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PERSPECTIVE

If you have a womb, you are a woman. Otherwise, you are not.

~ Elon Musk, American Entrepreneur

Retired Air Force Officer Arrested in Assam Over Alleged Links With Pakistan

TEZPUR

A retired Indian Air Force officer has been arrested in Assam's Sonitpur district on suspicion of passing sensitive information to Pakistani intelligence operatives, police said on Friday.

According to officials, the case involves the alleged sharing of confidential documents and sensitive details through social media platforms, raising concerns over national security and possible data breaches involving former defence personnel.

Additional Superintendent of Police Haricharan Bhumij said preliminary investigation revealed that the accused had been in contact with operatives linked to Pakistan and had transmitted sensitive material electronically. During the arrest, police seized a laptop and a mobile phone belonging to the suspect.

The seized electronic devices have been sent for forensic examination. Investigators said parts of the data appeared to have been deleted, which could complicate the analysis.

Police have registered a case under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). Further investigation is underway to ascertain the extent of the alleged information leak and to determine whether any other individuals were involved.

WHO SAID WHAT



If a person comes into contact with RSS and understands its true spirit, his or her whole outlook to serve the nation will be elevated! I'm fortunate that I didn't fall prey to the diatribe & false propaganda against RSS. Instead, I studied about RSS and became a better citizen! - Kiren Rijiju, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Minister of Minority Affairs

GUWAHATI

India's security establishment is increasingly concerned over the evolving political and security situation in neighbouring Bangladesh, with intelligence sources warning that the growing influence of Islamist and jihadi forces could have serious implications for Assam and the wider Northeast.

Security officials told that Jamaat-e-Islami is steadily gaining ground and could even emerge as a major political force in the next general election in Bangladesh, scheduled for February next year. Its student wing, Islamic Chhatra Shibir, has also expanded its footprint and is reported to have established full control over three major universities in the country.

Sources said that while the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) had not traditionally been viewed as pro-India, it remained a democratic political entity that had, at times, sought to improve ties with New Delhi. Jamaat-e-Islami, however, was described as an overtly Islamist organisation, with the potential to push Bangladesh towards becoming an Islamic republic if it gains power.



At the same time, the activities of extremist and jihadi outfits are said to be on the rise.

Leaders of the Ansar Bangla Team and Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), who were arrested during the previous regime, are now out of jail, with both organisations reportedly regaining strength. Security sources cautioned that, as in the past, such groups could attempt to establish bases in Assam and other parts of the Northeast.

The present caretaker administration in Bangladesh was described by sources as being "totally anti-India", with concerns that it could directly or indirectly facilitate activities hostile to India's interests. Officials pointed to recent developments, including Pakistani ships docking at Chittagong port after several decades and frequent visits by Pakistani Army and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) officers to Bangladesh.

"It would not be surprising if terror groups are allowed to set up launch pads in Bangladesh," a source said, adding that such a scenario would pose a direct threat to India's internal security, particularly in the Northeast.

Sources also flagged recent remarks attributed to Md Yunus, the Chief Adviser of Bangladesh's interim government, as deeply troubling. Yunus has reportedly stated that Northeast India should be cut off from the rest of the country, with security officials warning that while this may not be attempted through direct military confrontation, efforts could be made to destabilise the narrow Siliguri Corridor, often referred to as the 'chicken neck'.

"You cannot choose your neighbour, but you can be careful against your neighbour," a source remarked, stressing the need for heightened vigilance.

Security agencies have recommended tighter surveillance along the India-Bangladesh international border, along with strict internal monitoring to prevent radical elements from exploiting the situation to radicalise youths and carry out activities detrimental to national security.

Grenade threat forces shutdown of petrol pumps across Imphal Valley



IMPHAL

All petrol pumps across the Imphal Valley and its surrounding areas were shut on Saturday following the recovery of a hand grenade along with a threat letter at a filling station, triggering serious safety concerns and fears of fuel shortages.

The shutdown was announced by the Manipur Petroleum Dealers Fraternity (MPDF), which cited growing threats to the safety of customers, staff and dealers. The decision followed an incident on December 6, when a hand grenade, concealed with a letter warning of "dire consequences," was found in the toilet of the Ibudhou Pakhangba Filling Station at Keikol along Koirengei Road in Imphal East district.

In a statement, the MPDF said all petrol pumps in the valley areas and periph-

eries of Manipur would remain closed on December 13, describing the incident as a "serious matter" requiring urgent deliberation in the interest of public safety.

