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## PERSPECTIVE

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## 'Legacy of courage must guide us': BJP MLA

**IMPHAL**  
BJP MLA and former Manipur Rural Development Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Friday called upon the women of the state to take a leading role in restoring peace and normalcy in violence-hit Manipur, invoking the historic legacy of Manipuri women who spearheaded mass uprisings against colonial rule.

Addressing the Nupi Lal Day observance at Singjamei in Imphal, Khemchand recalled the courage and sacrifice of Manipuri mothers who led the women's uprisings against British oppression. "May their legacy guide us to walk steadfastly on the path of peace, unity and progress for a developed Manipur," he said.

Nupi Lal, or the Women's Uprising, is observed annually on December 12 to commemorate two landmark movements led by Manipuri women in 1904 and 1939.

The first uprising was directed against the British-imposed forced labour on Manipuri men, while the second erupted in protest against the export of rice, which had led to acute scarcity in the state. Referring to the 1939 movement, Khemchand said the collective resistance of Manipuri women compelled the colonial authorities to withdraw the exploitative policy and restore stability.

Emphasising unity among Manipur's diverse communities, the MLA said lasting peace could only be achieved through collective effort. "All 36 communities have contributed to building present-day Manipur. Their unity is essential for progress and a harmonious future," he said.

### WHO SAID WHAT



My gratitude to the people across Kerala who voted for BJP and NDA candidates in the local body polls in the state. Kerala is fed up of UDF and LDF. They see NDA as the only option that can deliver on good governance and build a #VikasitaKeralam with opportunities for all. ~ Narendra Modi, PM

# Manipur BJP MLAs rush to Delhi after summons; buzz over government formation peaks

**IMPHAL**

A day after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) high command summoned Manipur MLAs to New Delhi, speculation over the formation of an elected government intensified on Saturday as legislators were seen making a beeline for Imphal Airport.

Since morning, BJP MLAs have been departing for the national capital following the summons, signalling urgency within the party ranks. Sources said that at least 22 legislators had flown to Delhi by the time this report was filed.

Several MLAs were seen hurrying through the airport, including S. Kebi, L. Shushindro and Thongam Biswajit, who reportedly arrived late for their flight. The sudden spurt in political activity has fuelled expectations of a possible breakthrough in the prolonged political impasse, with several BJP legislators expressing hope that a new, popular government could soon be formed in the state.

Former chief minister N. Biren Singh, speaking to reporters before leaving for Delhi, said he was hope-



ful of a positive outcome. "Let us see. I am expecting a positive outcome for a better Manipur from the meeting. I hope the Central Government will take some positive decisions," he said, adding that clarity would emerge only after

discussions with the party's central leadership.

BJP sources said Biren Singh continues to be one of the strongest contenders for the chief minister's post if a new government is formed. At the same time, internal

dynamics within the party have come into focus, with two apparent groups said to have emerged - one led by Biren Singh and the other by Assembly Speaker Thokchom Satyabrata Singh. Sources indicated that MLAs Y. Khemchand, K. Robindro and L. Rameshor Meitei, among others, are backing the Speaker's camp. Assembly Speaker Thokchom Satyabrata Singh said that, to his knowledge, all MLAs had been invited for the meeting. "All MLAs, including Kuki-Zo MLAs, have been invited," he told reporters.

Echoing the sentiment, BJP MLA Paonam Brozen said the legislators were responding to a party summons. "We were called by the party yesterday. We are all going to the party headquarters in Delhi and are expecting something better. I have heard that Kuki-Zo MLAs are also invited," he said.

Adding to the optimism, BJP MLA Ushyam Deben said he believed a popular government could be formed by December. MLA K. Joykishan said the formation of an elected government would be the central agenda of the proposed

meetings. When asked about any preconditions, he remarked, "How can we set preconditions to our high command?" Striking a more cautious note, BJP MLA Y. Khemchand said peace remained his foremost concern. "Peace is the main agenda for me. I do not know whether a new government will be formed," he said. Senior party leaders, however, remained tight-lipped about the exact agenda of the Delhi meetings.

The developments have reignited political discussions across Manipur, which has been under President's Rule amid prolonged ethnic unrest. On December 12, Biren Singh had informed the media that the party's Northeast coordinator, Sambit Patra, had personally contacted most MLAs, instructing them to be present at a meeting in Delhi, reportedly scheduled for 5.30 pm.

As the Manipur BJP leadership converges on the national capital, all eyes are now on the outcome of the high-level deliberations and whether they will pave the way for the return of an elected government in the state.

## Tripura reports major progress on security directives, over 70% implemented

**AGARTALA**

Tripura has implemented more than 70 per cent of the security directives issued at the recent Directors General of Police and Inspectors General of Police (DGSP/IGSP) conference in Raipur, Chief Minister Manik Saha said on Thursday, indicating significant progress in strengthening the state's law and order framework.

Speaking after a state-level review meeting at Pragna Bhavan on December 12, Saha said the deliberations in Raipur - attended by the Prime Minister, the Union Home Minister and senior police leadership from across the country - focused on emerging national security challenges, evolving crime patterns and concerns over the alleged role of certain NGOs and foreign entities in funding and supporting protests.

The chief minister said the state government has acted swiftly on the recommendations that emerged from the conference. "More than 70 per cent of the directives have already been implemented. We are moving in the right direction, though there is still scope for further strengthening," he said.

Saha noted that the role of the

police has expanded significantly beyond traditional crime control. "Policing today involves responding to disasters, managing accidents and ensuring security during large public events. The police force is at the forefront of all these challenges," he said.

Highlighting what he described as an improved national security environment, the chief minister contrasted the current situation with the period prior to 2014, when he said the country faced sustained pressure from neighbouring nations, including Pakistan and China.

He added that the guidance provided by the Prime Minister and the Union Home Minister has been "clear," and urged Tripura's senior police officers to align their work with the broader national vision of building a "new India," while contributing to the creation of a "new Tripura" anchored in strong law and order.

Calling for a more people-centric approach to policing, Saha emphasised the need to safeguard democratic values, build public trust and instil a sense of pride and service within the police force as the state continues to implement the remaining security measures.

## Gaurav Gogoi accuses Assam CM of fuelling 'industry of hatred', vows end to divisive politics

**NEW DELHI**

Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president Gaurav Gogoi on Friday mounted a sharp attack on Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, accusing his decade-long leadership of fostering what he described as an "industry of hatred" in the state. Gogoi said the Congress is determined to put an end to divisive politics and refocus governance on development and employment, particularly for the youth.

Addressing a press conference following a major induction programme at the All India Congress Committee (AICC) headquarters, Gogoi said Assam's political climate has become increasingly polarised under the current regime. He asserted that the Congress would work to restore a politics centred on inclusivity, democratic values and economic opportunities.

The induction event marked a notable political development, with several senior leaders from the Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) formally joining the Congress. Those inducted included Bubul Das, Ashok Kumar Roy Pradhani, former BJP leader Gautam Dhanowar and prominent Karbi leader Longki Tokbi. Gogoi said the new entrants would significantly strengthen



the party's organisational base ahead of upcoming elections.

Claiming growing public discontent with the Sarma government, Gogoi said thousands of people from Assam were preparing to travel to Delhi to participate in Rahul Gandhi's "Vote Chor, Gaddi Chhor" protest rally scheduled to be held at Ramli-Maidan on December 14.

He also alleged that an atmosphere of fear prevails in the state, discouraging dissent. According to Gogoi, people are increasingly hesitant to question the government, attend opposition meetings or express their views freely on social media.

Responding to queries on the Zubeen Garg murder case, the APCC president said the matter must be allowed to proceed strictly through legal and judi-

cial channels, adding that the chargesheet would be examined as part of due process.

On the recent defection of the Congress's state social media head to the BJP, Gogoi dismissed it as a reflection of the ruling party's anxiety over the Congress's growing digital reach.

He further accused the BJP of employing "manipulative tactics" to secure victories in the 2024 Lok Sabha and recent state elections in Maharashtra, Haryana and Bihar.

The event was attended by AICC Assam in-charge Jitendra Singh, co-in-charges Prithviraj Sathe and Manoj Chauhan, MPs Pradyut Bordoloi and Rakibul Hussain, former MLA Satyabrata Kalita, and several other senior Congress leaders.

# ICMR Backs Assam's Demow Model in Rs.13.5-Crore Nationwide Snakebite Research

**GUWAHATI**

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has sanctioned a groundbreaking, four-year, multi-state research project totaling Rs 13.5 crore to tackle the devastating public health challenge of snakebite envenoming (SBE) in India.

