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**Tezpur University Under Scanner as Assam Congress Seeks CBI Investigation**

**GUWAHATI**  
Leader of the Opposition in the Assam Legislative Assembly, Debabrata Saikia, along with MLA Nurul Huda and MLA Sibamoni Bora, has formally written to the Central Bureau of Investigation's Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) seeking an independent and time-bound enquiry into a series of alleged financial, administrative and statutory irregularities at Tezpur University. The letter, addressed to the CBI's Anti-Corruption Branch in Guwahati, calls for a transparent investigation into concerns that have reportedly surfaced over several years and have triggered widespread unrest within the university community.

The letter to the CBI highlights that the allegations have been consistently raised by students, faculty bodies, and staff associations, and some even surfaced through official channels such as responses to Right to Information applications. While clarifying that the letter does not level personal accusations against any individual, Debabrata Saikia stated that the gravity of the circumstances demands an impartial verification by a competent agency like the CBI. Tezpur University, a Central University established under the Tezpur University Act of 1993, has been witnessing months of institutional turmoil. Numerous written complaints and submissions from stakeholders reportedly point to procurement-related anomalies, manipulation of tender processes, misallocation of public funds, violations of statutory procedures, irregular appointments and service extensions, withholding of retirement dues, and the non-availability of essential documents related to the appointment and qualifications of the sitting Vice-Chancellor as per an RTI response dated November 19, 2025.

**WHO SAID WHAT**



**Wherever we go, we carry the pride of Bharat Mata ki Jai and BJP Zindabad.**

~ Pema Khandu, CM, Arunachal Pradesh

## India's Digital Future in Focus as Assam Hosts Flagship Innovation Summit 2025

**GUWAHATI**

The Information Technology Department, Government of Assam, in partnership with Elets Technomedia, successfully organised the National Digital Innovation Residential Summit 2025 in Guwahati.

The summit was led by K S Gopinath Narayan, Principal Secretary, and co-chaired by Ashwani Kumar, Additional Secretary IT and Director DITEC, along with Dr Ravi Gupta, Founder and CEO of Elets Technomedia.

Together, they brought over 50 distinguished speakers and participants from more than 20 states, showcasing India's accelerating vision for next-generation digital governance.

Senior leaders from Assam, including Biswaranjan Samal, Additional Chief Secretary, B Kalyan Chakravarty, Additional Chief Secretary, and Syedain Abbasi, Special Chief Secretary, joined eminent national leaders from across India. These included Satinder Kumar Bhalla, Secretary, North Eastern Council; Justice Soumitra Saikia of the Gauhati High Court; Sumant Narain, Joint Secretary, National Water



Mission; Pravin Bakshi, Commissioner and Secretary, IT and Communication, Government of Meghalaya; Vivek H. P., Secretary, Health and Family Welfare, Government of Arunachal Pradesh; Dr Piyush Singla, Secretary, IT, Government of Jammu and Kashmir; Amit Sharma, Director, Census Operations for Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh; Dr Santosh Kumar Dewangan, Commissioner, Higher Education, Government of Chhattisgarh; and Dr K. Ilambarathi, Commissioner, Transport Department,

Government of Telangana.

Their presence enriched the discussions on the evolving landscape of digital governance in India.

In his welcome remarks, Dr Ravi Gupta emphasised Assam's rapid digital transformation and its emergence as a strong citizen-first governance model.

Sharing his vision for the future, K S Gopinath Narayan reflected on the global shift toward the concept of "intelligence inversion," where abundant digital intelligence must be applied with

strategic clarity to maximise public benefit. Building on this perspective, Ashwani Kumar highlighted Assam's remarkable achievements, including more than 900 services delivered through the Unified Assam Portal under Sewa Setu and over 500 services enabled through DigiLocker.

He reaffirmed the state's commitment to creating a transparent, secure and AI-driven model of governance for the people of Assam.

The summit featured extensive discussions on digital infrastructure, AI-enabled governance, emerging technologies, digital trade, semiconductor opportunities and innovations in service delivery across diverse geographies. Supported by leading industry partners such as Google Cloud, Indian Bank, TAGBIN, Salesforce, AMD, CSC, CDAC, HDFC Bank, Karix, Pinnacle, Bluecooper, Canara Bank and NRL, the event concluded with renewed collaboration and strengthened partnerships.

The National Digital Innovation Residential Summit 2025 reaffirmed Assam's vision of building an inclusive, intelligent and citizen-centric digital future.

## Meitei BJP MLA Makes First Outreach to Kuki Villages, Eases Frosty Ties in Manipur

**IMPHAL**

A Manipur MLA and former minister from the majority Meitei community mustered the courage and showed the inclination to break the ice by visiting two Kuki-Zo villages on Monday.

Yumnam Khemchand Singh, who is also a former Speaker of the Manipur Assembly, visited the Kuki villages, Litan and Chassad, and interacted with the villagers. Litan falls under Ukhrul while Chassad lies in Kamjong, both Naga-majority districts.

This is the first time since the bloody ethnic violence engulfed the state in May 2023 that a leader has started people-to-people contact. The visit is being seen as a confidence-building measure in a state that has remained internally partitioned.

Traveling to Litan, the BJP leader interacted with Kuki villagers and inquired about their life and hardship faced in the past two and



half years. Singh visited a Kuki relief camp at Litan Sareikhong Baptist Church and interacted with Kuki inmates who fled their homes during the violence.

"With the coming of Christmas, we all should pray for the return of peace in the state," the sportsman-turned-politician and founder of Assam Taekwondo Association said.

He consoled the villagers and told them that the return of peace should be the primary target of all communities. He said conflict exists in every part of the world, but it should

not be allowed to hinder a region's progress and development.

"There are conflicts among different countries and communities but we should learn to live in harmony despite differences. There should not be any hindrance in visiting each other's villages," Singh said.

"We should not allow this conflict affect the future of our children. We, the elders, may have differences, but we should think about our children's future," he added.

State BJP vice president and Naga leader Hopingson Shimray, who accompanied Singh, said it was a remarkable gesture by the MLA to travel to Kuki villages when everyone today is reluctant to venture into another community's area. He said Singh is the first BJP Meitei legislator to step into a Kuki relief camp.

The ethnic violence had left more than 260 people dead and an estimated 60,000 others internally displaced. A large majority of them are still lodged in relief camps.

**PASIGHAT**

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated and dedicated 125 strategically significant infrastructure projects of the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) on Sunday, 7 December 2025, from Shyok Tunnel, Ladakh.

The projects include 28 roads, 93 bridges, and four miscellaneous infrastructure works, spread across seven states and two Union Territories. Key components of the event were the inauguration of the 920-meter cut-and-cover Shyok Tunnel on a strategic road in Ladakh and the 3D-printed HAD Complex at Chandigarh. In Arunachal Pradesh, seven bridges under Project Brahman, headquartered in Pasighat, East Siang District, were inaugurated across the Shi-Yomi and Siang Valley.

These include Shene Bridge on the Tato-Menchuka road, which provides a link between Tato and Menchuka valley.

Five bridges along Dittie Dimme road were also completed, including Ritbung Bridge, Rabung Bridge,

Seoyo Bridge, Rabung Bridge, and Sirak Bridge.

A sixth bridge, Naglung Ri Bridge, was constructed on the Tuting-Bona axis. These bridges are expected to improve connectivity and facilitate movement in the region.

While the Defence Minister oversaw the inauguration from Ladakh, dignitaries from Arunachal Pradesh attended from Aalo/Along (44 BRTF location) and Yingkiang (761 BRTF location).

Attendees from Along included Kento Jini, Minister for Law & Justice; S.C. Looniya, CE Project Brahman; Col Arjun Gulati, Commander 44 TF; Tayi Taggu, DC Boleng; Techu Aran, DC Aalo; Tashi Namgyal, Commandant 20 Bn ITBP; Anil Kumar, Commandant 57 Bn ITBP; Kardak Pedu, SP Aalo; Gopin Padu, DFO Aalo; and officers of 44 TF.

Attendees from Yingkiang included Token Saring, SP Upper Siang; Kenbang Jonkug, Circle Officer Yingkiang; Chandraket Kumar, Commander 761 TF; R.R. Sinha, OC 105 RCC; and officers of 761 TF.

