Instagram. We should use it to learn about geography, history, science, sports, and new events around the world."

Education Minister Dr Ranaj Pegu, Indigenous and Tribal Faith and Culture Minister Jogen Mohan, Power Minister Prasanta Phukan, Cultural Affairs Minister Bimal Borah, MLAs Chakradhar Gogoi, Binod Hazarika, Terosh Gowala, and Taranga Gogoi, Dibrugarh Municipal Board Chairman Dr Saikat Patra, Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council Chief Executive Member Tonkeswar Sonowal, Moran Autonomous Council Chief Executive Member Saroj Gohain, Dibrugarh Zila Parishad Chairperson Pushpanjali Sonowal, Chairman Assam Tourism Development Corporation Rituporno Baruah, Secretary Education and host of other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

VOLUNTEER REQUIRED

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- We are looking for volunteers across Northeastern India and West Bengal.
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www.northeastintegrationally.in

“Will drive out Bangladeshi Muslim infiltrators”: LoP Suvendu Adhikari



KOLKATA

West Bengal Leader of the Opposition and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA Suvendu Adhikari called for the removal of Bangladeshi Muslim infiltrators from the state and said there is no need to establish detention camps in West Bengal for infiltrators.

While reacting to Mamata Banerjee's statement on SIR, the state LoP further declared that not a single Bangladeshi Muslim will live in this state and only Indians, whether Hindus or Muslims, will live in West Bengal.

“...There will be no need for detention camps in Bengal. We will drive out Bangladeshi Muslim infiltrators...Every Indian will live here, whether Hindu or Muslim, but not a single Bangladeshi Muslim will live here. There is no need for detention camps here...” Adhikari told.

Earlier, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee urged women in the state to “lead the fight” against the alleged “illegal voter deletion” through the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls. She

asked men to provide support from behind.

Addressing a gathering at Krishnanagar, Nadia, Mamata Banerjee alleged that the BJP wants to “take away” the rights and “terrify” women, and urged them to show that women are “more powerful” than the BJP.

Through SIR, they [BJP] want to take away the rights of women. During elections, they want to use Central forces to terrify the women. Do you have the strength to fight if your names are removed? Women should lead the fight and men should fight from the back. I want to see whether our women are more powerful or the BJP,” Mamata Banerjee said.

Accusing the BJP of “pressurising” the District Magistrate, Mamata Banerjee vowed to do a sit-in protest if names are removed “deliberately” from the voter lists.

“I have not come here to seek votes. I have come here to urge you to enrol your names in the electoral list. From Delhi, the BJP is sending people to pressurise the DMs with the intent of removing 1.5 crore

names from the electoral list. If any name is deliberately removed, I will do a sit-in protest. I urge you to do the same,” Mamata Banerjee said.

Meanwhile, the Election Commission of India, after Kerala, has extended the deadlines for Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in five States and one Union Territory.

As per the revised schedule, the enumeration period for Tamil Nadu and Gujarat has been extended to December 14, with the draft roll to be published on December 19.

The enumeration period for Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Andaman and Nicobar Islands will end on December 18, with the draft rolls on December 23. Uttar Pradesh received an extension of 15 days with the enumeration period ending on December 26 and draft rolls to be published on December 31. ECI said in a press note. In the earlier schedule, the enumeration period for these six States and UTs was until December 11, and the draft electoral rolls were published on December 16.

CM Mamata files her voter forms on last day after protest; slams ‘misleading’ media reports



KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee finally filled up her own enumeration forms (EFs) and handed them over to the concerned Booth Level Officer (BLO) at her Harish Chatterjee Street residence on Thursday afternoon, hours after she addressed a rally organised by the Trinamool Congress in Nadia district and

claimed that she had not filled out her EF.

“Do I now need to prove my citizenship to a party of rioters?” she said while addressing the crowd at the Nadia rally.

Thursday was the last day for submission of EFs to the Election Commission of India (ECI).