"Petrol pumps remain open round the clock to cater to public needs and emergencies as per government guidelines. However, dealers and staff have been facing repeated threats and exorbitant demands from time to time," the MPDF said.

Highlighting the sector's contribution to the state exchequer, the dealers' body noted that petroleum outlets collect value-added tax at the rate of Rs 19.56 per litre on petrol (25 per cent) and Rs 10.11 per litre on diesel (13.5 per cent). Collectively, petrol pumps in Manipur contribute between Rs 25 crore and Rs 30 crore every month as VAT revenue to the State Government, based on sales volumes.

The MPDF also pointed out that petrol pumps contribute to local development works and provide employment, even as the ongoing crisis in Manipur since May 3, 2023, has led to more than a 50 per cent drop in sales.

"We demand that such bomb threats and unbearable monetary demands be stopped. We are running our businesses on tight margins under extremely difficult conditions," the statement said. It warned that any recurrence of similar threats or extreme demands would lead to an indefinite, collective shutdown of petrol pumps.

The closure has already begun to impact public transport, with inter-district and inter-town passenger service operators, autorickshaw drivers and Tata Magic operators reportedly being forced to procure petrol and diesel at exorbitant rates.

IMPHAL

The fourth edition of the State-Level Barak Festival 2025 was celebrated with colour and cultural vibrancy at Zeilipou village in Senapati district on Friday, with Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla attending the event as chief guest.

Accompanied by the First Lady, the Governor toured the festival venue and visited the traditional Morungs set up by different communities, each showcasing the customs, lifestyles and artistic traditions of Manipur's diverse ethnic groups.

As part of the programme, Governor Bhalla unveiled the 4th State-Level Barak Festival Monolith, symbolising continuity, collective identity and reverence for the Barak River. The festival featured a range of indigenous cultural practices, including traditional stone-pulling rituals, exhibitions of ethnic cuisines, ceremonial horn blowing and folk dance performances, reflecting the cultural richness and unity of the region.

Addressing the gathering, the Governor said the Barak Festival had emerged as a powerful symbol of shared heritage, communal harmony and the deep connection between local communities and the Barak River. Referring to the festival's theme, "Heritage in Harmony," he highlighted Senapati district's scenic beauty, cultural diversity and untapped tourism potential. He noted that cultural festivals play a crucial role in



preserving indigenous traditions while also promoting sustainable tourism and inclusive economic growth.

Governor Bhalla said President Droupadi Murmu had expressed admiration for the natural beauty of Senapati district during her recent visit to Manipur. He pointed out that the district's strategic location along National Highway-2 makes it an important gateway to the state and a promising destination for eco-tourism and experiential travel.

To strengthen tourism infrastructure, the Governor informed that Tourist Circuit Development projects worth about ₹8.46 crore, supported by the North Eastern Council, are currently underway in several villages of the district. He said the projects aim to enhance tourism facilities and create livelihood opportunities for local communities.

Emphasising environmental conservation, Governor Bhalla lauded the recent Barak River

Cleanliness Drive and called for sustained collective efforts to protect the river and surrounding forests. He commended the organisers and volunteers for their efforts and urged the youth to take a leading role in cultural preservation and environmental protection to ensure a balanced and sustainable future.

Reiterating the government's commitment to supporting such initiatives, the Governor stressed that active community participation remains essential. He expressed confidence that the Barak Festival would continue to grow in stature and serve as a platform to highlight the cultural, ecological and economic significance of the Barak River.

The event was attended by Losii Dikho, MLA and NPO president, senior officials from the civil administration, police and Assam Rifles, along with large numbers of local residents, lending the festival a spirit of unity and collective pride.

Assam Woman Who Entered India in 2007 Granted Citizenship Under CAA, Rare Registration-Route Case

SILCHAR

In a rare case under the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), a 40-year-old woman from Sribhumi district, who entered India from Bangladesh in 2007, has been granted Indian citizenship, officials and legal experts said on Friday. Along with her, a 61-year-old man from Cachar district has also received citizenship under the Act.

Senior advocate Dharmanand Dev, a former member of the Foreigners' Tribunal in Silchar, confirmed that the Union Ministry of Home Affairs issued citizenship certificates to both beneficiaries on Friday. As per legal provisions, citizenship in such cases is deemed effective from the date of entry into India. The identities of the two individuals have been withheld due to concerns over possible social and personal repercussions.