## Masjid Demolition Demand Triggers 12-Hour Bandh; Capital Admin Declares Strike 'Illegal'

**ITANAGAR**

Tensions are rising across the Arunachal Pradesh capital ahead of a 12-hour bandh scheduled for December 9, even as district authorities have declared the shutdown "illegal and unlawful." The strike call, issued jointly by three youth groups, comes amid a charged political atmosphere with municipal and panchayat elections underway.

The Indigenous Youth Force of Arunachal (IYFA), Arunachal Pradesh Indigenous Youth Organisation (APIYO) and All Naharlagun Youth Organisation (ANYO) are pressing three key demands:

- o Removal of the Capital Jama Masjid at Nigam Colony, Naharlagun

- o A complete ban on weekly markets in the Capital Region

- o Identification and deportations of alleged illegal Bangladeshi immigrants

The groups had initially planned the bandh for November 25 but deferred it after being invited for talks with the state leadership. However, their claim discussions failed to materialise as a meeting slated for December 5 could not be held due to the Home Minister's ongoing election engagements.

APIYO president Taro Sonam Liyak has asserted that the December 9 bandh will go ahead as planned, urging civil bodies, business associations, transport unions and residents to extend



support. He warned that the state government will bear responsibility for any untoward incident during the shutdown.

In an order issued on Monday, District Magistrate Toko Babu (APCS) declared the bandh illegal under Section 163 of the BNSS and the Arunachal Pradesh Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 2014. The administration cited Supreme Court rulings prohibiting shutdowns imposed by organisations, noting that bandhs cause widespread hardship, especially to daily wage earners and small businesses.

The DM further observed that the strike violates the Model Code of Conduct, with elections presently underway for the Municipal Corporation, and the Baat-Ganga and Borum Panchayats. Police have been instructed to enforce the order strictly and take action against violators.

Market Bodies Urge Withdrawal

Market associations in Naharlagun have appealed to the youth groups to reconsider the

bandh, stressing that public shutdowns inflict disproportionate suffering on wage labourers and low-income families.

Speaking to India Today, Kipa Nai, President of the Bazaar Welfare Society Naharlagun, and General Secretary Tadar Tania said while the concerns raised by the organisations merit dialogue, imposing a shutdown during election season will disrupt livelihoods and essential public movement.

"The issues are real, but a bandh only hurts citizens especially the poor. Dialogue with the government is the way forward. Bandh is illegal and causes unnecessary harassment," they said.

They urged that sensitive socio-religious and demographic concerns be addressed through constructive engagement rather than coercive measures that cripple daily life.

Debate over the bandh call has sharply divided Itanagar and Naharlagun. While a section of residents supports the demands, others fear the fallout amid peak election activity, business movement and campaign mobilisations.

With authorities preparing enforcement steps and police deployment, residents remain anxious about possible road blockades and confrontations. All attention now turns to whether youth groups will honour their call or opt for renewed dialogue in the hours leading up to December 9.



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## Social Protection of the Indian Government

The prime priority of every successful state is to provide social protection to marginalized population. A democracy becomes meaningful not just through elections and public rallies but through the everyday experience of security and dignity that citizens derive from the state. When people feel protected against illness, accidents, unemployment or social crises, the moral foundation of democracy becomes stronger. Without such protection, millions remain citizens only on paper, not in their lived reality.

In India, the demand for a strong system of social protection has always been urgent because of the country's vast informal workforce, its history of social inequality, and the scale of economic vulnerability. Welfare programmes existed long before 2014, but their reach and impact were uneven. Many schemes struggled with leakages, corruption, duplication of beneficiaries and weak delivery mechanisms. Much of India's poor lived outside the formal financial system and had no reliable access to pensions, insurance or healthcare coverage. Welfare was often dependent on navigating local bureaucracies or political networks, which meant that the most disadvantaged were the most likely to fall through the cracks.

These gaps created a "structural exclusion" not intentional discrimination but systematic disadvantages that arise from the design and functioning of institutions. For a long time, India's social protection architecture could not fully overcome these structural barriers. As a result, while the country's constitutional vision promised equality and justice, the everyday experience of welfare remained uneven, fragile and uncertain for many citizens. After 2014, the approach toward social protection began to shift significantly. The government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi placed a strong emphasis on inclusive development, using technology and financial access as tools to reform the delivery of welfare. The starting point was the massive financial inclusion project under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana. By bringing crores of people into the banking system, the state created a direct channel between itself and the citizen. This reduced dependence on middlemen and signaled a move towards a welfare system based on rights rather than discretion. The bank account became not just a financial tool but a symbol of state recognition.

This foundation allowed the government to expand social insurance in ways not seen before. Affordable schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana brought life and accident insurance within the reach of the poorest families. The Atal Pension Yojana attempted to ensure that informal sector workers, who form the majority of the workforce, also gain some measure of old-age security. These schemes represent a democratisation of risk protection. Earlier, insurance and pension systems were largely the privilege of organised sector employees; now they became accessible to street vendors, daily wage labourers, domestic workers and agricultural labourers.

Healthcare protection saw an even more notable change with the introduction of Ayushman Bharat, one of the world's largest publicly funded health insurance programmes. Hospitalisation costs are among the biggest causes of poverty in India, pushing families into debt traps that take years to overcome. Cashless treatment under Ayushman Bharat attempted to break this cycle by enabling the poor to access hospital care without fear of financial ruin. While implementation challenges remain, the programme reflects a larger shift in the state's approach from viewing health as a consumer service to recognising it as a component of social citizenship.

The government also introduced targeted income support and social recognition for vulnerable groups. PM-KISAN provided direct financial assistance to millions of farmers, acknowledging the uncertainties of agricultural livelihoods. The e-Shram portal marked a historic step in documenting informal workers, many of whom had never been officially recorded by the state. This registration not only offers access to benefits but also symbolic recognition of workers who have long remained invisible in policy frameworks. When the state recognises a worker, it creates the basis for new claims, new rights and new forms of democratic accountability. Technology played a decisive role in building this new welfare architecture. The integration of Aadhaar with Direct Benefit Transfers reduced corruption, cut down duplication, and brought transparency to the system. The shift to a more centralised and digital delivery model has reduced arbitrariness and made the state's welfare role more predictable. This does not mean that all issues have been resolved. Digital literacy gaps, administrative capacity and regional disparities still pose challenges. But the direction of change is clear: towards a state that sees social protection not as a burden but as a commitment central to its democratic character. What emerges from these developments is a redefinition of the relationship between the citizen and the state. Social protection is no longer treated as optional support or a political favour; it is increasingly framed as part of the state's duty and a citizen's entitlement. In sociological terms, this strengthens the sense of belonging and inclusion. When individuals feel protected, they feel more integrated into the social fabric and more confident in the promises of democracy. India's progress in social protection after 2014 does not mean that the task is complete. Inequalities persist, and new vulnerabilities continue to emerge in a rapidly changing economy. But the direction and intent are unmistakable: the Indian government has moved toward a more expansive and citizen-friendly welfare regime, rooted in financial inclusion, digital governance and accessible security nets.

A democracy's real test lies not in its slogans but in its ability to protect its most vulnerable members. Social protection is not charity but a constitutional and moral commitment. India's efforts over the past decade suggest that the state is taking this responsibility more seriously, moving closer to the vision of a nation where every citizen irrespective of class, caste or region can feel secure, valued and protected.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

"I don't have talent, so I just get up earlier." - Henry Rollins

# Indo-Russian Summit-2025 Reinforces All-Weather Friendship



PROF (DR) D MUKHERJEE

India and Russia have long shared what they describe as a "special and privileged strategic partnership," a formal designation established in October 2000. Over the years, this relationship has broadened to include defence and security cooperation, economic and trade engagement, scientific and technological collaboration, cultural ties, and extensive people-to-people exchanges. By FY 2023-24, bilateral merchandise trade had risen to USD 65.70 billion, with India exporting goods worth USD 4.26 billion and importing USD 61.44 billion from Russia. This trade pattern has consistently favoured Russia, driven largely by Indian purchases of energy products such as oil, fertilisers, minerals, metals, and other raw materials. Defence remains a central axis of the partnership, with India depending heavily on Russian-origin platforms across its air, land, and naval forces. Within this historical context, President Vladimir Putin's visit to India on 4-5 December 2025—his first since the Ukraine conflict began—carries exceptional symbolic and strategic weight. Occurring amid global instability, heightened Western scrutiny, and shifting power alignments, the trip reflects a deliberate effort by both nations to reaffirm the depth and durability of their ties. The phrase "Russia—the All-Weather Friend of India" therefore encapsulates a long-standing bond grounded in mutual confidence, converging strategic priorities, and a shared aspiration for a more multipolar international system.