The study, titled "Zero Snakebite Death Initiative: Community Empowerment & Engagement for Mitigation of Snakebite Envenoming," aims to develop a unified, replicable, and highly effective national model for prevention and management.

This extensive implementation research will span seven states, including Assam, West Bengal, Odisha, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Jharkhand, and will be spearheaded by Dr. Jaideep Menon of Amrita Institute, Kerala, as the Principal Investigator.

In a significant recognition of local healthcare excellence, the Demow Model from Sivasagar, Assam, has been chosen as one of the key successful models to be scientifically studied and potentially scaled across the participating states.

The project will analyze and inte-



grate proven regional strategies, including: Community Awareness, Volunteers & Participation (The Demow Model); focusing on robust community engagement and referral networks; Protective Equipment Distribution (Maharashtra Model); distributing personal protective gear to high-risk communities; Anti-Snake Venom (ASV) Injection during Transport (Himachal Pradesh Model); pioneering pre-hospital care by administering ASV in ambulances; and

Digital Platforms (Kerala Model): utilizing digital tools for better coordination and real-time surveillance.

The research will be conducted under the banner of SARPA (Snakebite Awareness, Response, Prevention & Action). This integrated approach seeks to bridge the critical gap between affected communities and formal health systems, ensuring victims receive life-saving treatment within the crucial 'golden hour.'

For Assam, the study will focus on the Demow and Gelekey blocks of Sivasagar. Dr. Surajit Giri from Demow Hospital has been appointed as the Investigator for Assam on this project.

The research and community study are slated to begin in January 2026. ICMR has already allocated resources, including one research scientist and four technical staff members for each participating state, to ensure rigorous implementation and data collection.

This collaborative, multi-state effort seeks to produce high-quality implementation evidence to significantly reduce snakebite mortality and morbidity, addressing India's disproportionately high burden of SBE, which is estimated at approximately 58,000 deaths annually.

The primary objective is to co-develop, pilot, and implement a composite model of community engagement for SBE prevention and mitigation.

Secondary objectives include assessing changes in awareness among all stakeholders (from community volunteers to doctors) and developing a real-time digital snakebite dashboard for data-driven surveillance.

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## TO VOTE OR NOT IS NO LONGER THE ONLY QUESTION

I have never been an enthusiastic voter. My father was a mid-level officer in the Indian Railways and we lived in various localities in Delhi. At that time, it was considered somewhat infra-dig to vote—after all, one had to stand in line with the hot polloi to cast a vote. The vote really did not matter anyway, as the Congress was predominant and would win regardless of whether we voted. Other parties, particularly the Jana Sangh, were gradually coming to the fore and, by the late 1950s, had begun to win municipal elections.

This was long before T N Seshan's stint as the Chief Election Commissioner. Political parties were so desperate to win votes that, at times, they hired cars to take voters to their polling booths. Party booth representatives kept a close watch on those on the voters' list who had voted and those who had not, and sent party members to try and persuade the non-voters to come to the polling booth.

One such representative came to our house on Turkman Road in central Delhi and made an impassioned appeal to my father to "boat". My father legitimately asked why he should go boating. "For parliament," said the party member. My father pointed out that it was not possible to reach parliament by boat. The party member gave up on it as a lost cause.

My parents never voted in their lives. I preferred to enjoy my holiday rather than stand in line to cast my vote in an ill-kept primary school. I never voted in my home state Kerala until 1996, when I was posted to Delhi. I did not return to Kerala until I retired in 2011. In Delhi, I voted twice—in 2008 for the Delhi legislative assembly, and in 2009 for parliament. I was Cabinet Secretary then and it would have looked awkward if I did not have the mandatory black mark on my finger. After returning to Kerala, I voted again in 2014, 2019, 2021, and 2024.

The huge controversy regarding the special intensive revision, therefore, did not cause a flutter for me until it came home to roost. I assumed this was just another bureaucratic nightmare created by three bureaucrats sitting in the Election Commission. I have always held that when bureaucrats are vested with constitutional power, some of them go berserk. They try to express their authority by tormenting others. But it didn't create a nuisance for me as long as it was confined to Bihar.

Now it has come home to me in Kerala. Suddenly, I was confronted with a long form with many entries in Malayalam. It wanted not merely my name and other details about me, my parents, and my wife, but also the details I had given in the previous SIR (of which I was totally unaware), including those of an undefined 'bandhu', or relative. Besides, I was required to affix a photograph to the form. I haven't had my picture taken for a long time, as soft copies sent by email or WhatsApp usually suffice.

The booth level officer, a lady, did not merely have to collect the form, but also to ensure that I was not an unmitigated liar by collecting details of corresponding entries made in the 2002 electoral rolls. There was no way she could have done that, because I was working in Geneva in 2002. Of course I had voted in the 2000s—in Delhi in 2008 and 2009—but the local authorities in Kerala could not connect with the Delhi electoral rolls despite the enormous strides we are reputed to have made in digital technology.

I have what they call an EPIC, a voter identity card. This card was obtained with little effort. The chief electoral officer had himself sent someone to assist me in providing the details. The validity of this card is now under threat because if an entry in my name and my wife's name is not found on the 2002 rolls, I would be considered 'untraceable' and therefore cease to exist, as so many thousands of disenfranchised Bihar migrants who work for short periods in northern cities and in the more prosperous southern states of India.

It doesn't matter to us if my wife and I are denied the right to vote. We are in our seventies, with little interest in politics and governance. I am, however, afraid that if our names are removed from the voters' list, I may, at some future date, be deprived of citizenship rights as well. The way the bureaucracy is being given a free hand to oppress the ordinary citizen, this too is not beyond the realms of possibility. And I feel sorry for the hard-pressed booth level officers, some of whom have died by suicide, leaving their wives, children, and aged parents to fend for themselves. This has gone beyond the limits of bureaucratic excess—it has assumed the dimensions of tyranny.

So far, successive election commissioners, governments, and political parties have tried to persuade more and more people to vote. Yet, at the 2024 general election, the national turnout was barely 66 percent, indicating that more than a third of the registered voters did not vote. I recall that the Election Commission had established a Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation division and institutionalised the National Voters' Day on January 25.

Besides, the Election Commission had developed and deployed the Electoral Rolls Services Net, a sophisticated, centralised national database designed to detect 'demographically similar entries' and duplicates across constituencies. There are other countries like Australia, considered a gold standard for direct voter enrolment, as well as the US and the UK, where this kind of harassment is not known to take place en masse. There are other Indian government agencies, such as the income tax department, that focus on making tax filing easier for taxpayers. The Prime Minister himself has said, "It is the dream of the country to take India forward on the digital path at a rapid pace so that the life of every citizen becomes easier." The worst denouement of this controversy would be a conflict between the government and the opposition. A government that wants to make life easier for the people should look at the problems confronting voters fairly, and not be pushed into a corner where they have to defend what is clearly bureaucratic overreach.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

"You must live in the present, launch yourself on every wave, find your eternity in each moment. Fools stand on their island of opportunities and look toward another land. There is no other land; there is no other life but this." - Henry David Thoreau

# Centre's Decision to Set up System For Rare Earth Magnets is a Game Changer



R. SURYAMURTHY

India's decision to establish a domestic rare-earth magnet industry may seem like a technical footnote in a week crowded with political and economic headlines. In reality, it marks one of the country's most important strategic turns in years. The Union Cabinet's approval of a ₹7,280-crore scheme to build a complete ecosystem for sintered rare-earth permanent magnets (REPMs) is more than industrial housekeeping. It is New Delhi's clearest admission that India can no longer afford to be a passive spectator in the global race for minerals that power the 21st century.

For two decades, China has dominated the critical minerals landscape with remarkable discipline and foresight. It did not merely mine these materials; it mastered the refining, separation, alloying, and processing stages where true value and geopolitical leverage sit. The result is a level of concentration that would be alarming in any strategic sector: Beijing controls most of the world's rare-earth magnet output, a decisive share of lithium conversion, and an overwhelming percentage of the processing of cobalt, manganese, and graphite.