Legal experts described the woman's case as particularly significant, noting that citizenship granted through the registration route under the CAA is extremely rare in Assam. According to Dev, the woman, who uses the surname Banerjee, entered India in 2007 when she accompanied a relative to Silchar Medical College and Hospital for medical treatment. During her stay, she met a local resident of Sribhumi district, whom she later married. The couple eventually settled permanently in Assam and have a son. Her extended family continues to reside in Chattogram, Bangladesh.

After the notification of the CAA rules, she applied for citizenship in July this year. However, her first application was rejected due to administrative complications linked to the delimitation exercise conducted ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. Parts of the Badarpur area, where she resides, were re-assigned from Sribhumi district



to Cachar district, leading to jurisdictional confusion. After rectifying the discrepancies, she reapplied, and the application was subsequently approved.

Dev said citizenship was granted under Section 5(1)(c) of the Citizenship Act, 1955, read

with Section 6B, which allows a foreign national married to an Indian citizen to acquire citizenship through registration after seven years of continuous residence in India. He added that while overall approvals under the CAA in Assam have been limited, cases granted through the registration route are even fewer.

The second beneficiary, a resident of Silchar city, entered India from the Srimangal area of Bangladesh's Moulvibazar district in 1975 at the age of 11. Born in 1964, he later married in Silchar and established his life in Assam. His citizenship has been granted through the process of naturalisation.

With these two approvals, only four individuals in Assam have so far received citizenship under the CAA despite having entered India after the March 25, 1971 cut-off date. Dev said that over the past 18 months he has assisted nearly 25 appli-

cants, though most applications remain pending or have been rejected. The CAA, enacted on December 11, 2019, had triggered widespread protests across Assam. Since the notification of its rules, around 40 people in the state have applied under the Act. The law provides a pathway to citizenship for Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain and Parsi migrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan who entered India between March 25, 1971, and December 31, 2014. Despite nearly two lakh people in Assam still being categorised as "doubtful citizens," the number of CAA applicants remains low. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has repeatedly stated that the majority of Hindu migrants entered Assam before 1971.

Reactions to the development have been mixed. Senior Gauhati High Court advocate and Congress leader Hafiz Rashid Ahmed Choudhury questioned

the effectiveness of the CAA, arguing that it has failed to offer meaningful relief to persecuted Hindus, particularly in the context of recent developments in Bangladesh.

Former Hojai MLA and senior BJP leader Shiladitya Dev, however, welcomed the move, calling it a positive outcome of the Act that could encourage eligible members of persecuted communities to apply. Rajya Sabha MP Sushmita Dev criticised what she described as inconsistent implementation of the CAA, alleging that while citizenship certificates are being openly distributed in some states, the process in Assam remains muted and opaque.

Highlighting procedural delays, Dharmanand Dev urged authorities to streamline the functioning of the state-level empowered committee and adopt a more sensitive, time-bound approach to ensure timely relief for genuine applicants.



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POLL REFORMS IN INDIA

More than 50 years ago, a venerable British scholar of Indian politics wryly observed that elections are one of those things "Indians do rather well." Coming in the backdrop of fears-not entirely illegitimate-of India's democracy being put on permanent hold or becoming 'guided', the sanctity of the electoral process was perceived as a redeeming feature of public life. This basic pillar of democracy secured its ultimate endorsement in 1977 when, despite the shadow of the Emergency, India's electorate voted out an authoritarian regime.

The ability of the Election Commission (ECI) to ensure that popular will is reflected in the legislatures has been tested over and over in the past seven decades of Independence. Although there have been instances of derailment-the West Bengal Assembly election of 1972 and the Jammu and Kashmir election of 1987 being two notable examples-India's overall experience with elections has helped maintain the legitimacy of the political system.

As happens in a first-past-the-post that exaggerates legislative majorities, there have also been instances of incredulous losers whose anecdotal experiences of the campaign didn't quite correspond with the outcome. In 1971, a defeated side insisted that the use of Soviet-made 'invisible ink' helped Indira Gandhi win handsomely. Similar incredible claims of satellite manipulation of EVMs were heard after the 2009 general election.

What was once the prerogative of conspiracy theorists has become less of a fringe preoccupation in the past year. Encouraged by number-crunchers in his party whose predictions were at variance with the popular mood, the Leader of Opposition has challenged the veracity of the electoral rolls. There have been loud assertions that the ECI is contemplating using the Special Intensive Revision of the electoral rolls to exclude minority voters on the ground that they may not be Indian. The controversy has become a subject of jousting between the political parties in West Bengal and this may spill over to Assam and other North-eastern states.