The geopolitical implications of this visit are significant, particularly at a time when the United States continues to send mixed signals toward India. While New Delhi has expanded cooperation with Washington, U.S. policy has often oscillated in response to its own strategic and economic interests. Simultaneously, Russia faces Western sanctions and diplomatic isolation due to the Ukraine war. Against this backdrop, the India-Russia summit conveys an unmistakable message: India intends to safeguard its strategic autonomy and will not allow any external pressure from the U.S., the EU, or others to dictate its foreign-policy choices. Hosting Putin underscores India's ability to engage all major powers independently, without subordinating one relationship to another. For Russia, sustained ties with India offer a crucial strategic corridor at a time when many of Moscow's partnerships have weakened. For India, Russia's reliability in defence, energy, and economic spheres remains invaluable. The summit thus reinforces a balanced triangular dynamic wherein India maintains strong relations with both the West and Russia, preserving its flexibility in an increasingly multipolar world.

The core priorities of the Modi-Putin Summit and the message it sends to the world are direct and unmistakable. The 2025 Indo-Russian meeting brings together a broad agenda that reflects both the long-standing foundations of their partnership and the new strategic demands of a shifting global landscape. Defence and security cooperation remain central. India is expected to seek additional S-400 air-defence

systems and examine prospects for collaborating on advanced platforms, including next-generation fighter aircraft. Indications that Russia may provide up to 50 percent technology transfer for the S-400-allowing partial production within India—highlight the push for deeper defence industrial integration. Discussions are also likely to cover upgrades to Russian-origin systems such as Sukhoi jets and further development of joint missile initiatives, notably the BrahMos programme.

Alongside these military discussions, both nations are preparing to activate the Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Support (RELOS) pact, recently approved by Russia's lower house. This agreement will grant reciprocal access to military bases, ports, and airspace, forming a stronger logistical network for joint exercises, humanitarian operations, and rapid mobility during emergencies. Such an arrangement significantly enhances operational coordination and strengthens long-term strategic mobility. Economically, the summit aims to finalize a 2030 Strategic Economic Roadmap to steer cooperation in trade, investment, energy, technology, and connectivity. With bilateral trade reaching USD 68.7 billion in FY 2024-25, both sides acknowledge the need to broaden engagement beyond defence equipment and energy imports, seeking more diversified and balanced exchanges. In the civilian sphere, the agenda extends to civil nuclear cooperation—including ongoing projects like Kudankulam—along with skilled workforce mobility, space collaboration, and advanced technology tie-ups. These areas reinforce the multifaceted nature of the partnership. Ultimately, the summit delivers a diplomatic signal that far exceeds immediate agreements. By emphasizing mutual respect, strategic autonomy, and sovereign equality, India and Russia demonstrate that partnerships can be shaped by shared interests rather than geopolitical pressure. This meeting thus reaffirms their joint commitment to a multipolar world where India preserves independent decision-making and Russia sustains relevance through stable, long-term cooperation.

The reaction of anti-India or Western nations, including the EU, to the summit is predictable. India's renewed closeness with Russia is likely to attract scrutiny and concern, particularly from countries that regard Moscow as isolated due to the Ukraine conflict. The approval of the RELOS pact and fresh defence agreements may heighten anxieties about shifting power dynamics in the Indo-Pacific and the potential for regional militarization. Many in the EU and broader Western bloc may interpret the summit as India moving strategically closer to Russia, possibly weakening collective sanctions or undermining pressure mechanisms directed at Moscow. Expanded defence cooperation, joint missile production, and enhanced logistics coordination could be viewed as India challenging Western expectations on arms-control alignment or sanction compliance. India's neighbours and regional observers may also feel uneasy, especially if strengthened Indo-Russian defence ties translate into more advanced Indian military capabilities. Yet, overt criticism from the West

is unlikely, as alienating India would harm their own strategic and economic interests. Instead, responses will likely take diplomatic forms—subtle cautions, reminders about sanctions, and calls for transparency. Overall, the summit underscores the limits of Western influence over India's sovereign foreign-policy decisions.

The likely U.S. reaction to the summit—especially in the context of India's continued Russian oil purchases—reveals a complex strategic dilemma. Washington faces tension between its concerns over India-Russia defence and energy cooperation, which it views through the lens of sanctions and great-power competition, and its need to maintain India as a central Indo-Pacific partner. Recent U.S. actions, including punitive tariffs linked to India's Russian oil imports, suggest that pressure may intensify, possibly through diplomatic warnings or threats of additional trade restrictions. Yet India's emphasis on strategic autonomy complicates any coercive approach. The summit reinforces the idea that New Delhi will not subordinate national interests to external expectations, a stance that may unsettle Washington. Should India deepen defence deals and continue large-scale energy imports from Russia, bilateral friction could grow in trade and security dialogues. Still, the U.S. may ultimately choose to manage disagreements pragmatically, prioritizing Indo-Pacific cooperation over disputes tied to Russia.

The long-term impact of the 2025 India-Russia Summit on defence strategy and technology transfer is likely to be substantial, particularly given the security challenges in India's neighbourhood. The defence and logistics agreements concluded at the summit signal a significant shift in India's strategic planning. The ratification of the RELOS pact will allow both nations to share military bases, ports, and airspace, enabling smoother joint exercises, coordinated responses to regional contingencies, and stronger humanitarian operations. This deepens operational interoperability and broadens India's strategic flexibility in the Indo-Pacific. India's expected procurement of additional S-400 air-defence systems, potential collaboration on fifth-generation fighter platforms, upgrades to existing Sukhoi fleets, and advancement of missile programmes—including BrahMos variants and possibly hypersonic systems—could substantially reinforce India's deterrence architecture. These capabilities are critical in countering persistent threats from neighbouring states such as Pakistan and Bangladesh, which have historically shaped India's defence posture. Moreover, increased technology transfer and the prospect of domestic assembly or manufacturing of advanced systems can boost India's defence-industrial base. Such progress reduces vulnerability to foreign supply disruptions and positions India to emerge as a credible exporter of defence equipment. Ultimately, the summit's outcomes move beyond tactical acquisitions, offering India a pathway toward greater self-reliance, stronger deterrence, and enhanced regional stability.

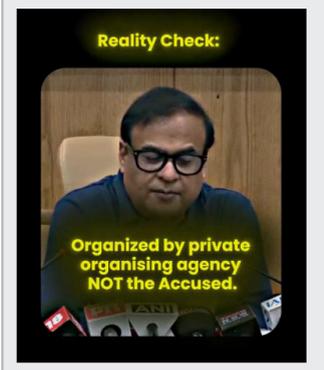
In an age marked by shifting alliances, geo-economic pressures, and ideological polarizations, the 2025 summit between Putin and Modi underlines the enduring relevance of a relationship built on mutual respect, strategic necessity, and shared civilizational outlook. The deepening of Indo-Russian ties—in defence, energy, trade, technology, and diplomacy—is not simply a bilateral affair. It is a statement: sovereign nations can choose partnership on their own terms, pursue strategic autonomy, and resist coercive alignments. With the "All-Weather" moniker, India and Russia reaffirm that their friendship transcends transient global currents. The summit's outcomes—whether in S-400 deals, logistics cooperation, economic roadmaps, or technology transfer—will likely reshape not just South Asia's strategic architecture, but influence the broader contours of a multipolar world. For India, this recalibration is not about antagonism toward any power, but about asserting agency: ensuring security, sovereignty, and a future grounded

in dignity, equality, and mutual trust. In that sense, this visit is not just "historic," but possibly "epochal"—a renewed anchor for a future where India's foreign policy is anchored in national interest, not external pressure.

India may therefore be recommended to strengthen defence self-reliance, deepen strategic partnerships like the Russia alliance, and remain vigilant against anti-India forces. By balancing global relations while prioritizing national security, India can safeguard sovereignty, counter regional threats, and reinforce its role as a stable, independent power in an increasingly uncertain geopolitical environment.

### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

**Post Malone performing in Guwahati is more than a concert. It's a milestone in Assam's rise as a true cultural hub. □ There was a time when fans flocked to Shillong for rock shows. Today, Guwahati takes centre stage, marking a new beginning for our cultural journey. ~ Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM, Assam**



## India-Russia ties poised to gather pace

M K BHADRAKUMAR

The state visit by Russian President Vladimir Putin to India drew heightened international attention, which gave it the colouring of a geopolitical event. Three European ambassadors assigned to Delhi from France, Germany and the UK even resorted to pamphleteering to smear Russia, compelling a rare rebuke by the government. In the event, though, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Putin kept the focus on the bilateral content, with a long-term perspective.

Although the presence of the ghost at the banquet would have been on their minds, neither Modi nor Putin showed any signs of it. In fact, Putin embarked on the journey to Delhi right after his momentous 5-hour negotiations in the Kremlin with US President Donald Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff and son-in-law Jared Kushner, which have held out hopes that guns may soon fall silent in the battlefields of Ukraine and promises a historic breakthrough in the adversarial Russian-American relationship that has posed formidable challenges lately to Indian diplomacy.

To be sure, the Delhi summit was held in the backdrop of a tumultuous shift of tectonic plates in the alignment of major powers, especially Russia and India. In his first public remarks with Putin, Modi went straight to the point, saying India was anything but 'neutral' in the Ukraine situation and stood for peace. It was a bold articulation of support for the coordinated efforts by Putin and Trump to bring the war to an end, the diabolical moves by the

European Union and the Kiev regime to smother the nascent peace process notwithstanding.

By coincidence, perhaps, Trump chose Friday, even as Putin's visit was under way, to unveil the new National Security Strategy (NSS) of his presidency, which painted European powers as weak and raised doubts about their long-term reliability as partners; reinforced the 'America First' philosophy espousing non-intervention overseas; and called for shifting US military assets to the Western Hemisphere, "away from theatres whose relative import to American national security has declined in recent decades".

The NSS stressed improved ties with both Russia and India. On the one hand, it messaged that ending the Ukraine war is a core US interest to "reestablish strategic stability with Russia", while on the other hand, it stated the Trump administration's determination to "improve commercial (and other) relations with India to encourage New Delhi to contribute to Indo-Pacific security".

Conceivably, Moscow and Delhi could anticipate the drift of the forthcoming NSS document presaging an imminent shift in the Trump administration's strategic calculus. It must have been a daunting challenge to choreograph a summit with a superpower in such a fluid setting, and it probably accounted for the anti-climactic look of the Modi-Putin summit. The joint statement, titled "INDIA-RUSSIA: A Time-Tested Progressive Partnership, Anchored in Trust & Mutual Respect", prudently steered clear of the geopolitical convulsions in

the international environment. The entire turf of defence ties lies submerged. There was no trace of 'anti-Americanism' in the summit's proceedings. Nonetheless, the joint statement firmly reaffirmed the further strengthening of the special and privileged strategic partnership and "emphasised the special nature of this long-standing and time-tested relationship, which is characterised by mutual trust, respect for each other's core national interests and strategic convergence".

It asserted that "as major powers with shared responsibilities, this important relationship continues to be an anchor of global peace and stability that should be ensured upon the basis of equal and indivisible security".

Suffice to say, the joint statement unequivocally rejects the Western pressure on India to sever its relationship with Russia. The relevant paragraphs defiantly state, "The leaders positively assessed the multi-faceted mutually beneficial India-Russia relations that span all areas of cooperation, including political and strategic, military and security, trade and investment, energy, science and technology, nuclear, space, cultural, education and humanitarian cooperation. It was noted with satisfaction that both sides are actively exploring new avenues for cooperation while further strengthening cooperation in the traditional areas."

"The leaders underlined that India-Russia ties have remained resilient in the backdrop of the prevailing complex, challenging and uncertain geopolitical situation... Development of India-Russia

relations across the entire spectrum is a shared foreign policy priority. The leaders agreed to make all efforts to unlock the full potential of the strategic partnership."

There is no question that the forceful formulation carries Modi's imprimatur, signalling India's defiance to the Trump administration, which has punished and publicly humiliated Delhi for its purchases of Russian oil.

All the same, Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Denis Manturov, the co-chairman of the Russian-Indian joint economic commission, was the senior-most member of Putin's entourage, which highlighted that the locomotive of the relationship will be an ambitious economic partnership with an emphasis on technology.

Several new vistas of cooperation are opening up—a deal to allow more Indian nationals to work in Russia; advancement of India's Arctic ambitions with Russian help; a joint venture to manufacture fertiliser for the Indian farmer who plays a vital role in the economy; a new era of media cooperation with the launch of RT India. At a public function, Putin poignantly recalled the legacy of Russian-Indian friendship at the peoples' level, and pledged to reboot it.

The signing of the reciprocal exchange of logistics agreement, a bilateral military logistics pact that allows armed forces to access each other's military facilities, gives Russia strategic access to the Indian Ocean, a region dominated by the US, China, the UK and France.

# Assam clears 3,000-bigha land transfer for Silchar Greenfield Airport; Cabinet okays key infra and education reforms

GUWAHATI

The Assam government has approved the transfer of 3,000 bighas - nearly 992 acres - of land from Doloo Tea Estate in Cachar to the Airports Authority of India (AAI), paving the way for construction of a greenfield airport near Silchar. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced the decision on December 7, noting that the sanctioned area includes an additional 500 bighas beyond the previously earmarked 2,500.

The clearance marks a crucial step toward securing Union Cabinet approval for what would be Silchar's first dedicated civilian airport. Sarma said the proposal was necessitated by operational constraints at the existing defence airport in Kumbhirgram, where civilian flight expansion is considered unfeasible due to heavy military traffic.

The Doloo Tea Estate land ac-



quisition has been among the most contentious infrastructure developments in Barak Valley in recent years. Earlier controversies intensified after former Union Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said the Centre had not received a formal airport proposal from Assam, prompting the state to clarify that acquisition began at AAI's request. The process sparked protests from tea garden workers, though the government assured that homes and jobs would not be affected.

Financial assistance was later provided to 1,296 families in November 2022 as part of a Rs 50-crore compensation package for workers of Doloo, Lalbagh and Mainagarh. Discontent resurfaced in mid-2025, with the Asom Mojuri Shramik Union demanding return of the land or an alternative estate to continue tea cultivation.

Cabinet clears multiple develop-

ment projects

Alongside the land transfer, Sarma outlined a slate of major cabinet decisions.

Mission Basundhara: Land allotments have been approved for 1,200 families, bolstering the government's ongoing effort to grant secure land rights across the state.

Aerospace and engineering collaboration: A joint advanced technology centre at Assam Engineering College has been cleared in partnership with Dassault Systems India Pvt Ltd. Spread over 5,000 sq ft at a cost of ₹243 crore, the project will offer specialised courses in aerospace, defence, automotive and electric vehicle technologies. Dassault will contribute ₹200 crore, with the state government funding ₹43 crore.

New Sainik School: Administrative approval has been granted for Assam's second Sainik School, to be set up at Longvaku in Karbi

Alonglong. The ₹335-crore institution will be funded in an 80:20 ratio by the Ministry of Defence and the state government. Compensation for 884 families affected during four-lane National Highway construction in Dima Hasao has also been sanctioned.

Education reform: Assam's history and geography will now be compulsory subjects for Classes 6, 7 and 8, in line with Clause 6 panel recommendations led by Justice (Retd.) Biplob Kumar Sharma.

Logistics & industry: The cabinet approved the Assam Logistics and Warehousing Policy, 2025, designed to position the state as a major logistics hub for the eastern region.

With the land transfer now approved, the Silchar Greenfield Airport project moves a step closer to central clearance, signaling one of the most ambitious infrastructure pushes in Barak Valley in decades.

## Manipur: Joint forces destroy 67-acre illegal poppy fields worth Rs 1.6 crore

IMPHAL

A joint team of security forces from the central and state governments destroyed 67 acres of illegal poppy cultivation in the hill ranges of Manipur's Kangpokpi district. The police said the poppy fields had a potential value of around Rs 1.6 crore in the regional clandestine trade.