Confirmed sources in the ECI said, “The EFs, which she had accepted from the

concerned BLO more than a month ago, were lying at her Kalighat residence since then. She handed over the filled-up form, duly signed by her, to the BLO this afternoon.”

To intensify her attack on the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in the state, the Chief Minister had repeatedly said she would not fill up her own EF as a mark of protest against the

Commission and the exercise. On November 4, she said she had not personally received any EF form for the SIR from any official.

The Trinamool Congress supremo had dismissed media reports claiming she accepted the forms in person at her residence on Wednesday as “completely false, misleading, and a deliberate attempt at spreading misinformation.”

She issued the rejoinder after a section of the media, including Trinamool's mouthpiece Jago Bangla, reported that she personally received her EFs from the local BLO.

“A BLO had come to our area yesterday in discharge of his electoral duties. He came to the office at my residence, enquired about the number of voters in the premises and handed over forms,” she had said.

“A section of the media has reported that I came out of my residence and accepted the enumeration forms personally. This information is completely false, misleading, and a deliberate attempt at spreading misinformation,” she reiterated.

She has been launching scathing attacks on the Commission and the BJP-led Centre, alleging that the SIR exercise is being implemented in a partisan manner by the ECI in the state.

She has frequently claimed on social media and in party meetings that she “has not and will not” fill up any form until all citizens in the state have completed filling theirs.

INTERNATIONAL

Mexico's Congress approves tariff hikes up to 50 per cent on imports from India, China



MEXICO

Mexico's Congress approved Wednesday most of the tariff increases proposed by the government on more than 1,400 products imported from India, China and other countries that do not have free trade agreements with Mexico. The Senate passed

the measure Wednesday evening, following the lower chamber, which had approved the increases before dawn.

The governing Morena party of President Claudia Sheinbaum, who said the tariffs were necessary to spur domestic production, controls both chambers. The

Senate passed the legislation with 76 votes in favor, five against and 35 abstentions.

Analysts say the real motivation is ongoing negotiations with Washington, Mexico's most important trading partner. Sheinbaum has been trying to find relief from remaining tariffs imposed on Mexican imports

by the Trump administration, which has accused China of using Mexico as a backdoor into the U.S. market.

Tariff increases of as much as 50% will affect textiles, shoes, appliances, cars and auto parts among other things beginning in January.

China will be the most affected as Mexico imported \$130 billion worth of products from the country in 2024, second only to the what Mexico bought from the United States. The Chinese government was critical of the proposed tariff increases when they were announced in September. “The real reason has to do with the United States, it has to do with the review of the USMCA (free trade agreement) that is coming up, with the negotiations to obtain reductions, exemptions from the tariffs that Mexico is facing at this moment to access the U.S. market,” said Oscar Ocampo, director of economic development at the Mexican Institute for Competitiveness. Mexico still faces U.S. tariffs on the automotive sector, steel and aluminum. But Ocampo said Mexico was bending to an unpredictable U.S. President Donald Trump and changing its commercial policy “in the wrong direction.” He said the government was creating problems for a number of sectors, including auto parts, plastics, chemicals and textiles, because the tariffs will create disruptions in supply chains and could push inflation up at a time when the economy is slowing.

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Thailand's Parliament dissolved ahead of new elections early next year

BANGKOK

Thailand's Parliament was dissolved Friday for new elections early next year in a country engaged in deadly fighting with Cambodia.

Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul dissolved the House of Representatives after getting approval from King Maha Vajiralongkorn, whose endorsement became effective Friday with its publication in the Royal Gazette.

Anutin had signaled the move with a Facebook post late Thursday saying: “I'd like to return power to the people.”

The election must be held 45 to 60 days after the royal endorsement, a period during which Anutin will head a caretaker government with limited powers that cannot approve a new budget.

His action comes at a tricky political moment, as Thailand is engaged in large-scale combat with Cambodia over long-disputed border claims. About two dozen people were reported killed in the fighting this week, while hundreds of thousands have been displaced on both sides.

Anutin has been prime minister for just three months, succeeding Paetongtarn Shinawatra, who served only a year in office.