India, like most countries, has relied on this ecosystem because it was convenient, competitive, and seemingly reliable. But the last few years have shown just how fragile this arrangement is. Export controls, diplomatic tensions, price shocks, and geopolitical signalling have all demonstrated the risks of depending on a single supplier for minerals that underpin everything from EV motors to missile guidance systems. India's own import bills tell the story. Lithium-ion battery imports have soared into the billions, and key intermediates such as lithium carbonate, nickel sulphate, cobalt sulphate, and LiPF<sub>6</sub> are still entirely sourced from abroad.

The newly approved REPM scheme is significant because it targets the segment that China has used most effectively as leverage: the midstream. The plan is not merely to assemble magnets, but to create full-stack capacity—converting rare earth oxides into metals, metals into alloys, and alloys into high-strength magnets. The government will back the initiative with heavy incentives, global competitive bidding, and a seven-year support structure that gives companies both the time and confidence to invest.

For India, rare-earth magnets are only the starting point of a larger strategic repositioning. Over the past year, the government has rolled out a series of decisions that indicate a new seriousness about critical minerals.

Incentives now extend beyond exploration to refining, precursor chemicals, and high-purity processing—the very activities that India long ignored while China quietly fortified its industrial moat. Mining reforms have been aligned with industrial policy, and the National Critical Mineral Mission has been tasked with coordinating what used to be a fragmented policy space.

Just as important is India's new-found diplomatic clarity. Recognising that no domestic strategy can succeed without diversified global access, New Delhi has intensified its partnerships with Latin America, Africa, Australia, and Canada—the geographies that hold the greatest reserves of lithium, cobalt, nickel, and rare earths. India's state-backed vehicle, KABIL, has become more active in securing stakes and off-takes in overseas assets. Quiet but significant progress has been made in Argentina's lithium triangle; exploratory ties are being deepened with mineral-rich African states; and India's relationships with Australia and Canada—two of the world's most stable providers of battery metals—have begun shifting toward long-term, strategic mineral cooperation.

These moves are not about rivalry for rivalry's sake. India's goal need not be to replace China—a task no country can accomplish soon—but to ensure that India is not exposed to one-sided risks in technologies central to its own growth and security. A balanced reading of global politics shows that mineral concentration is not a theoretical threat; it can manifest overnight in the form of export restrictions, price squeezes, or quietly withheld shipments during diplomatic friction. India's energy transition, industrialisation, and defence modernisation cannot be built on supply chains that remain vulnerable to external shocks beyond its control.

At the same time, India's domestic mineral base, while promising, is not something it can fully rely on. Many high-profile finds remain in the early inference stage. Mining and refining are long-gestation activities with complicated environmental and community considerations. For the foreseeable future, India will have to build a hybrid model: secure resources abroad, refine strategically at home, and recycle aggressively to recover materials from retired batteries and electronic waste. Recycling, in particular, is the fastest path for India to reduce import dependence. Recovery technologies for lithium, nickel, and cobalt have improved sharply, and India has the scale of end-of-life products to build a circular ecosystem around them.

There is, of course, a risk that India

falls into its old patterns: fragmented decision-making, slow permits, policy drift, and the lure of cheaper imports that undermine domestic investments. That would be the fastest way to lose this race before it even begins. A laser-like focus on execution is essential. Mineral strategies require decades of consistency; without continuity, India will end up with scattered projects instead of a coherent industrial base. Getting the REPM scheme right—commissioning plants on schedule, achieving global quality standards, securing supply for defence and EV sectors, and eventually exporting magnets—will be a litmus test for whether India can execute complex industrial programmes.

But there are reasons for cautious optimism. India's market today is large enough to justify full domestic value chains. EV demand is rising, grid storage is expanding, and renewable energy has become mainstream. These industries cannot grow on imported uncertainty. They require stable, predictable supplies of refined minerals. That urgency creates political alignment. It also gives Indian companies the confidence to invest in technologies that were once seen as too niche or too capital-intensive.

The geopolitical context further tilts in India's favour. Many countries are searching for mineral partners that are both reliable and not entangled in great-power rivalries. India occupies a unique position: large enough to matter, trusted enough to partner with, and increasingly willing to bring diplomatic muscle to its industrial goals. If it can synchronise domestic incentives with overseas partnerships—something the REPM scheme hints at—India can carve out a meaningful place in global mineral supply chains without having to mirror China's scale.

Still, realism is necessary. China's dominance will not erode because India has announced a few strategic schemes. It will erode only if India stays committed for the long haul—building refineries, training metallurgists, investing in R&D, scaling recycling, securing overseas equity, and maintaining consistent policies across elections and budgets. This is a generational undertaking, not a typical five-year plan.

The magnet scheme is important because it marks the first concrete step toward that long horizon. It tells industry that India is ready to put money on the table. It tells partners abroad that India is serious about diversifying supply chains. And it tells China—quietly but unmistakably—that India is no longer content to

occupy the weakest link in the minerals-to-manufacturing chain.

India's fight to end dependence on China's mineral muscle will be long, uneven, and at times frustrating. But for the first time, the country seems prepared for the effort. The clean-energy economy of the future will belong not just to the nations that build batteries, motors and turbines—but to those that can secure the minerals behind them.

India has taken its first step. What it does next will decide whether this becomes a turning point or another unfinished ambition swept away by the next cycle of cheap imports and lost opportunities.

### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

**Such a huge disgrace in the heart of Kolkata will remain etched in the pages of history forever! Purely for political reasons, an internationally renowned player like Lionel Messi was brought to Kolkata after the installation of a bizarre 70-foot statue of him. People were then misled into purchasing tickets priced between ₹8,000 and ₹10,000 and were brought to the venue. Due to extremely poor management, Messi was not even allowed to stay for the programme and was taken away. As a result, nothing occurred except a major scam. In anger, people poured onto the stadium grounds, vandalising chairs and tearing down posters. By God's grace, no major tragedy occurred. For bringing an international player like Messi to West Bengal, playing with the emotions of ordinary people, and pushing them towards such serious risk, the State Sports Minister, Aroop Biswas, must resign immediately. ~ Amit Malviya, Member, National Executive, BJP**



## INDIGO FILES INCOMPETENCE, COVER-UPS AND A BRUTAL REALITY CHECK FOR INDIA

### LT COL ANKIT SHARMA

IndiGo, India's largest domestic airline, plunged into its worst operational crisis in years. What began as a crew-rostering problem triggered by new regulations quickly snowballed into a full-blown travel nightmare. Over days, flights across the country were cancelled en masse, passengers were left stranded at airports, luggage went missing and the airline's assurances of refunds and hotel stays rang hollow for countless travellers. What was presented as temporary chaos soon looked like systemic failure and many say the airline's and regulator's handling of the crisis amounts to a betrayal of public trust.

### SCALE OF CANCELLATIONS AND THE WORST-HIT SECTORS

According to the media reports, by December 5, 2025, more than 1000 flights had been cancelled nationwide. On that day alone, all flights scheduled from the airport in Delhi, around 225 flights were grounded till midnight. Major airports across India, including Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai and more, saw widespread disruption. On-time performance plummeted. Where it used to be a strong selling point, this dropped to as low as 8.5 percent on certain days. In short, chaos was nationwide, affecting all major travel hubs and hitting both business and leisure travellers alike.

### STRANDED FAMILIES: ABANDONED AT UNWANTED STATIONS

The sudden cancellations left thousands of travellers, including families stranded far from home. Reports emerged of people left with no timely rebooking options and no adequate shelter or guidance from airline staff.

Many found themselves sleeping on airport floors, waiting for updates that never came on time. One passenger, describing the chaos at the airport, said: "I have been here for over 12 hours. Every time they are telling us one-hour delays, two-hour delays. Another recalled: "My luggage has not arrived since two days. I came via IndiGo... I have a baby; we badly need our essentials. With connecting flights cancelled and no clarity on baggage, for many families—especially those travelling with children or the elderly—this breakdown meant not only a logistical nightmare but emotional distress and real hardship."

### NO CREW, MISSING LUGGAGE, NIGHTS SPENT IN TERMINALS

A key cause of this meltdown: inadequate crew planning. The underlying trigger was the new crew-rest and duty-time norms introduced by the regulator DGCA (Flight Duty Time Limitations, FDTL), which the airline clearly failed to anticipate in its staffing schedule. Passengers described chaotic scenes: empty check-in and boarding counters, no staff to answer queries, last-minute cancellations and confusion at every turn. Compounding the misery was missing baggage. Numerous travellers reported that their checked-in bags never arrived or were delivered late, even after days. Many families spent nights at airports, waiting for help that often did not come. For travellers relying on timely flights, for weddings, visas, business or long-haul trips, this was more than inconvenient. It was a breakdown of trust and safety.