The team, comprising the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), Manipur Police, Assam Rifles, CRPF, and Forest Department, carried out the operation at Makui Ashang, Laloi, Wakotphai, Chajang, and surrounding areas under Kangpokpi Police Station over the past 36 hours. As part of the fully grown poppy flowering plant destruction campaign, the team also destroyed 38 huts, 44 bags of fertilisers, 43 Roundup herbicides, 26 bags of salt, and equipment such as spray pumps, pipes, and other tools found at the cultivation sites. Meanwhile, former Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh, on his X account, wrote that Ajay Kumar Bhalla, the Governor of Manipur, is instructing law enforcers to destroy poppy cultivation in various hill ranges.

He noted that such operations demonstrate a clear resolve to protect forests, safeguard youth, and uphold the rule of law. Biren further wrote that this initiative aligns with the Prime Minister's vision of a Nasha Mukta Bharat, and it is encouraging to see Manipur actively contributing to this national mission.

He concluded, "I urge the authorities to continue these operations across all vulnerable regions of the state so that no area remains a haven for narcotics activities. Only through consistent and collective action can we fully secure Manipur's future and ensure a healthier, safer, and drug-free society."

## Tripura to launch eco-adventure and water park in Jirania; work to begin soon, says Tourism Minister



AGARTALA

Tripura is set to begin construction of a state-of-the-art eco-tourism, adventure and water park at Sachindranagar Colony in Jirania subdivision, West Tripura, Tourism Minister Sushanta Chowdhury announced on December 6.

Modelled on Kolkata's Nicco Park, the project is expected to enhance the state's tourism appeal while generating new employment opportunities, particularly for young people. Chowdhury said the initiative aligns with the government's broader vision of a self-reliant and economically

vibrant Tripura built on a stronger tourism sector. The minister, accompanied by Tourism Department Secretary Uttam Kumar Chakma, Director Prashant Badal Negi, social worker Ranjit Roy Chowdhury and local representatives, visited the proposed site to assess land conditions and discuss groundwork ahead of construction. Chowdhury expressed confidence that the project will elevate Tripura's presence on the national and international tourism map and eventually emerge as a major recreational landmark in the state.

## Tezpur University lien dispute unresolved as High Court awaits order; key respondent now posted in Sikkim

GUWAHATI

A protracted service dispute involving Tezpur University has entered another month without resolution, with the Gauhati High Court yet to pronounce an order on a writ petition linked to the lien rights of senior administrative officer Dr Upakul Sarmah. The matter has remained under judicial consideration for over a year, even as one of the key respondents has since taken up a new posting outside the university.

The petition - WP(C) No. 6620/2024 - challenges administrative decisions concerning Dr Sarmah, who moved to the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Guwahati on deputation. Despite repeated hearings before multiple benches, the case continues to be marked as "pending" in

court records as of December 7.

Complicating the situation is the status of Respondent No. 5, Dr Braja Bandhu Mishra, formerly the Finance Officer at Tezpur University. He has recently joined Sikkim University as Officer on Special Duty to the Vice-Chancellor, a development that observers say adds fresh dimensions to accountability questions arising from his previous tenure. Mishra's departure coincided with a period of campus unrest at Tezpur University, amid allegations of financial mismanagement, disruptions in governance and delays attributed to administrative instability.

Dr Sarmah, meanwhile, who has served in various key administrative positions on the Tezpur University campus, secured Board approval for an extension of his lien in October

2023, granting him the right to return to his parent institution. However, subsequent internal decisions during a heightened phase of institutional turbulence reportedly hindered that extension, prompting him to seek judicial protection for his lien, seniority and service status.

Court listings show multiple hearing dates - including September 3, September 24, October 30 and December 2 - without any final verdict. The matter was not included in the cause list for December 7. Counsel representing the petitioner, Tezpur University, the Union government and other respondents have continued to appear before the court as proceedings remain open-ended.

The dispute has now evolved beyond an individual service matter, emerging as a reflection

of broader governance challenges within Tezpur University. Debates surrounding financial oversight, HEFA-funded development projects, procurement decisions and administrative functioning have intensified scrutiny of the institution's management practices. Mishra's shift to Sikkim University has further sharpened attention on unresolved questions from his tenure in Assam. With the High Court yet to deliver judgment, uncertainty persists over whether Dr Sarmah's lien stands legally protected and whether intervening actions by the university may have jeopardised his career trajectory. The ruling - when issued - is expected to have implications extending beyond the petitioner, potentially shaping governance standards and administrative accountability across Central universities in the Northeast.

# Armed Forces Flag Day celebrated at Lok Bhavan

GUWAHATI

Assam also joined the rest of the nation in observing the Armed Forces Flag Day at Lok Bhavan, Assam, celebrated the day under the leadership of Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya at its premises in Guwahati on Sunday.

It may be noted that since 1949, December 7 has been observed as the Armed Forces Flag Day throughout the country to honour the martyrs and the men in uniform who valiantly fought and continue to fight on the borders to safeguard the country's honour.

On this occasion, Governor Acharya paid his rich homage to the valour and sacrifices of India's soldiers at a special ceremony held at Lok Bhavan.

Addressing an assembly comprising Veer Naris, disabled soldiers, veterans, serving personnel and senior dignitaries on the occasion, Governor Acharya, paying his unparalleled gratitude to the

brave hearts who laid down their lives in service to the nation, said that the day serves as a reminder of every citizen's duty to acknowledge the immense contributions made by the armed forces.

Honouring the spirit of sacrifice that defines the life of a soldier, the Governor emphasised that from guarding the borders in treacherous conditions to leading relief and rescue efforts during disasters, the armed forces remain the embodiment of courage, discipline and compassion.

He moreover said that the bravery of soldiers inspires the nation, their sacrifices humble all citizens, and their dedication ensures the safety of the country.

Reaffirming Assam's commitment to the welfare of veterans and their families, the Governor noted that the state is home to around 41,968 ex-servicemen, 10,361 Veer Naris. He acknowledged the continuous efforts of the Directorate of

Sainik Welfare and the 21 District Sainik Welfare Offices, which are working around the year to support the veteran community.

During the programme, the Governor released a wall and table calendar showcasing the activities of the Directorate of Sainik Welfare and the welfare initiatives for the ex-servicemen community carried out by the Directorate.

Five veteran achievers from the state were also felicitated for their notable contributions.

A major highlight of the day was the launch of the visionary initiative 'Sainik Tujhe Salaam', under which Armed Forces veterans aged 90 and above, as well as Veer Naris and Veer Mothers across the state, will be honoured at their homes by the District Administration and Zila Sainik Welfare Offices every year on Armed Forces Flag Day. The Governor expressed pride that Assam received special commendation from the Defence Min-

ister Rajnath Singh at the National Conference in New Delhi on 29-30 September for exemplary efforts in ex-servicemen welfare.

He further elaborated on the Lok Bhavan's initiative, the 'Assam Governor Rashtriya Kritagyata aur Jagroktta Yojana', which aims to inspire the youth by connecting them with the lives and experiences of soldiers through programmes organised in schools and colleges.

Appealing to the people of Assam to generously contribute to the Armed Forces Flag Day Fund, the Governor stated that though nothing can compensate for the sacrifices of the armed forces, generous contributions by the countrymen can assuage the hardships faced by the soldiers and their family members. On the occasion, he exuded his confidence that the state will continue working tirelessly for the well-being of the soldiers and their next of kin.

## 8 Northeast states showcase cultural diversity at Hornbill Festival

KOHIMA

Day 7 of the ongoing Hornbill Festival at the Naga Heritage Village in Nagaland's Kisama, on Sunday, showcased the rich cultural diversity and celebrated the spirit of harmony of the eight northeastern states.

The festivities extended from the majestic hills of Nagaland and Meghalaya to the beautiful valleys of Manipur and Mizoram, and from the mighty Brahmaputra of Assam to the unique heritage of Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, and Sikkim.

The Mizoram cultural troupe performed Cheraw (bamboo) dance, known for its rhythmic use of bamboo staves, and Sarlamkai, a warrior dance symbolising victory. The Nyishi community of Arunachal Pradesh presented Juju Jaja Jaminja, performed during harvest to invoke the deity of wealth, along with Rikhampada, featuring devotional songs and love ballads traditionally sung by women.

Manipur's Kabui Rongmei community showcased Duisha Laam, or the waterfall dance, reflecting the graceful flow of water, and Kit Laam, inspired by the flamboyant movements and gaiety of crickets after the monsoon.

Tripura's Chakma community also performed the popular Bizu Dance, noted for its sudden

pauses, and the Jhum Dance, representing the various stages of jhum cultivation through circular and linear formations.