Anutin won the September vote in Parliament with support from the main opposition People's Party in exchange for a promise to dissolve Parliament within four months and organize a referendum on the drafting of a new constitution by an elected constituent assembly.

The party, which runs on progressive platforms, has long sought changes to the constitution, imposed during a military government, saying they want to make it more democratic.

The issue of constitutional change appeared to trigger the dissolution, after the People's Party prepared to call a no-confidence vote Thursday. That threat came after lawmakers



from Anutin's Bhumjaithai Party voted in favor of a bill to amend the constitution that the opposition party felt ran against the spirit of the agreement they had reached in September.

The People's Party holds the largest number of seats in the House of Representatives and is seen as the main challenger to Bhumjaithai. As news of the pending dissolution circulated late Thursday, its leaders said they hoped Anutin would still honor the agreement to arrange a constitutional referendum.

Anutin had served in Paetongtarn's former government but resigned from his positions and withdrew his party from her coalition government in June in the wake of a political scandal related to border tensions with Cambodia.

Paetongtarn, daughter of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, was suspended from office in early July after being found guilty of

ethics violations over a politically compromising phone call with Cambodia's Senate President Hun Sen ahead of July's armed conflict.

With Thailand now again engaged in heavy combat against Cambodia, Anutin has embraced an aggressive military posture appealing to nationalistic public sentiment, and has said Thailand will keep fighting until its sovereignty and safety are guaranteed. After the five days of border fighting in July, U.S. President Donald Trump pushed the two countries to agree on a ceasefire by threatening to withhold trade privileges from them.

Trump has vowed again to make peace between them after widespread fighting flared up again this week. If he employs the cudgel of high tariffs on Thai exports should Thailand fail to comply with his peacekeeping effort, it could cause serious damage to its already sluggish economy.

Assam's Infant and Child Mortality Rates Remain Above National Average

Assam continues to record higher levels of infant and child mortality than the national average, the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) informed the Lok Sabha on Friday, underscoring a persistent public health challenge that has plagued the state for decades. The latest figures, drawn from the Sample Registration System (SRS) 2023, reveal that key indicators-neo-natal mortality and under-five mortality-remain stubbornly above the all-India levels, despite improvements recorded across many parts of the country.

The data were placed before Parliament in response to a question raised by Nagaon MP Pradyut Bordoloi, who sought clarity on the status of malnutrition, child deaths, and the effectiveness of the government's flagship nutrition programme, POSHAN Abhiyaan, since 2020. The ministry's reply included detailed state-wise comparisons, highlighting wide variations across states and exposing deep regional inequalities.

Reacting to the numbers, Bordoloi posted on X, calling for an urgent and evidence-based revision of nutrition and maternal healthcare interventions in Assam, and pushing the state government to introspect on programmatic gaps.

Assam's Mortality Rates Remain a Concern

According to the SRS 2023 data annexed to the minister's reply, India's Neo-Natal Mortality Rate (NMR) stands at 19 deaths per 1,000 live births, while Assam records an NMR of 21. Neonatal mortality accounts for deaths within the first 28 days of life, a period widely regarded as the most vulnerable for both mother and child. Health experts point out that high NMR is often a direct reflection of poor maternal nutrition, inadequate antenatal care, unsafe births, and limited availability of emergency neonatal services.

Assam's NMR places it among the states with above-average burden. For comparison, Kerala, a longstanding leader in maternal and child health outcomes, reports an NMR of 4, while Delhi and Tamil Nadu report 9 each. Among the worst-performing states are Madhya Pradesh (27) and Uttar Pradesh (26), underscoring the uneven progress in maternal-child health across India.

The disparities become sharper when looking at the Under-Five Mortality Rate (U5MR), which measures the likelihood of a child dying before reaching five years of age. India averages 29 deaths per 1,000 live births, but Assam records 33, placing it alongside high-burden states such as Rajasthan (34), Odisha (35), and Chhattisgarh (41).