### CELEBRITY AND PUBLIC OUTRAGE

The crisis has drawn travellers' outrage, and several public figures voiced their frustration as well.

\* Actress dancer Lauren Gottlieb, whose flight was cancelled, did not mince words. She reportedly said travellers should avoid IndiGo, claiming the airport scene looked like an "apocalypse".

\* Industrialist Harsh Goenka took a more sarcastic route, mocking the situation with a viral AI-generated video, a rickshaw painted to look like an IndiGo plane, jabbing at the airline's new fleet with no delays.

\* Another wrote: "Feeling bored at home? Fly IndiGo and be a part of the chaos and indulge in the adventure of finding your own luggage for days."

\* Absolute chaos and mockery at #DelhiAirport. Passengers have been stranded for the past 12 hours with no confirmation.

The flood of statements from celebrities to regular flyers underlines that the crisis hasn't just erupted in travel. It has damaged the social license and public faith in the airline.

### THE 'REFUNDS AND HOTEL CLAIM- AND WHY IT RINGS HOLLOW

In an attempt to contain the backlash, the airline publicly announced that it would automatically refund passengers affected by cancellations between December 5-15, waive scheduling fees and arrange hotel rooms, transport, food/snacks, and lounge access, especially for senior citizens. By December 8, the airline claimed it had resumed "nearly 1,800 flights" and that baggage deliveries were ongoing. However, many passengers, especially those on urgent travel, with families or with special needs, say these measures were inadequate, delayed or never reached them. Social media revealed no alternate flights for days, no food or hotel stays, baggage still lost, staff indifferent, even refunds delayed

or complicated. For many, the airline's public claims painted a rosier picture than the ground reality. As one traveller put it: "I ended up having to book my own last-minute travel at crazy prices". With so many saying "normalcy restored" felt like a slog of broken promises, trust in IndiGo has been severely shaken.

### MORAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

This crisis was no accident; it was the result of poor planning, misjudged logistics and lack of contingency for a regulatory shift that was foreseeable. According to reports, the operational meltdown stemmed from the airline's failure to anticipate the effects of the stricter FDTL norms enforced by DGCA. Given the scale of disruption, thousands stranded, baggage lost, families harassed, many argue this is more than a "service failure". It's a public interest failure. Therefore, accountability must be robust.

\* Should the country's aviation minister be held morally and politically responsible? After all, the Ministry oversees airline regulation and is responsible for ensuring airlines are prepared for regulatory changes. Critics argue that such a large-scale failure reflects poorly on regulatory oversight.

\* Should the management and owners of IndiGo be tried, not just for negligence, but for harassing the common public, denying basic rights, luggage safety, timely refunds, and alternate arrangements that customer is entitled to.

\* At the very least, there should be a transparent inquiry, either judicial or via DGCA, into operational preparedness, compensation owed and systemic failures to prevent recurrence.

# Zubeen Garg death case: Wife welcomes SIT chargesheet, seeks swift punishment



GUWAHATI

Garima Garg, wife of late singer Zubeen Garg, on Friday welcomed the chargesheet filed by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) in connection with the artist's death, expressing hope that the judicial process would now move swiftly to deliver justice.

Speaking to reporters on December 12, Garima said the investigation was conducted on the basis of the First Information Report (FIR) lodged by the family and thanked the investigating agency for carrying out the probe in line with their expectations. "The investigation began on the basis of the FIR filed by us

against the accused on behalf of our family. The probe proceeded on expected lines, for which we are very grateful to the investigating agency," she said. She added that the outcome of the investigation reflected the sentiments of the public at large. "Now everything depends on the judicial process, which we hope will move smoothly. We have faith in our nation's judiciary and want the guilty to be punished accordingly," Garima said. Referring to the state government's move to expedite the trial, she noted that Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has indicated that the Chief Justice of the Gauhati High Court would be approached to constitute a fast-

track court. "We also want the matter to be resolved at the earliest. Our house has been shattered, and people are deeply disturbed that a person like Zubeen Garg could be killed. The people of the entire Assam want the guilty to be punished," she said. On questions related to the involvement of Singaporean authorities, Garima reiterated that the probe was rooted in the FIR filed by the family and said they continued to repose full faith in both the investigation and the judiciary.

The SIT has named four accused in the chargesheet filed before a local court on Friday, charging them with murder. Those accused in-

clude Garg's secretary Sidhartha Sharma and festival organiser Shyamkanu Mahanta. Garg's band members Shekhar Jyoti Goswami and Amritprava Mahanta have also been charged with murder. Mahanta was the chief organiser of the North East India Festival, which Garg had travelled to Singapore to attend. The singer died under mysterious circumstances while swimming in the sea on September 19. Additionally, the singer's two personal security officers, Nandeswar Bora and Prabin Baishya, have been charged with criminal conspiracy and criminal breach of trust for allegedly misappropriating funds or property entrusted to them.

## ED action in Meghalaya nets Rs17.91 crore in assets in nationwide Ponzi scam

SHILLONG

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has provisionally attached assets worth ₹17.91 crore in connection with the Pearlvine International Ponzi scam, as part of its ongoing money-laundering investigation spanning multiple states.

ED officials said the attachment was carried out on December 10 by the agency's Shillong Sub-Zonal Office under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002. The attached assets include 13 immovable and seven movable properties, among them several luxury vehicles allegedly purchased using proceeds of crime. The money-laundering probe originates from an FIR registered by the CID, Meghalaya Police, following a complaint lodged by the Reserve Bank of India's Shillong office. A chargesheet under various provisions of the Indian Penal Code was later filed against individuals linked to the fraudulent investment scheme operated under the banner of Pearlvine International.

According to the ED, Pearlvine International was an unrecognised entity that falsely projected itself as a US-based company. It lured investors with promises of unusually high returns, charging a minimum membership fee of ₹2,250 and operating a classic Ponzi structure across the country between 2018 and March 2023.

The agency said the operators organised promotional seminars across India and abroad to attract investors, at one stage claiming to have more than 80 lakh members in India and overseas in 2022. Investigations indicate that the scheme collected at least ₹1,575 crore, of which ₹385.35 crore was allegedly never returned to investors. The ED has identified Neeraj Kumar Gupta as the principal accused in the case. Officials said Gupta purchased the domain pearlvine.com in November 2015 and played a key role in promoting the scheme, including organising large-scale seminars in India and Thailand.

## Evicted families protest over electoral roll revision in Dhubri ahead of polls

GUWAHATI

Hundreds of residents, previously evicted from Charuabakhra and Santoshpur areas, staged a protest on Friday in front of the Bilasipara Sub-Divisional Officer's (SDO) office in Assam's Dhubri district, raising concerns over the ongoing Special Revision (SR) of the electoral roll. The demonstration was organised by the Bilasipara Block Youth Congress. "The administration must understand that these people are victims of eviction. Subjecting them to repeated scrutiny without rehabilitation is unjust," a Youth Congress leader said. The protesters alleged that the SR process has added to their suffering at a time when many families are still struggling to rebuild their lives after eviction drives. Evicted families participating in the protest claimed they are living in extreme uncertainty without permanent shelter or stable livelihoods.

They said repeated verification visits and official inquiries

under the SR process have created fear and confusion among people already displaced from their original habitations. Raising slogans and holding placards, the protesters demanded immediate intervention from the administration. "We have already lost our homes and means of survival. Now, in the name of voter list revision, officials are visiting us repeatedly, questioning our identity and residency," said one protester. Another participant said the process has left families anxious about their voting rights. "People are scared their names will be deleted when they are already homeless," he added. During the protest, representatives of the affected families submitted a memorandum to the Bilasipara SDO and the local Election Officer. In the memorandum, they urged the authorities to adopt a humanitarian approach while conducting the SR process and to ensure that no eligible voter is excluded due to displacement caused by eviction.

## Akhil Gogoi calls Assam CID chargesheet on Zubeen Garg 'politically motivated'

GUWAHATI

Rajior Dal chief and Sivasagar legislator Akhil Gogoi on Friday questioned the credibility and intent of the chargesheet filed by the Assam CID in connection with the death of singer Zubeen Garg.

Talking to the media, he alleged that the probe was politically motivated, procedurally flawed, and prepared without visiting the actual incident site in Singapore.

Gogoi said, "This document is a piece of fantasy. This is not Zubeen da's murder chargesheet; this is Himanta Biswa Sarma's election manifesto for 2026. For the past 84 days, the Chief Minister has created a politically convenient narrative instead of addressing the questions raised by the people of Assam."