Since Article 321 of the Constitution and the Representation of People's Act gives the ECI 'exclusive jurisdiction' over the conduct of elections, the electoral process has been kept out of political interference. Over the decades the ECI has introduced many innovations to ensure the fairness of elections. Among the most important are the Model Code of Conduct that imposes curbs on untoward political behaviour and the EVMs which have made manipulation of votes more difficult-although not impossible. There are now norms guiding the deployment of police and paramilitary forces at polling booths. Additionally, with the spread of technology, the ECI is insisting on CCTV cameras in polling booths to ensure that decorum is maintained, and officials and voters aren't subjected to intimidation.

It is, of course, true that none of these innovations are foolproof. Crude muscle power often prevails at the local level, including at counting centres, and these have potentially perverted outcomes. Anecdotal evidence of manipulation by Returning Officers cannot be disbelieved entirely. When Parliament discusses electoral reforms in the Winter Session it is possible that the country may hear of many more deviations from exemplary democratic conduct that need to be addressed by the ECI. As an important stakeholder in the democratic project, Parliament needs to collate its vast experience of elections for the public good. However, the larger cause of good politics is not served if the political executive issues crude threats, including bodily harm, against the ECI and prevents lesser government officials-on whose decorous conduct the system is completely dependent-from carrying out their Constitutional obligations. The conduct of the ruling party in West Bengal over the ongoing SIR is shameful.

It goes without saying that the existence of accurate voter lists is a basic precondition of democracy. There is an understandable outcry if members of underprivileged communities are coerced into staying away from the polling stations. Unfortunately, the outrage is significantly less when large numbers are either not included in the rolls or there are duplicate and triplicate entries that could potentially distort the outcome. The ECI has tried to address the issue of Impersonation through Voter Identity cards and photographs. However, the cheats have also found ways to short-circuit the system by voting on behalf of people who are either dead or have relocated permanently. In eastern India there is the additional problem of the voter rolls having been padded by individuals who are ineligible to vote in Indian elections.

The ongoing SIR exercise isn't the first time the ECI is undertaking a thorough voter inventory. Although there is no stipulated time schedule, say once in 10 years or so, for this large-scale exercise, it is well recognised that unless this periodic audit is undertaken, the outcome of elections will not accurately reflect the popular will.

In the early decades of the 20th century it used to be said, in the context of Ireland, that people were advised to 'vote early and vote often.' An enterprising scholar may find it worthwhile to document how innovative practices such as dead men voting or the votes of one candidate being effortlessly transferred to the tally of his rival are prevalent in parts of India. SIR won't turn all these examples of creative politics into history, but it will add some more conviction to the global belief that India does its elections well. The hope is that in the coming decades, it will not be said about any state or locality that elections there aren't conducted, they are managed.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Decide the type of person you want to be. Prove it to yourself with small wins."

- James Clear

India's New Labour Codes: Reshaping the Future of Work, Wages and Welfare



MOHAMMAD HANIEF

India stands at a historic turning point as the government implements the four new Labour Codes from 21 November 2025. By consolidating 29 existing labour laws into a single, streamlined framework, the reforms mark one of the most significant overhauls of labour governance in independent India. The move aims to modernise the labour ecosystem, enhance worker welfare, and create a legal framework that aligns with the evolving world of work. It is designed not only to provide predictability for industries but also to ensure that workers, especially in emerging sectors, receive stronger protections and benefits. With India striving to become a global manufacturing and investment hub, the new labour architecture lays the foundation for a future-ready workforce and more resilient industries, advancing the vision of an Aatmanirbhar Bharat.

For decades, India's labour laws were criticised for being fragmented, complex, and difficult to enforce. The existing framework often created administrative hurdles for employers while leaving gaps in worker protections. Discrepancies in wage definitions, overlapping laws governing industrial relations, and limited social security for gig and platform workers had made compliance challenging and left millions of informal workers vulnerable. The four new Labour Codes aim to simplify this legal landscape while reflecting the realities of a 21st-century workforce.

Among the most transformative reforms is the standardisation of wages. The new definition of wages brings clarity to compensation structures and ensures consistency in calculating statutory contributions, provident funds, gratuity, and overtime benefits. Workers now enjoy stronger financial protection through clearer entitlements, while employers benefit from simplified compliance mechanisms and predictable legal obligations. Social security coverage has also been expanded to include gig and platform workers, acknowledging the growing importance of flexible employment in India's economy.

This inclusion ensures access to essential benefits such as health coverage, maternity protection, life insurance, and disability support—protections that were previously inaccessible to large segments of the workforce.