Once again, Kerala reports the lowest U5MR at just 8, demonstrating the impact of sustained investment in public health systems, immunization, nutrition services, and community-level care.

Structural Challenges Behind the Numbers

Public health specialists say the data are not surprising. Assam has historically struggled with a combination of geographic constraints, poor maternal health indicators, and low coverage of quality antenatal and postnatal services, which collectively contribute to preventable infant and child deaths.

"These deaths are mostly preventable," said a Guwahati-based paediatric specialist who has worked in several districts of Lower Assam. "We still see high levels of maternal anaemia, poor nutrition, and delayed or unsafe delivery practices. Many mothers come in too late for treatment because healthcare facilities are either far away, understaffed, or ill-equipped."

The doctor added that the lack of specialized neonatal intensive care units (NICUs) and the irregular functioning of sick newborn care units (SNCUs) in district hospitals continue to be major bottlenecks in reducing infant mortality.

Experts further note that Assam's geographical diversity-ranging from flood-prone riverine areas (chars) to hilly regions-poses significant access challenges. Seasonal flooding often disrupts



transportation, making it difficult for pregnant women or sick children to reach health centres in time.

The Missing Link: Nutrition and Maternal Health

Assam's child health indicators are intimately tied to nutritional deficiencies. According to earlier NFHS-5 data, Assam registers high levels of stunting, wasting, and underweight children, conditions that are known to directly increase vulnerability to infections and early childhood mortality.

The MWCD's response in Parliament pointed to the availability of real-time nutrition monitoring through the Poshan Tracker, a digital tool intended to capture data on stunting, wasting, and underweight children through Anganwadi centres. Minister of State Savitri Thakur noted that the tracker provides public access to state-wise and district-wise data and has improved the identification of at-risk children.

However, the challenge in Assam lies not in data availability but in translating data into effective intervention, said a senior public health observer based in Guwahati.

"Even when malnourished children are identified, the ability of the state to respond with supplementation, food security measures, and healthcare support remains weak," he said. "The Anganwadi network is large but uneven in quality and often struggles with shortages of manpower, training gaps, and logistical delays."

Many health workers in remote districts have also reported disruptions in the supply of take-home rations, iron supplements, and growth monitoring equipment-critical components under POSHAN Abhiyaan.

Government Acknowledges Challenges

While listing the steps taken under POSHAN Abhiyaan-such as growth monitoring devices, community-based events, training modules for Anganwadi workers, and strengthened nutrition surveillance-the Ministry acknowledged that states like Assam face unique constraints.

"The geographical barriers, difficult terrain, and gaps in health infrastructure continue to affect progress," the minister stated. She also noted that the Centre is examining best practices from low-burden North-Eastern states, several of which have managed to maintain lower infant and child mortality rates despite similar terrain challenges.

States such as Mizoram and Sikkim have historically reported stronger health outcomes due to better community participation, higher literacy rates among women, and more efficient last-mile delivery of health services.

A Wake-Up Call for Assam's Public Health System

Public health analysts say that the latest SRS data should serve as a wake-up call for Assam, especially at a time when India as a whole is witnessing steady improvements in child survival rates.

They argue that unless Assam strengthens its frontline health workforce, enhances the functioning of primary health centres (PHCs), improves maternal nutrition, and ensures timely referral services, the gap between the state and national averages may widen further in the coming years.

One of the major concerns cited by experts is the overburdening of district hospitals, which often lack adequate staff, equipment, and space to handle neonatal emergencies. While Assam has expanded institutional deliveries-one of the key factors in reducing infant mortality-the quality of these

deliveries remains inconsistent across districts.

The lack of specialist doctors, particularly paediatricians, gynaecologists, and anaesthetists in rural areas, severely limits the ability of smaller hospitals to handle complications. Many expectant mothers still rely on untrained midwives or seek medical attention only when complications escalate, reducing the chance of survival for premature or low-birth-weight infants.