He claimed the government rushed the report to influence the upcoming 2026 elections and mislead the public.

He alleged that the chargesheet submitted by the Assam CID was



"crafted for political advantage" rather than based on factual and scientific inquiry.

Raising procedural objections, Gogoi questioned how a chargesheet could be filed without visiting the incident site in Singapore. "How can an investigating officer file a chargesheet without even travelling to Singapore?" he asked. "This is the first chargesheet in

the world prepared without visiting the crime scene."

He further alleged that the government rushed the chargesheet to prevent the kind of public backlash the BJP faced during the anti-CAA movement.

According to Gogoi, the intention was to ensure BJP workers could freely enter villages during the upcoming election season without facing public anger.

Gogoi also referred to legal precedents, saying he had repeatedly highlighted the Madras High Court verdict in the Jayalalithaa case, which emphasised that investigations into incidents outside India must follow international procedures.

He asserted that this requirement was completely ignored by the authorities.

He dismissed the government's claim that 3,500 documents and 7,000 statements were collected during the probe, calling them meaningless without proper ground verification. "They

have not even examined the water where Zubeen da reportedly drowned, yet they proceeded with a chargesheet. If it were up to me, I would have torn it apart," he remarked.

Gogoi accused the Chief Minister of making claims about a murder motive without explaining how the murder was supposed to have taken place.

He alleged that the chargesheet was built in a way that "gives the guilty a chance to escape rather than ensuring punishment."

He also criticised the Chief Minister's remark that the matter now rests with the court. "How can the court deliver justice when the foundation itself is flawed? Even if you bang your head against a wall, justice cannot happen in this manner," he said.

Concluding his remarks, Gogoi reiterated that the chargesheet was "strategically timed" and "politically designed" to influence the environment ahead of the 2026 Assam elections.

## AAI Imphal International prepares for winter season

KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

**IMPHAL:** AAI's Imphal International Airport has stepped up preparations for the winter fog season, holding a high-level fog preparedness meeting on Friday to reduce flight disruptions and ensure safe, orderly operations during low-visibility conditions.

Chaired by Airport Director Chipemmi Keishing, the meeting brought together officials from the India Meteorological Department, CISF, AAI department heads, and airline station managers. IMD Imphal Scientist D K Ambethkar and CISF CASO Kiran Khade were among those present.

Here's what matters. The discussion centred on coordination, readiness, and quick decision-making during foggy conditions, with a clear focus on passenger convenience. Officials reviewed operational protocols, weather inputs, and contingency planning to keep diversions and cancellations to a

minimum.

Imphal International Airport currently operates with a Category I Instrument Landing System, supported by full airfield ground lighting infrastructure. This includes PAPI, SALS, guard lights, and other aeronautical lighting systems that allow aircraft to operate safely in reduced visibility. Under CAT I ILS norms, landings can take place with visibility of 800 metres or Runway Visual Range of 550 metres, as per regulatory standards.

Operational capability has been further strengthened with the commissioning of a transmissometer that provides real-time RVR data. The system has been fully functional since July 2024 and plays a key role in decision-making by air traffic controllers and flight crews during adverse weather.

In a significant boost to winter operations, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation has

recently approved Low Visibility Procedures for the airport. With LVP in place, aircraft departures can now be conducted with RVR as low as 400 metres, subject to compliance with safety and technical requirements.

The Airport Director informed the meeting that all critical systems are functional and readiness-certified. Standard operating procedures for fog management are firmly in place to ensure continuity of operations through the winter months.

Passenger facilitation was another key focus. The airport has arranged additional seating, ensured availability of food, beverages, essential medicines, and sanitary items, and strengthened the flow of real-time flight information. Coordination has also been completed with taxi operators and nearby hotels to handle weather-related contingencies smoothly.

To tighten coordination, an

inter-departmental communication group has been set up for real-time decision-making. A dedicated Operations Control Room has also been established at AAI Imphal to provide immediate assistance. The control room can be reached at 9402880368. Reinforcing the airport's readiness, Keishing said a full-scale mock exercise involving all stakeholders has already been conducted. He stressed that cancellations and diversions should be avoided as far as possible, assuring airlines of full operational and logistical support. It was also agreed that scheduled flights would be prioritised over diverted flights to protect passenger interest and maintain operational discipline.

The meeting ended with all stakeholders reaffirming their commitment to safe, efficient, and passenger-friendly operations at Imphal International Airport throughout the winter fog season.

## Historic consecration of rare Somnath Shivalinga fragments in Diphu

SUSHANTA ROY

**DIPHU:** In a momentous spiritual event, the Pran Pratishtha (consecration) ceremony of rare Shivalinga fragments originating from the ancient Somnath Temple in Gujarat will be held tomorrow at the Arts of Living International Centre (Ashram) Diphu in Karbi Anglong district, by the founder of Arts of Living Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar.

These sacred Somnath Shivalingas, preserved for over 1,000 years following historical invasions, have arrived at the ashram, offering devotees a divine blessing and a rare opportunity for darshan after centuries.

Devotees are invited to join this historic occasion and receive the divine grace of Lord Shiva. This event marks a significant moment of cultural and spiritual reunion, bringing the timeless energy of Somnath to Assam.

Vishnu Prakash, in charge of the Art of Living Ashram has informed that, a special spiritual event at the Diphu Ashram will take place tomorrow from morning hours.

He has informed that it's a rare chance to see the fragments of the original Somnath Shivalinga and the Vedic Rudra Pooja with pundits, and receive prasadam, celebrating the sacred Jyotirlinga's presence after centuries.

"Original Shivalinga Fragments,

these aren't just replicas; they are believed to be pieces of the ancient Somnath Jyotirlinga, destroyed in 1026 AD, preserved by a Brahmin family". Prakash said.

The Shivalinga has Unique Magnetic Properties. The fragments possess unusual, powerful magnetic qualities, phenomenon scientists haven't fully explained, linking them to ancient scriptures. Spiritual Blessing.

It's considered a blessed, historic occasion to receive blessings from these sacred relics.

This event offers a profound spiritual experience, connecting devotees to ancient traditions and powerful divine energy.

The Somnath Shivalinga - that's a powerful symbol, there's this legend that says the Shivalinga at Somnath was originally in the moon's orb. It's said to be a jyotirlinga, a radiant linga that was installed by none other than Chandra, the moon god himself.

Story goes that Chandra was married to 27 daughters of Daksha Prajapati, but he was super in love with Rohini, so he neglected the others. Daksha wasn't happy, obviously, and cursed Chandra to lose his light.

Chandra prayed to Lord Shiva, and Shiva was like, He told Chandra to install a linga at Somnath and worship him. Chandra did just that, and the linga started shining bright like a moon, restoring Chandra's lost glory!

## Energy Conservation Day seminar in Agartala focuses on EV charging readiness and power system upgrades

KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

**AGARTALA:** A seminar on EV charging infrastructure and power system preparedness marked Energy Conservation Day in Tripura, hosted by The Institution of Engineers (India), Tripura State Centre, in association with the Tripura State Electricity Corporation Limited (TSECL). The event took place at the TSECL Conference Hall and brought together senior engineers, policymakers, and industry experts.

Er Paramananda Sarkar Banerjee, Chairman of IEI Tripura State Centre, presided over the programme. In his opening remarks, he drew attention to the pace at which India's electric vehicle ecosystem is expanding and explained why distribution utilities need to gear up for the transition. He said the shift to e-mobility is more than a change in transport habits. It is a chance to strengthen grid resilience, adopt smarter technology, and push sustainable energy practices across Tripura.

The keynote address was delivered by TSECL Managing Director Er Biswajit



Basu, who attended as Guest of Honour. He presented the current picture of EV penetration in Tripura and across the country, backed by data and national trends. He spoke about the rising need for charging infrastructure, operational challenges for DISCOMs, and the policy environment guiding EV rollout. He pointed to regulatory provisions and government incentives and explained how TSECL is aligning its

strategies with national goals.

A technical presentation by Prof (Dr) Priyanath Das of NIT Agartala followed. He spoke on the "Impact of EV Charging Station Placement in Radial Distribution Networks" and introduced an EV Allocation Index-Based Solution. His analysis covered voltage stability, network loading, and optimal charger placement, offering insights for planners and engineers working

on large-scale EV integration.