From Meghalaya, the Khasi community performed the Mastieh Dance, a thanksgiving dance expressing gratitude to the creator for good health and prosperity, and a harvest dance performed joyfully by men and women after the harvest season.

Nagaland's Lotha tribe women presented Nzanta, a post-harvest thanksgiving dance, and Mungyanta, performed during the Tokhu Emong festival to celebrate the fruits of their labour.

Sikkim's Bhutia community also performed the Snow Lion Dance (Singhi Chham), honouring Mt. Khangchendzonga, believed to resemble the sacred snow lion that symbolises fortune and prosperity.

The Karbi community of Assam performed Chong Kedam, a martial dance usually performed during Chomangkan to protect the spirits of the deceased from evil forces.

The cultural event was curated by the North East Zone Cultural Centre, Dimapur.

The day's programme was hosted by Nagaland Deputy Chief Minister Y. Patton, with S. Krishnan, Secretary, Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology, as the special guest.

# STRANDED AT GUWAHATI AIRPORT: Passenger Hits Out at IndiGo Over Shutdown Counters, Unreachable Helpline

GUWAHATI

IndiGo's ongoing nationwide flight disruptions have left passengers at Guwahati's Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport facing cancellations, unanswered queries, and mounting travel costs on Monday.

One visibly distressed passenger shared her ordeal with ANI after being stranded for days without clarity or assistance.

The traveller, who had flown from Jaipur to Guwahati, said her scheduled return flight on December 5 at 5:55 PM was abruptly cancelled, triggering chaos at the airport. "I had come from Jaipur and had a return ticket for December 5 in an IndiGo flight scheduled at 5:55 PM. It was cancelled, and there was a lot of chaos at the airport, due to which the staff closed the window, and we went back," she said.

She added that she made repeated attempts over the next three days to reschedule his ticket or contact IndiGo's grievance team, but said customer support did not respond. "I tried for 3 days, but neither my



ticket was rescheduled nor did the grievance contact number respond," she said.

"We finally booked a ticket on Air India two days ago, which cost us 25,800," the passenger said, adding that they are still waiting for IndiGo to refund the original fare. "We are trying, but there has been no refund yet," she further added.

Meanwhile, air travel across India has been in chaos with widespread IndiGo flight disruptions on Monday, and major airports across the country reported exten-

sive cancellations.

Ahmedabad Airport reported 18 IndiGo cancellations by 8 AM, including nine arrivals and nine departures. However, airport authorities confirmed that terminal and airside operations remained smooth and that passenger facilitation was being handled. 21 IndiGo flights operated during this period, including seven arrivals and 14 departures.

At Bengaluru's Kempegowda International Airport (KIAL), a total of 127 IndiGo

flights were cancelled, with 65 arrivals and 62 departures affected.

Hyderabad's Rajiv Gandhi International Airport (RGIA) also saw a severe impact, with 77 IndiGo flights disrupted as of today, including 38 arrivals and 39 departures cancelled, according to airport authorities.

Furthermore, Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGI) recorded the highest number of cancellations so far today, with 75 departures and 59 arrivals, 134 flights in total, being called off.

The large-scale disruptions prompted Delhi Airport to issue an advisory urging passengers to check their latest flight status before leaving for the airport.

Meanwhile, passengers at Chennai International Airport, Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA) and Gujarat's Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport in Ahmedabad, Assam's Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport were stranded in terminal areas as they waited for updates on their flights.

Jaipur International Airport also reported multiple IndiGo cancellations, including flights to Hyderabad, Chennai, and Delhi. However, airport authorities confirmed that the situation remained calm, with no major issues reported among passengers despite the cancellations.

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IndiGo crisis enters day 7; 250 flights cancelled in Delhi, Bengaluru; Mumbai also hit by cancellations



## NEW DELHI

Over 250 IndiGo flights were cancelled from Delhi and Bengaluru airports on Monday as the disruptions in the crisis-hit airline's flight operations entered the seventh day, sources said.

Hyderabad's Rajiv Gandhi International Airport (RGIA) reported 77 IndiGo flights affected so far, 38 arrivals and 39 departures cancelled, airport authorities confirmed.

The ripple effect of IndiGo's operational issues was also felt in Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport, where passengers faced widespread delays and cancellations.

The ongoing turmoil has prompted aviation regulator DGCA to extend the

deadline for IndiGo CEO Pieter Elbers and COO-Accountable Manager Isidro Porqueras to respond to its show-cause notices. The replies, originally due within 24 hours of the notices issued on Saturday, must now be submitted by 6 pm on Monday.

In its notice, the DGCA flagged "significant lapses" in IndiGo's planning, oversight, and resource management, pointing to large-scale operational failures that have stranded lakhs of passengers since December 2. The airline attributed the disruptions to regulatory changes in flight duty time limitations (FDTL) for pilots. The nationwide disruptions also prompted the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) to issue a formal appeal to

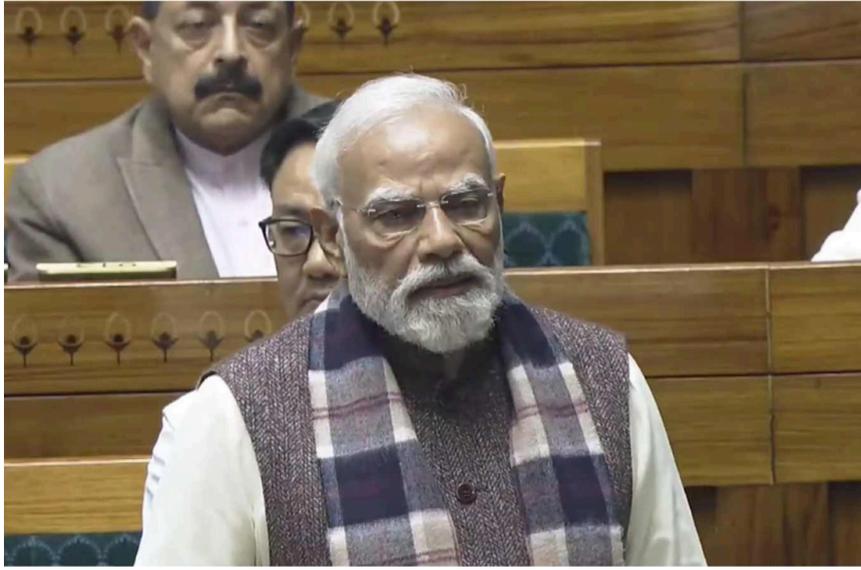
all pilot bodies, urging full cooperation as airlines navigate mounting operational strain.

The regulator noted that unpredictable weather, peak holiday travel, seasonal demand, and rising passenger loads are compounding pressures on airline operations.

With the onset of the fog season and heavy winter travel, the DGCA warned of further challenges ahead.

Following the appeal, the Airlines Pilots Association of India (ALPA India) said it is ready to fully support the DGCA and the Ministry of Civil Aviation in managing the crisis, but cautioned that rolling back the revised Flight Duty Time Limit (FDTL) norms would compromise fatigue protection and passenger safety.

# Vande Mataram is a mantra that energised Freedom Movement: PM Modi in Lok Sabha



## NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday hailed Vande Mataram as a "powerful mantra" that energised and inspired India's freedom struggle, calling its 150th anniversary a historic milestone for the nation. Addressing a special discussion in the Lok Sabha on the sixth day of the Parliament Winter Session, PM Modi said that the government aims to "restore the glory of Vande Mataram for future

generations."

As the Prime Minister entered the House, members of the ruling party greeted him with chants of "Vande Mataram," setting a patriotic tone for the proceedings.

PM Modi described Vande Mataram as a guiding force during the independence movement, embodying courage, sacrifice, determination, and devotion. "It is a matter of pride that we are witnessing 150 years of Vande Mataram. Remembering this sacred

mantra today is a great privilege for all of us," he said.

The Prime Minister linked the occasion to several historic milestones being celebrated this year, including 75 years of the Constitution, the 150th birth anniversaries of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Birsra Munda, and the 350th martyrdom year of Guru Teg Bahadur. Together, he said, these reflect India's long-standing traditions of unity, sacrifice, and nation-building. PM Modi also invoked the 1975

Emergency, recalling that the 100th anniversary of Vande Mataram had coincided with what he described as "a dark calamity" in India's democratic history. He said the Constitution was "throttled," patriots were imprisoned, and the spirit of democracy was suppressed. Treasury benches responded with chants of "shame."