The Way Forward: Strengthening the First Mile and the Last Mile

Health researchers suggest a multi-pronged approach to closing the mortality gap, including:

1. Strengthening Maternal Nutrition

High levels of anaemia among pregnant women are a major contributor to low birth weight and neonatal complications. Ensuring uninterrupted supply of iron-folic acid (IFA) tablets, nutrition supplementation, and early detection of high-risk pregnancies should be prioritised.

2. Improving Antenatal and Postnatal Care

Greater emphasis on four quality antenatal check-ups, institutional deliveries, and follow-up care for mother and newborn in the first 48 hours-which account for the majority of neonatal deaths-is essential.

3. Expanding Access to Neonatal

Care

SNCUs must be equipped with adequate staff, oxygen supply, incubators, and infection control systems. Strengthening district-level NICUs and ensuring reliable referral transport systems will be crucial.

4. Reducing Travel Barriers in Remote Regions

Boat clinics, mobile medical units, and telemedicine services should be expanded, especially in the char areas of the Brahmaputra and in hilly regions like Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao.

5. Empowering Anganwadi Centres

Anganwadi workers are the backbone of POSHAN Abhiyaan. Regular training, timely payment of honorariums, and improved supply chains for nutritional supplements will improve the quality of early childhood services.

6. Community Engagement and Awareness

Behavioural change campaigns on breastfeeding, hygiene, early arrival at hospitals, and balanced diets can significantly reduce preventable deaths.

Assam's Long Road Ahead

Assam has made gains in maternal and child health over the last two decades, but progress has been slower than national trends. The state's mortality rates continue to mirror deeper socio-economic issues such as poverty, malnutrition, gender disparities, and poor access to healthcare-factors that cannot be addressed through infrastructure expansion alone.

The SRS 2023 findings underscore that child survival is not just a health sector issue. It is tied to education, women's empowerment, food security, and disaster resilience-especially in a state uniquely vulnerable to floods and erosion. Unless the state commits to bridging the gaps in both nutrition delivery and maternal-child health systems, Assam risks falling further behind India's trajectory toward reducing infant and child mortality.

For now, the figures placed before Parliament serve as a stark reminder that thousands of children in Assam continue to face risks that are largely preventable, and that tackling these challenges requires sustained political will, community partnership, and robust, accountable public health systems.

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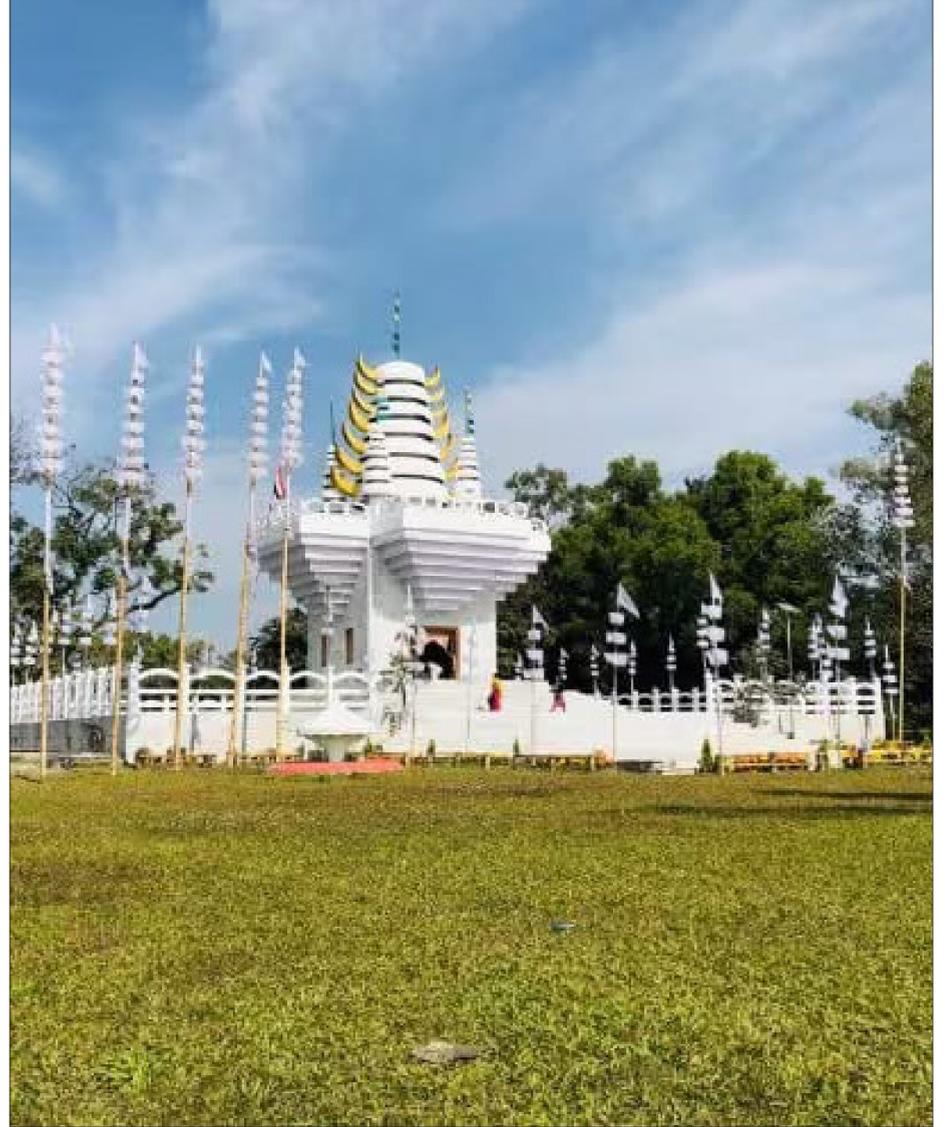
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Over thinking ruins happiness.