Er Pradip Sutradhar, Additional General Manager of Electrical Circle-I, TSECL, added to the discussion with a session on EV behavior within power systems. He explained how charging affects demand patterns, feeder design, and overall load management. His talk helped clarify the engineering considerations involved in preparing distribution networks for wide-spread EV use.

The seminar also heard from Shri Swapan Debbarma, General Manager (Tech), TSECL, who outlined the EV-related projects underway in Agartala. He described ongoing collaborations with government agencies and gave participants a clear sense of how these initiatives are progressing on the ground.

The programme concluded with a Vote of Thanks from Er Mita Saha, Additional General Manager, TSECL. She acknowledged the contributions of all speakers, guests, and participants and noted that the discussions would support Tripura's continued movement toward sustainable energy and electric mobility.

The seminar reaffirmed the commitment of IEI Tripura State Centre and TSECL to deepening awareness, encouraging technology adoption, and strengthening policy implementation for a more energy-efficient future.

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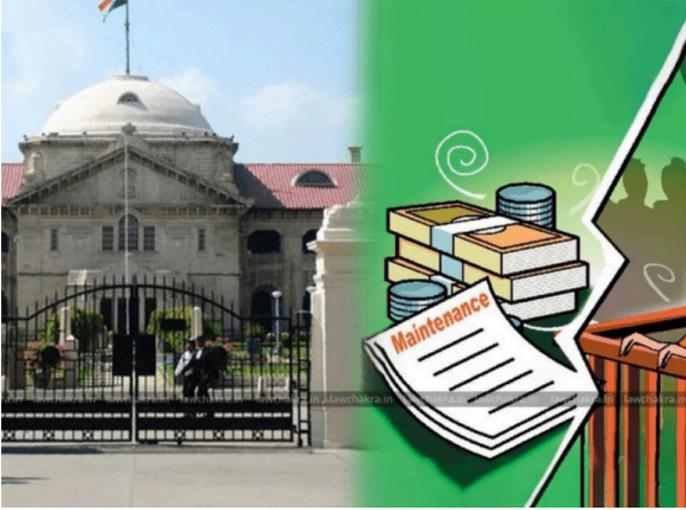
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## ‘Earning woman able to maintain herself’: Allahabad HC sets aside maintenance order



### LUCKNOW

In a significant decision, the Allahabad High Court set aside an order passed by the lower court of Gautam Buddh Nagar mandating a man to pay maintenance to his estranged wife, observing that she earned her living and did not reveal the true salary in her affidavit.

The bench comprising Justice Madan Pal Singh also allowed a criminal revision petition filed by the man Ankit Saha.

“A perusal of the impugned judgment indicates that in the affidavit filed before the trial court, the opposite party herself admitted that she is a post-graduate and a web designer by qualification. She is working as a senior

sales coordinator in a company and getting a salary of Rs 34,000 per month,” the court said in the order dated December 3.

“But in her cross-examination, she has admitted that she was earning Rs 36,000 per month. Such an amount for a wife who has no other liability cannot be said to be meagre; whereas the man has the responsibility of maintaining his aged parents and other social obligations,” it observed.

The High Court observed that the woman was not entitled to get any maintenance from her husband “as she is an earning lady and able to maintain herself.”

The man’s counsel argued in court that the estranged wife did not reveal the whole truth in the affi-

dat. “She claimed herself to be an illiterate and unemployed woman. When the document filed by the man was shown to her before the trial court, she admitted her income during cross-examination. Thus, it is clear that she did not come before the trial court with clean hands,” said the man’s counsel while making his submissions.

The court, in its order, said, “Cases of those litigants who have no regard for the truth and those who indulge in suppressing material facts need to be thrown out of the court.”

It impugned the lower court’s February 17 judgment and order, passed by the principal judge of a family court in Gautam Buddh Nagar and allowed the criminal revision petition filed by the man.

## “Sincerely apologise to Messi and his fans”: Mamata Banerjee after chaos at Kolkata stadium

### KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday ordered a high-level enquiry after chaos erupted during football icon Lionel Messi’s appearance at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan (Salt Lake Stadium) in Kolkata, expressing regret over the mismanagement and apologising to the Argentine legend, his fans and sports lovers.

The Chief Minister’s remarks came after disgruntled fans, upset over poor crowd management and Messi’s brief appearance at the venue, allegedly vandalised parts of the stadium.

The incident prompted the state government to announce the constitution of an enquiry committee to fix responsibility and recommend corrective measures to prevent such incidents in the future.

In a post on social media platform X, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said she was deeply disturbed by the events that unfolded at the stadium.

“I am deeply disturbed and shocked by the mismanagement witnessed today at Salt Lake Stadium. I was on my way to the stadium to attend the event along with thousands of sports lovers and fans who had gathered to catch a glimpse of their favourite footballer, Lionel Messi,” the Chief Minister said in her post.

“I sincerely apologise to Lionel Messi, as well as to all sports lovers and his fans, for the unfortunate incident. I am constituting an enquiry committee under the chairmanship of Justice (Retd.) Ashim Kumar Ray, with the Chief Secretary and the Additional Chief Secretary, Home and Hill Affairs Department, as members,” she added.

The Chief Minister further stated that the committee would conduct a detailed probe into the incident. “The committee will conduct a detailed enquiry into the incident, fix responsibility, and recommend measures to prevent such occurrences in the future. Once again, I extend my heartfelt apologies to all sports lovers,” Banerjee said.

Following this, several frustrated fans criticised ministers and politi-



cians for monopolising Messi’s time and failing to deliver promised attractions, such as actor Shah Rukh Khan.

Speaking to media angry fans accused the Ministers and politicians of hogging Messi’s time and failing to deliver on promises, such as securing Cine Star Shah Rukh Khan for the event.

“Absolutely terrible event. He came for just 10 minutes. All the leaders and ministers surrounded him. We couldn’t see anything. He didn’t take a single kick or a single penalty. They said they would bring Shah Rukh Khan too. They didn’t bring anyone. He came for 10 minutes and left. So much money, emotions, and time wasted. We couldn’t see anything,” said one fan.

“We are very disappointed... My child was very excited to see Messi... I think it’s a scam for the people. When Messi arrived, everyone surrounded him,” another fan told.

One angry fan claimed that he had bought a ticket for Rs 12 thousand but didn’t see Lionel Messi’s face during the event.

“Only leaders and actors were surrounding Messi... Why did they call us then... We have got a ticket for 12 thousand, but we were not even able to see his face,” he said.

A fan of star footballer Lionel Messi said, “Absolutely terrible event. He came for just 10 minutes. All the leaders and ministers surrounded him. We couldn’t see anything. He didn’t take a single kick or a single penalty. They said they would bring Shah Rukh Khan too. They didn’t bring anyone. He came for 10 minutes and left. So much money, emotions, and time wasted. We couldn’t see anything.”

Earlier, Messi virtually inaugurated a 70-foot-tall statue of himself at Lake Town in Kolkata on Saturday, along with West Bengal Minister and

Sree Bhumi Sporting Club President Sujit Bose.

The Argentine football legend arrived in the City of Joy early on Saturday morning to an overwhelming reception from fans. Enthusiastic supporters gathered in large numbers across key locations in Kolkata, eager to catch a glimpse of the global football icon, reflecting the immense popularity Messi enjoys in the country, particularly in West Bengal.

Demonstrating its admiration for Lionel Messi, the Sree Bhumi Sporting Club has completed construction of a massive 70-foot iron statue in Lake Town, South Dum Dum, Kolkata.

The statue depicts Messi holding the FIFA World Cup trophy, symbolising his historic triumph with Argentina at the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar. The statue will be virtually unveiled by Messi himself, making the occasion even more special for fans.

## INTERNATIONAL

## Iran arrests Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi

### DUBAI

Iran has arrested Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi, her supporters said Friday.

A foundation in her name said she was detained in Mashhad, some 680 kilometers (420 miles) northeast of the capital, Tehran, while attending a memorial for a human rights lawyer recently found dead under unclear circumstances.

A local official reportedly acknowledged arrests had been made, but did not directly name Mohammadi, 53. It wasn’t clear if authorities would immediately return her to prison, where she had been serving a sentence until her temporary release in December 2024 for medical purposes.

However, her detention comes as Iran has been cracking down on intellectuals and others as Tehran struggles with sanctions, an ailing economy and the fear of a renewed war with Israel. Arresting Mohammadi may spark increased pressure from the West at a time when Iran repeatedly signals it wants new negotiations with the United States over its nuclear program — something that has yet to happen.