"When Vande Mataram completed 100 years, India was in the clutches of the Emergency. At that time, the patriots were jailed, and the country witnessed a black period," he said, adding that the 150th anniversary marks an opportunity to reclaim pride in this iconic symbol of resistance and unity.

Slamming the opposition for remaining absent during the discussion, PM Modi said the moment demanded collective participation. "We are here to acknowledge the debt of Vande Mataram collectively. This song united the nation from North to South and East to West. The time has come to unite again." He urged lawmakers to draw inspiration from the mantra to fulfil the dreams of freedom fighters and reaffirm India's resolve to become a self-reliant and developed nation by 2047. PM Modi said that commemorating 150 years of Vande Mataram is not merely a tribute to history but a reaffirmation of India's democratic spirit, ensuring that the lessons of the past continue to guide the nation's future.

The BJP-led NDA has been allotted three hours for its participation in the debate, while a total of ten hours has been reserved for discussions across both Houses. The 6th Session of the 18th Lok Sabha and the 269th Session of the Rajya Sabha began on December 1 and will conclude on December 19.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Netanyahu says Israel and Hamas will enter ceasefire's second phase soon

## TEL AVIV

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday that Israel and Hamas are "very shortly expected to move into the second phase of the ceasefire," after Hamas returns the remains of the last hostage held in Gaza.

Netanyahu spoke during a news conference with visiting German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and stressed that the second phase, the disarming of Hamas and the demilitarization of Gaza could begin as soon as the end of the month.

Hamas has yet to hand over the remains of Ran Gvili, a 24-year-old police officer who was killed in the Hamas-led Oct. 7, 2023, attack that sparked the war. His body was taken to Gaza.

The ceasefire's second stage also includes the deployment of an international force to secure Gaza and forming a temporary Palestinian government to run day-to-day affairs under the supervision of an international board led by U.S. President Donald Trump.

The return of Gvili's remains — and Israel's return of 15 bodies of Palestinians in exchange — would complete the first phase of Trump's 20-point ceasefire plan.

Hamas says it has not been able to reach all remains because they are buried under rubble left by Israel's two-year offensive in Gaza. Israel has accused the militants of stalling and threatened to resume military operations or withhold humanitarian aid if all remains are not returned.

Merz said Germany, one of Israel's closest allies, is assisting with the implementation of the second phase by sending officers and diplomats to a U.S.-led civilian and military coordination center in southern Israel, and by sending humanitarian aid to Gaza.

Netanyahu said few people believed the ceasefire's first stage could be



achieved, and the second phase is just as challenging.

"As I mentioned to the chancellor, there's a third phase, and that is to deradicalize Gaza, something that also people believed was impossible. But it was done in Germany, it was done in Japan, it was done in the Gulf States. It can be done in Gaza, too, but of course Hamas has to be dismantled," he said.

Merz said Germany will "always stand up for Israel's existence and security" after the atrocities of the Holocaust. "This is part of the unchanging core of

our relationship. This applies today, it applies tomorrow and it applies forever."

The chancellor also said Germany still believes that a two-state solution is the best possible option but that "the German federal government remains of the opinion that recognition of a Palestinian state can only come at the end of such a process, not at the beginning."

The U.S.-drafted plan for Gaza leaves the door open to Palestinian independence. Netanyahu has long asserted that creating a Palestinian state would

reward Hamas and eventually lead to an even larger Hamas-run state on Israel's borders. Netanyahu also said that while he would like to visit Germany, he hasn't planned a diplomatic trip because he is concerned about an arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court, the U.N.'s top war crimes court, last year in connection with the war in Gaza.

Merz said there are currently no plans for a visit but he may invite Netanyahu in the future. He added that he is not aware of future sanctions against Israel from the European Union nor any plans to renew German bans on military exports to Israel.

Germany had a temporary ban on exporting military equipment to Israel, which was lifted after the ceasefire began on Oct. 10.

The Israeli military said it killed a militant who approached its troops across the so-called Yellow Line that divides the Israeli-controlled majority of Gaza from the rest of the territory.

Gaza's Health Ministry says Israeli forces have killed more than 370 Palestinians since the start of the ceasefire, and that the bodies of six people killed in attacks had been brought to local hospitals over the past 24 hours.

In the original Hamas-led attack in 2023, the militants killed around 1,200 people and took more than 250 others hostage. Almost all the hostages or their remains have been returned in ceasefires or other deals.

Israel's offensive in Gaza has killed at least 70,360 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which operates under the Hamas-run government. The ministry does not differentiate between civilians and combatants, but says that nearly half the dead have been women and children. The ministry is part of Gaza's Hamas government and its numbers are considered reliable by the U.N. and other international bodies.

### Japan summons China envoy after Chinese military aircraft locked radar onto Japanese jets



## TOKYO

Tokyo has summoned Beijing's ambassador after Chinese military aircraft locked radar onto Japanese jets, the latest incident in the row ignited after Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's comments backing Taiwan.

Takaichi suggested last month that Japan would intervene militarily in any Chinese attack on the self-ruled island that Beijing claims as its own and which it has not ruled out seizing by force.

J-15 jets from China's Liaoning aircraft carrier on Saturday twice locked radar on Japanese aircraft in international waters near Okinawa, according to Japan.

No damage or injury was caused, but it was the first time that Japan had disclosed such an incident.

Fighter jets use their radar for fire control to identify targets as well as for search and rescue operations.

Japan had scrambled its F-15 jets because it was worried about possible "airspace violations", chief government spokesman Minoru Kihara said Monday.

China's navy said Sunday that the Japanese planes

"repeatedly approached the Chinese Navy's training area and caused trouble, seriously affecting the normal training of the Chinese side and seriously endangering flight safety."

A statement said that Tokyo's claim was "completely inconsistent with the facts" and told Japan to "immediately stop slandering and smearing".

Kihara responded on Monday that China's "claim that the Self-Defense Forces aircraft seriously obstructed the safe flight of Chinese aircraft is unfounded."

Vice Foreign Minister Takehiro Funakoshi summoned ambassador Wu Jianghao on Sunday and "made a strong protest that such dangerous acts are extremely regrettable."

Funakoshi "strongly urged the Government of China to ensure that similar actions do not recur," the Japanese foreign ministry said late Sunday.

Takaichi said the same day that Japan would "respond calmly and resolutely."

Beijing's foreign ministry said it rejected that protest, and had lodged its own counter-protest, according to state news agency Xinhua.

The comments on November 7 about Taiwan

by Takaichi, seen before she became premier in October as a China hawk, have enraged Beijing.

China has urged its citizens to avoid Japan — they are the biggest source of tourists — and cultural events involving Japanese performers and movies have been hit.

Last week Japanese and Chinese vessels engaged in a fresh standoff around disputed islands administered by Japan in the East China Sea that have long been a flashpoint.

Aside from reportedly renewing a ban on Japanese seafood imports, China has however so far stopped short of imposing more serious economic measures such as curbing exports of rare earth metals.

But the Yomiuri Shimbun daily reported on Sunday that China's export permit procedures for rare earths — key ingredients for smartphones and electric vehicles — to Japanese companies were taking longer than usual.

Kihara told reporters that there have been "no significant changes", adding however that China's existing control measures were having a "serious impact on the global supply chain."

## ME'GONG FESTIVAL 2025 OPENS WITH A MASSIVE TURNOUT AND GLOBAL ACTS IN GARO HILLS



### KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

**TURA:** The fifth edition of the Me'gong Festival opened on Thursday with a packed crowd, a strong global line-up and the presence of Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma, who inaugurated the state's flagship cultural event in Tura.

The opening day made clear why the festival has become one of Meghalaya's biggest drivers of tourism and cultural enterprise. Thousands of visitors filled the grounds as international and home-grown artists took over the Aski Stage through the evening. Richard Marx set the tone with a setlist that blended classics with new tracks from his upcoming album Afterhours. The American singer told the crowd he was delighted to return to India and perform at Me'gong for the first time. Neeti Mohan followed with a high-energy set that moved from Ishq Wala Love and Jiya Re to retro favourites like Lag Ja Gale. She praised the landscape of Garo Hills and ended her performance with a tribute to Zubeen Garg, singing Mayabini in honour of the late icon who was born in Tura.