Imphal - The Jewel of India



The NEIR 2026 will enter Imphal on January 20. On January 22, it will host the NE Integration Film Festival and Art Festival. The next day, the rally will carry out a series of activities (Kangla Fort, the INA site, and Loktak Lake). Imphal doesn't try to overwhelm you. It's not a city that leans on spectacle or size. It sits quietly in the middle of a wide valley, surrounded by hills that rise like a natural amphitheatre. At first glance, everything feels measured and unhurried. But if you stay long enough, you realise the calm is only the surface. Underneath it lies a place shaped by memory, resilience, and a steady determination to push forward.

The first thing that strikes you is how deeply anchored the city feels. It carries the weight of its past without letting it turn into a burden. Imphal has lived through conflict, seen moments of upheaval, and endured long spells of uncertainty. Yet people here continue building, creating, and showing up for the routines that keep life steady. That balance between remembering and moving on is woven into almost every corner of the city.

One of the clearest expressions of this spirit is Ima Keithel, the women's market. Before you even reach its entrance, you hear the soundscape of bargaining, laughter, and the rustle of baskets filled with vegetables, spices, handwoven shawls, and tiny crafted items that seem to hold their own stories. The market is run entirely by women, and it has been that way for generations. The sight of hundreds of mothers and grandmothers holding the economic reins of the city creates an atmosphere unlike any other market in the country. They manage the ebb and flow of daily commerce with an ease that comes from being central to Manipuri society for centuries. If you want to understand the backbone of the city, start here.

A short distance away, the mood shifts when you enter Kangla. The fort sits at the heart of Imphal, but it feels like its own world. The quiet here is gentle but charged. Walk along the pathways lined with old trees, pause near the ponds, and you feel the layers of power and loss that Kangla has witnessed. This was once the royal seat of Manipur. It has seen battles, political transitions, and long periods of restricted access. Today, it's open to the public, and people come not just to learn its history but to feel connected to something larger than themselves. Kangla carries the emotional memory of the state, and you sense that as soon as you step inside.