The Norwegian Nobel Committee said it was “deeply concerned” by Mohammadi’s arrest.

The committee “calls on the Iranian authorities to immediately clarify Mohammadi’s whereabouts, ensure her safety and integrity, and to release her without conditions,” it said in a statement.

Her supporters on Friday described her as having been “violently detained earlier today by security and police forces.” They said other activists had been arrested as well at a ceremony honoring Khosrow Alikordi, a 46-year-old Iranian lawyer and human rights advocate who had been based in Mashhad.

“The Narges Foundation calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all detained individuals who were attending a memorial ceremony to pay their respects and demonstrate solidarity,” a statement read. “Their



arrest constitutes a serious violation of fundamental freedoms.”

Alikordi was found dead earlier this month in his office, with provincial officials in describing his death as a heart attack. However, a tightening security crackdown coincided with his death, raising questions. Over 80 lawyers signed a statement demanding more information.

“What we witnessed today is the Islamic Republic’s latest assault on the most basic human freedoms — where even mourning a slain lawyer becomes a punishable act,” said Hadi Ghaemi, the executive director of the New York-based Center for Human Rights in Iran.

“When peaceful citizens cannot mourn without being beaten and dragged away, it reveals a government terrified of truth and accountability. It also reveals the extraordinary bravery of Iranians who refuse to surrender their dignity.”

Footage purportedly of the ceremony showed Mohammadi with a microphone, calling out to the crowd gathered without wearing a hijab, or headscarf.

She started the crowd chanting the name Majidreza Rahnavard, a man whom authorities hanged from a crane in a public execution in 2022.

Footage published by her foundation also showed her without a hijab, surrounded by a large crowd.

Hasan Hosseini, the city governor of Mashhad, said prosecutors ordered security officials to temporarily detain a number of participants at the ceremony after the chanting of “norm-breaking” slogans, Iranian state television reported.

Hosseini described the detentions as preventive to protect those there from others in the crowd, but did not address claims that security forces used violence in making the arrests.

Other anti-government chants could be heard in purported video footage of the event.

Supporters had warned for months that Mohammadi was at risk of being put back into prison after she received a furlough in December 2024 over medical concerns.

While that was to be only three

weeks, Mohammadi’s time out of prison lengthened, possibly as activists and Western powers pushed Iran to keep her free. She remained out even during the 12-day war in June between Iran and Israel.

Mohammadi still kept up her activism with public protests and international media appearances, including even demonstrating at one point in front of Tehran’s notorious Evin prison, where she had been held.

Mohammadi had been serving 13 years and nine months on charges of collusion against state security and propaganda against Iran’s government. She also had backed the nationwide protests sparked by the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini, which have seen women openly defy the government by not wearing the hijab.

Mohammadi suffered multiple heart attacks while imprisoned before undergoing emergency surgery in 2022, her supporters say. Her lawyer in late 2024 revealed doctors had found a bone lesion that they feared could be cancerous that later was removed.

“Mohammadi’s doctors recently prescribed an extension of her medical leave for at least six more months to conduct thorough and regular medical examinations, including monitoring the bone lesion which was removed from her leg in November, physiotherapy sessions to recover from the surgery and specialized cardiac care,” the Free Narges Coalition said in late February 2025.

“The medical team overseeing Mohammadi’s health has warned that her return to prison — especially under stressful conditions of detention and without adequate medical facilities — could severely worsen her physical well-being.”

An engineer by training, Mohammadi has been imprisoned 13 times and convicted five. In total, she has been sentenced to over 30 years in prison. Her last incarceration began when she was detained in 2021 after attending a memorial for a person killed in nationwide protests.

## Awami League rejects Feb 12 polls, calls Yunus government illegal as Bangladesh crisis deepens



### NEW DELHI

Bangladesh’s political tensions escalated sharply on Thursday after the Awami League (AL) of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina rejected the interim government’s decision to hold national elections on February 12, accusing the administration led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus of being “illegal and fascist.”

The Awami League’s move marks a fresh rupture in the standoff that has gripped the country since Hasina fled amid student-led protests in August 2024. In Dhaka, the interim government announced the first election schedule since her ouster, with nearly 128 million voters eligible to participate. But the AL, whose registration was suspended after its activities were banned, is barred from contesting—a restriction the party says renders the poll

meaningless.

In a strongly worded statement, the AL alleged that the Yunus administration and its Election Commission lack the capacity to ensure a credible electoral process. “The Bangladesh Awami League has reviewed the election schedule announced by the illegal, occupying, killer-fascist Election Commission... Under their control, it is impossible to ensure a fair and normal environment where transparency, neutrality, and the people’s will can be reflected,” the statement said.

The party renewed its demand that Yunus step down and warned that holding elections without the Awami League, “the party that led the Liberation War,” was an attempt to destabilise the country. “The Awami League has the strength, courage and capacity to stand before the people... Attempting to hold an

election while excluding the... Awami League... is a scheme to push the country and the nation into a deep crisis,” it said.

The AL called for all restrictions on the party to be lifted, for “fabricated cases” against Hasina and other leaders to be withdrawn, and for the release of political prisoners “unconditionally.” It also demanded that the interim administration be replaced with a “neutral caretaker government to hold a free and participatory election.”

The deepening standoff has triggered concern across the region. Stepping up its mobilisation, the Awami League announced nationwide protests, including demonstrations after Friday prayers on December 12 and a morning-and-evening lockdown on December 13, as it pushes for what it calls a “people’s mandate-based” political settlement.

## NHRC Directs Fresh Probe Into Blockade of NH-2; Highlights Serious Rights Concerns Raised in Asem Roshan Singh's Petition



NEW DELHI

In a significant development, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has ordered a fresh inquiry and action-taken report into allegations of the continued denial of safe passage along National Highway-2 (NH-2) in Manipur's Kangpokpi district — a lifeline road that has remained persistently obstructed, triggering widespread humanitarian and economic distress.

Acting on a complaint filed by Asem Roshan Singh on June 25, 2025 and formally received on June 30, the Commission observed that the grievance points to a "complete denial of safe access at National Highway (NH-2) particularly in the Kangpokpi District, Manipur," resulting in "critical shortages essential goods and economic hardship for the valley people."

The complaint also alleged that despite repeated assurances, state authorities failed to ensure safe passage — exemplified by the March 8, 2024 attack on former RIMS Medical Superintendent Dr. Yengkhom Mohen Singh and his team, even while travelling under official escort. The complainant described this failure as a "major dereliction of duty by the state in protecting citizens' rights."

### Commission Flags Jurisdictional Clarification

The NHRC noted that the earlier report submitted by the Superintendent of Police, Imphal West, on September 4, 2025 stated that "there is no report of such incident happened within the jurisdiction of Imphal West district Police," clarifying that the attack actually occurred "near Gamphipai under the jurisdiction of Kangpokpi district



Even if I fail, I have to finish what I started.

Police, Manipur." In light of this, the Commission directed its Registry to forward the complaint to: District Magistrate-cum-Collector, Kangpokpi District, and Superintendent of Police, Kangpokpi District, with instructions to conduct a fresh inquiry and submit an action-taken report within two weeks.

The Commission further ordered that the complete and additional report sought in the matter must be submitted on or before January 4, 2026, for continued consideration.

All communications, the NHRC added, must be uploaded through the HRCNet Portal, noting that reports sent via email "may not be entertained."

Petitioner's Core Focus: A Humanitarian Crisis Created by NH-2 Blockade

The petition filed by Asem Roshan Singh under Section 12 of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, centers on one of the most pressing issues confronting Manipur today: the prolonged and unconstitutional blockade of NH-2 in Kangpokpi district.

The complaint highlights:  
1. Systematic denial of the constitutionally guaranteed right to free movement

NH-2 — the state's primary lifeline connecting Imphal to Dimapur — has remained inaccessible, particularly through Kangpokpi, resulting in widespread shortages, soaring prices, and near-total isolation of large civilian populations.

2. Grave violations of fundamental rights

The petitioner cites violations of Articles 14, 15, 19(1)(d), and 21 of the Constitution, arguing that the blockade disproportionately targets and harms economically vulnerable groups, students, patients, job seekers, and daily wage earners.

3. Breakdown of law and order

The March 2024 attack on Dr.

Mohen Singh, even while under state escort, is presented as evidence of collapsing protective governance.