The crowd engagement only intensified through the evening as festival-goers sang along through most performances. By the time Nucleya took over with his trademark bass-heavy set, the festival grounds had shifted into a full-scale dance arena. Earlier, Julian Marley brought a reggae interlude that added a global rhythm to the night.

Local talent shared the spotlight throughout. Meghalaya's Haystack Ladies, Strum Stories and Ahaia delivered well-received sets, underscoring how the state's indie scene has strengthened in recent years.

A key moment of the evening came from the Top 7 finalists of the Chief Minister's

Meghalaya Grassroots Music Project. Bands including Nictophilia, Magnificent Obsession, Emberfall, Misagathia and Rise and Shine performed before their biggest crowd yet. For many, sharing a line-up with international names marked a milestone. Nineteen-year-old Jakrima R Marak from Tura said the project has opened rare opportunities for young musicians across the state. Food and culture played an equally strong part in the festival's opening. The Great Garo Hills Cook Off returned with Nambie Jessica Marak, MasterChef India Season 8 runner-up, serving as a guest judge. She praised participants for combining indigenous flavours with fresh interpretations using ingredients unique to Meghalaya. The cook-off reaffirmed the festival's push to promote traditional food cultures. Visitors also explored traditional sports like Anding Oka, checked out the Brew Village, tried VR experiences and interacted with artisans and dancers from across the region. PRIME Meghalaya entrepreneurs showcased food, crafts and beverage stalls across the venue. The scale of participation and the mix of contemporary staging with indigenous culture again highlighted how Meghalaya has positioned itself as a key player in India's cultural economy. The state has steadily pulled in global artists, expanded major festivals and invested in creative infrastructure to build a sustainable tourism and music ecosystem. With the opening day setting a high bar, attention now turns to Day 2. The Aski Stage will feature British band Blue, electronic duo Yellow Claw, Kanika Kapoor and Praateek Kuhad.

The Kingfisher Stage will host Hoi Hoi Makkbil, G-Hills Finest, Crack Gang, Rough Road and Nokpante, alongside a cosplay contest and ongoing cultural showcases.

The first day's energy suggests another packed outing as Me'gong Festival 2025 continues.

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# The Charrismatic Kaziranga

The NEIR 2026 will reach Kaziranga on January 15, when the winter chill sets in, and carry out its activities the next day, January 16. Kaziranga has a kind of presence that doesn't rely on drama. You don't need soaring mountains or postcard lakes to feel its force. The park works on a different scale. Wide floodplains. Tall elephant grass. Forest patches that look ordinary until something massive moves inside them. The quiet is never really empty. It's a pause before something reveals itself.

Kaziranga's story begins long before it became a national park. At the turn of the twentieth century, when rhinos were disappearing fast, conservationists and administrators pushed for protection of this landscape. What started as a small reserve eventually grew into one of India's most successful wildlife sanctuaries. Today, Kaziranga isn't just an ecological asset. It's a symbol of how a place can fight back from the edge when people commit to protecting it.

The first thing that strikes you is scale. Kaziranga stretches along the Brahmaputra, its terrain shaped by the river's moods. The park isn't a single consistent ecosystem. It shifts constantly between wetlands, grasslands, and semi-evergreen forests. During the monsoon, parts of it drown under floodwater. When the water retreats, animals return to feed on the fresh growth. This cycle of destruction and renewal is so deeply woven into the park's rhythm that you can't understand Kaziranga without understanding the river.

And then there are the rhinos. This is their kingdom. You see them grazing alone or in small groups, their bodies heavy but their movement almost casual. They don't seem to hurry. They've learned to trust the land again. Kaziranga holds two-thirds of the world's remaining one-horned rhinoceroses, and watching one at close range is a reminder of what conservation actually means: not documents or declarations, but a living, breathing animal that almost vanished a century ago.

But the rhino is only one part of the story. The park supports a dense population of tigers, and though you rarely see them, you feel their authority. Their tracks in the mud, the alarm calls of deer, the sudden stillness in a patch of grass—everything hints at power moving through the park's hidden layers. Kaziranga has one of the highest tiger densities in India. The fact that you may not see one doesn't diminish the experience. If anything, it sharpens your sense of being in a functioning, healthy ecosystem.

The elephants offer a different kind of drama. Entire herds cross the grasslands with a level of coordination that feels choreographed. Young ones stay tucked between adults, protected from stray vehicles or curious tourists. Their presence alone can shift the energy of a safari. You learn quickly that in Kaziranga, you aren't the center of the story. You're a guest on someone else's land.

Kaziranga is divided into zones—Kohora, Bagori, Agaratoli, and Burapahar. Each has its own character. Kohora is the familiar starting point, accessible and well-organized. Bagori gives you sweeping views of the floodplains and some of the most reliable rhino sightings. Agaratoli, on the eastern edge, feels quieter and more forested. Burapahar tests your patience a little more but rewards you with a deeper sense of wilderness. You can visit all four and still feel you've barely scratched the surface.

The landscape never stays still. Morning safaris begin with mist rising off the grass, softening every outline. Birds start calls that sound like a dozen different clocks going off at once. As the sun rises, the light transforms the wetlands into sheets of silver. By afternoon, the brightness sharpens into a harsher tone, and the animals retreat to shade. Evening brings cooler air and a rush of movement—herds feeding more openly, birds returning to roost, and predators preparing for night.

Birdlife is one of Kaziranga's overlooked joys. You'll spot adjutant storks, bar-headed geese, crested serpent eagles, Bengal floricans, hornbills, and dozens more if you pay attention. The park sits along a major migratory route, so the variety changes through the year. Even someone with a casual interest in birds ends up scanning tree-tops more than expected.

Kaziranga's beauty lies in its simplicity. Grasslands dominate the terrain. Yet those grasses are the basis of the entire food chain. They feed rhinos, deer, buffaloes, and elephants. They hide predators. They even determine where water collects, shaping the wetlands that sustain countless



species. Conservation here isn't about one animal alone. It's about maintaining an entire system built around cycles of grazing, growth, flooding, and migration.

There's a human story too. The villages surrounding the park live with wildlife in ways that are difficult for outsiders to fully grasp. Crop raids happen. Elephants wan-

der into fields. Villagers sometimes lose livestock to predators. Floods push animals out of the park and into human settlements. Yet communities continue to adapt. Some families work in tourism. Others in forest protection. Many simply coexist because this land has shaped their lives for generations.

The relationship isn't perfect. Conflicts occur. But the region has shown that with consistent management, strong protection, and community involvement, conservation can succeed without pushing people entirely out of the picture. Kaziranga's guards, often working in tough conditions, deserve credit for the park's stability. They patrol on foot, on elephant back, and in boats during floods. Their efforts rarely make headlines, but without them, the rhinos would not be here. Now let's talk about the floods. To an outsider, yearly flooding looks like a disaster. And it can be, especially when animals drown or roads cut off

villages. But ecologically, the floods keep the park alive. They wash away old vegetation, deposit nutrients, and prevent the grasslands from turning into forests. Without this annual renewal, Kaziranga would lose the character that supports its wildlife. The challenge is to manage the floods, not prevent them entirely. Climate change, however, alters the equation. Heavier rainfall, more unpredictable river behaviour, and increased erosion threaten both animals and people. The park's future depends on how well Assam adapts to these new patterns. Conservation can't remain static when the environment refuses to stay predictable. And then there is tourism. Done responsibly, it brings income, awareness, and incentive to protect the park. But unmanaged tourism can crowd sensitive zones. Kaziranga, for the most part, has found a workable balance. Safaris follow strict routes. Tourist numbers remain controlled. But as interest grows, the pressure will increase. The success story needs constant maintenance.

Kaziranga isn't just a national park. It's a living argument for why conservation matters. It proves that species can bounce back, ecosystems can recover, and humans and wildlife can share space if the boundaries are respected. The park doesn't rely on spectacle to impress you. Its charm lies in how naturally everything fits together. You leave with a sense of how rare that balance is, and how much effort goes into keeping it intact. Spend a day in Kaziranga and you carry the memory. Spend a few more and you begin to understand that the place isn't defined by rhinos alone. It's defined by resilience, by the pulse of a river that shapes life, and by the quiet, steady work of people who've protected the land long enough for the animals to reclaim it. That's what stays with you long after you've left the grasslands behind.





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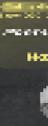
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