Even surrounded by history, Imphal is very much alive in the present. You see

it in the small cafés that pop up near college clusters, where young people discuss everything from cinema to politics. Sports fields fill up every evening with kids and teenagers who treat play with a kind of disciplined seriousness. That's not surprising in a place that has produced some of India's finest athletes. Sports aren't a pastime here; they're part of the city's identity. You can feel that energy in boxing gyms tucked behind narrow lanes, in football grounds that stay busy until late, and in the stories locals tell with pride about athletes who rose from modest neighbourhoods to national acclaim.

population in the valley, but Imphal is also a meeting point for people from surrounding hill districts and the Pangal community. Different languages, food habits, and cultural practices mix here, sometimes easily and sometimes uneasily. The city has seen divisions sharpen and soften over time. People don't pretend those tensions don't exist. But they also don't let them define daily life. Markets continue, work continues, classrooms remain full. Small acts of everyday cooperation keep the city functioning even when the larger political picture looks complicated.

To understand Imphal's sense of memo-

ry, you only need to travel to Moirang and visit the INA Memorial. The drive takes about an hour, but the landscape makes it feel shorter. The museum there marks the place where the Indian National Army raised the tricolour in 1944. The building is modest, its rooms simple. The power of the place lies in its story. The narrative of resistance and aspiration resonates deeply in Manipur, and you can see that in the way visitors move through the museum, reading carefully, speaking softly. Memory here is not abstract. It's personal, and it connects generations. Back in the valley, Loktak Lake shapes the imagination of almost everyone in Imphal. It's not within the city limits, but it's close enough to feel like part of the city's emotional geography. The lake is vast, quiet, and full of life. The floating phumdis drift with the wind, fishermen glide past in slender boats, and in the distance lies Keibul Lamjao, the world's only floating national park. The Sangai deer moves with an elegance that has almost become symbolic of Manipur itself: fragile, rare, and deeply rooted. People in Imphal speak of Loktak with a kind of affection normally reserved for childhood memories. The lake offers perspective, a sense of openness that balances the density of life in the city. Food adds another layer to the city's character. Imphal's cuisine doesn't aim for theatrics. It's about balance, freshness, and simplicity. Eromba, made with mashed vegetables and fermented fish, tells you everything about the local palate. Nga thongba, singju, ooti, chak-hao kheer—each dish carries the valley's ingredients, climate, and rhythms. Even the tea, served strong in small roadside stalls, feels like a ritual that anchors the day.

What stands out most in Imphal is how people move through their routines. There's a quiet determination in the way they approach work, whether they're shopkeepers, teachers, students, drivers, or vendors. Years of navigating uncertainty have built a kind of inner steadiness. That doesn't mean life is grim. Far from it. There's warmth everywhere, often in the smallest gestures. A driver slowing down to point out a landmark you might have missed. A vendor slipping an extra handful of herbs into your bag. A stranger helping you find your way without making a fuss. That softness is part of the city's texture, and it reveals itself slowly.

Imphal isn't trying to compete with big capitals or reinvent itself for attention. It knows what it is: a place shaped by its valley, its history, and the layered strength of its people. It holds its scars without hiding them and finds new ways to grow despite the weight it carries. Spend enough time here and the city settles into you. Not with spectacle, but with honesty, depth, and a pace that teaches you how to listen.



The city's social texture is shaped by its many communities. Meiteis form the core

ry, you only need to travel to Moirang and visit the INA Memorial. The drive takes



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.
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11 JAN
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11 JAN
Barak Valley Conclave
 Potential Issues and Challenges of Barak Valley to be discussed by stakeholders.
 Includes: MOU, and 20 general discussion topics for Barak valley. Includes 50 seats for members and general public. Participation through invitation only. Different rewards are provided.



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



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



10 JAN
Media Conclave
 Media Conclave: Media Experts, Webinars, and the Fund, Talks and Conferences are part of the 'Barak Festival 2025'. Theme: 'One for All, All for One'.
 Webinars: Journalism, Marketing, Business & Corporate HR, Entrepreneurship, HR, Analytics, Leadership.

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

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

Barak Festival

Band Night | 10 JAN

Musical Night | 11 JAN



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



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



10-12 JAN
Book Bank
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