Additional reports of abduc-

tion, intimidation, and targeted harassment in the region further underscore the absence of rule of law.

4. Severe humanitarian consequences

The year-long road closure has placed enormous strain on: Patients requiring urgent medical travel

Students attending institutions outside the valley

Small traders and truck drivers

Daily wage earners and essential service workers

5. Request for immediate interim relief

Given the impossibility of road travel, the petitioner urgently seeks a subsidized emergency airfare scheme for civilians forced to rely on air transport to reach Guwahati or Kolkata — a measure intended to prevent further distress among those unable to afford escalating flight prices.

6. Appeal for restoration of constitutional order

The petitioner urges the NHRC to:

Direct the State of Manipur and Ministry of Home Affairs to ensure safe passage and remove unlawful obstructions

Hold accountable those responsible for violations

Restore free, lawful movement through NH-2

Intervene to prevent further human rights deterioration

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# From Monks to Mountains to Military: A Traveller's Journey Through Tawang



RISHOV BHATTACHARJEE

When I first began the steep ascent from the plains of Assam into the high folds of Arunachal Pradesh, I had no idea that Tawang would leave such a deep mark on me. The district is often spoken of as a land of monasteries, a borderland shaped by history, a frontier guarded by soldiers, but nothing quite prepares you for that moment. The first rays of light strike the snow-dusted ridges of the eastern Himalayas as chants from Tawang Monastery rise like slow-moving mist. The sound rolls over the sleepy town, passes through pine-laden hills, and disappears into clouds drifting toward the Indo-China border. It is a sound that has echoed for more than three centuries, a reminder that Tawang is not merely a place, but a living bridge between faith, history, and geopolitical destiny. As the air thins and the clouds drift low enough to touch, Tawang reveals itself slowly, layer by layer, like a story waiting to be read.

## A Spiritual Legacy in the Clouds

Long before Tawang became a name associated with border tensions, it was a cradle of Mahayana Buddhism in the eastern Himalayas. The 17th-century Tawang Monastery, a sprawling complex perched high above the town, was founded by Merak Lama Lodre Gyatso under the guidance of the 5th Dalai Lama. Today, it stands as the second-largest monastery in the world after the Potala Palace in Lhasa.

Inside the three-storey Dukhang, the walls glow with centuries-old thangkhas and manuscripts. A massive statue of Buddha looks down serenely as young monks recite verses with quiet confidence. It is impossible not to feel humbled, this is not merely a place of worship, but a 350-year-old institution that has shaped the spiritual spine of the region.

A short drive away lies Urgelling Monastery, the birthplace of the 6th Dalai Lama, Tsangyang Gyatso. Unlike the grand monastery, Urgelling is modest, quiet, and surrounded by trees, including the sacred multi-trunk tree linked to his prophecy. Tsangyang Gyatso was a poet-saint, known for his unrestrained verses on love and longing. Legend says he planted a walking stick before leaving for Tibet, prophesying that he would return when all three trunks of the tree grew to equal height. Centuries later, the 14th Dalai Lama's arrival in Tawang in 1959, after fleeing Tibet, was seen by many as the quiet fulfilment of that prophecy.

This spiritual aura, layered with folklore and faith, gives Tawang a timelessness that few places can match. Yet beyond its calm, Tawang has witnessed storms of a different kind, conflicts that shaped its destiny.

## Where the Mountains Remember War

The serenity of the monasteries feels worlds away when you reach the Jaswantgarh War Memorial, yet both places tell stories of devotion, one spiritual, the other patriotic.

Looking at the memorabilia, letters, and the preserved room of Rifleman Jaswant Singh Rawat, I was struck by how personal the 1962 Indo-China war suddenly felt. The local guide narrated the story with pride, how Jaswant Singh, aided by two Monpa sisters, Sela and Nura, held off advancing Chinese forces for hours, shifting firing positions to give the illusion of a larger defense.

Tragically, Sela was killed during the encounter, and Nura was reportedly captured. Jaswant Singh was eventually martyred, but his bravery became legendary. The Indian Army regards him as a soldier who "continues to guard the post," maintaining a symbolic room for him at the memorial, his uniform and rifle intact.

A few kilometers beyond lies the climb to Sela Pass. At nearly 13,700 feet, the pass is windswept, stark, and unforgettable. The famous Sela Lake, often half-frozen, mirrors the surrounding peaks. It is easy to imagine how difficult and heroic it would have been to fight here, in temperatures that drop frighteningly fast.

These stories from 1962, painful yet heroic, are

now deeply woven into Tawang's identity. They serve as reminders of the immense human cost of protecting this frontier.

## Mountains, Passes, and Lakes: Tawang's Natural Wonders

No visit to Tawang is complete without travelling further up to Bumla Pass, one of the most remote and politically sensitive border points between India and China. The road climbs sharply, hugging cliffs and disappearing into dense fog. For stretches, I could see nothing but white, the kind that feels both magical and intimidating.

At 15,200 feet, the air is thin, and the winds cut through layers of clothing. Watching Indian soldiers stationed there, calm and composed, I understood why this pass symbolizes both vigilance and diplomacy. Bumla is one of the few designated Border Personnel Meeting points, where Indian and Chinese armies interact. Prayer flags flutter right beside military bunkers, a sight I doubt I will ever forget.

The next stop, Sangetsar Lake, felt like stepping into a painting. Formed in 1950 after a massive earthquake, it is popularly known as Madhuri Lake after a Bollywood sequence shot here. Its deep blue waters are punctuated by fallen tree trunks, surrounded by rugged hills and grazing yaks. The lake is jointly managed by the Indian Army and local communities, a reminder of how deeply intertwined they are in this region.

Even the landscape reflects this dual identity. Prayer flags flutter beside bunkers; serene gompas overlook rugged military trails; and markets sell butter lamps alongside heavy-duty winter gear



meant for soldiers.

From Gorichen Peak viewpoint, I watched the clouds part briefly, revealing snow-capped ridges. From the Tawang War Memorial Hill, I saw the town sprawled like a patchwork of colors against a backdrop of cliffs. Every viewpoint told a different story, of nature, resilience, and everyday life shaped by harsh but beautiful terrain.

The New Tawang: Power, Roads, and Progress in the High Himalayas

As a traveler revisiting notes from history and

folklore, I also saw a Tawang moving decisively toward modernity.

Arunachal Pradesh, with its vast river systems, is often called India's future powerhouse. In Tawang district, several hydropower projects have been proposed or are under construction on rivers like the Tawang Chu and Nyamjang Chu. These projects aim to generate clean energy while improving local employment and connectivity to remote villages. While some remain under debate due to environmental and cultural concerns, there is a clear sense that the region is entering a phase of development driven by sustainability.

Modern Tawang is no longer the remote, isolated settlement it once was. Over the past decade, it has transformed into a region of strategic and cultural significance for India. The Indian Army maintains a robust presence, and upgraded infrastructure, roads carved along cliffs, helipads perched on ridges, and high-altitude camps, ensures readiness against modern challenges. A journey through Tawang often means sharing the road with army convoys weaving their way through mountains thick with fog.

The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has revolutionized accessibility in Tawang. Roads that once required days of trekking are now motorable, even if challenging. BRO's flagship achievements include all-weather tunnels near Sela Pass, upgraded roads to Bumla, and improved highways linking Tawang to Bomdila, Dirang, and the Assam plains.

## An Evolving Frontier

Tawang today stands at an extraordinary intersection of the old and the new. Monasteries continue their ageless rhythms, war memorials recall the courage of 1962, mountain passes host dialogues between two powerful neighbours, and modern infrastructure reshapes what daily life looks like.

Yet despite all the change, Tawang retains a core of calm resilience. The chanting at dawn still echoes across the mountains. The prayer flags still dance on icy winds. And the people continue to live with the dignity and warmth that has defined this region for centuries.

Festivals like Losar, Torgya, and Choskar still draw communities into vibrant celebration. Hand-woven Monpa textiles, yak-milk butter tea, and the soft glow of prayer wheels continue to shape the rhythms of daily life.

Most places offer one kind of experience. Tawang offers many, ancient and contemporary, serene and strategic, poetic and practical. As my vehicle descended the serpentine roads back toward the plains, I replayed images in my mind, the golden monastery at dawn, the snow at Bumla, the haunting beauty of Madhuri Lake, the quiet memorials, and soldiers standing guard at the roof of the world.

Tawang is not a destination you simply visit. It is a place you absorb, slowly, deeply, and long after you leave.



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