Industrial relations have also undergone significant reform. The Codes seek to balance the interests of work-

ers and employers by streamlining dispute resolution, formalising grievance redressal systems, and fostering structured negotiation between management and employees. The threshold for requiring government permission for layoffs or retrenchment has been revised to encourage business growth while safeguarding worker interests. With these changes, industries are expected to experience greater stability, reducing prolonged litigation and promoting a collaborative environment that supports both productivity and job security.

Workplace safety and welfare standards have been strengthened under the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code. Minimum standards for working hours, sanitation, protective measures, and employee health monitoring are now mandated across industries. The Code also includes provisions for the safety and empowerment of women workers, including night shifts under regulated and safe conditions. These reforms reflect India's commitment to ensuring dignity, health, and safety for all workers, particularly those in hazardous industries and the unorganised sector.

Since the Codes came into effect in November 2025, the scenario has evolved significantly. Industries and workers alike have begun adapting to the new regulatory framework, and the impact is already visible across sectors. Many enterprises report increased clarity in compliance procedures, reduced legal ambiguities, and a more predictable framework for payroll and industrial relations. Digital platforms introduced for registration, record-keeping, and grievance redressal have facilitated smoother communication between employers, workers, and government authorities, streamlining administration and reducing delays.

For workers, the post-implementation period has brought tangible benefits. Wage structures are now more transparent, and contributions toward provident funds and gratuity have become easier to calculate and monitor. Gig and platform workers, previously outside the ambit of statutory social security, now have access to pensions, health insurance, and maternity benefits. In sectors such as construction, logistics, and manufacturing, improved safety standards and workplace inspections have reduced incidents of accidents, instilling greater confidence in the workforce.

Despite these positive changes, challenges remain. While central

rules have been implemented uniformly, some states are still finalising their own regulations, leading to minor variations in compliance requirements. Small and medium enterprises, although appreciative of simplified procedures, are adjusting to increased financial obligations related to wages and social security contributions. Some workers have reported confusion during the initial transition, highlighting the need for continuous awareness campaigns and training programmes to ensure that all employees understand their rights and responsibilities under the new Codes.

The industrial relations landscape has shown signs of stabilisation. Structured grievance mechanisms and negotiation councils have reduced the frequency of unresolved disputes, while formal dispute resolution channels have become faster and more transparent. Businesses have found that maintaining compliant workplace policies has enhanced productivity and reduced operational risks, while workers feel more secure with clearer regulations governing employment conditions.

The Codes have also influenced labour formalisation. A higher number of previously unregistered workers in informal sectors have now been recorded under national databases, enabling them to claim benefits that were previously inaccessible. This trend is particularly noticeable in gig economy sectors such as delivery services, ride-sharing platforms, and digital freelance work, which employ millions of Indians.

However, adaptation is ongoing. Stakeholder engagement continues to be critical as government authorities work to address operational bottlenecks, interpretational ambiguities, and feedback from both employers and workers. Experts note that the success of the reform will not be determined merely by its enactment but by consistent enforcement, proactive monitoring, and an inclusive approach that ensures both economic growth and worker protection.

The post-implementation scenario demonstrates that the New Labour Codes are more than just legislative reforms; they represent a shift toward a workforce that is adaptable, protected, and aligned with modern economic realities. By integrating social security coverage for all, standardising wages, improving workplace safety, and rationalising industrial relations, India is creating conditions for more equitable growth. The Codes also facilitate a predictable and transparent environment for businesses, enabling long-term planning and investment while maintaining accountability toward employees.

In a rapidly changing economy where technology, digital platforms, and global competition define employment patterns, these Codes provide a framework capable of meeting the challenges of the future. The integration of informal workers, the enhancement of worker welfare, and the creation of clear industrial relations mechanisms ensure that India's workforce is better prepared to contribute to national economic growth while safeguarding individual rights and dignity.

The implementation of the four Labour Codes marks a historic moment for India's labour policy. The scenario post-implementation reflects tangible improvements in worker welfare, compliance clarity, indus-

trial relations, and workplace safety. At the same time, it underscores the continuing need for capacity building, state-level coordination, and ongoing dialogue among all stakeholders. These reforms, if executed consistently and inclusively, have the potential to transform India's labour ecosystem, creating a secure, transparent, and future-ready workforce that can support economic growth, global competitiveness, and social equity.

India's new labour framework is not merely a policy initiative; it is a decisive step toward a more resilient, inclusive, and productive nation.

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

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. 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. 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. ~ Mamata Banerjee, CM, West Bengal



UNDERSTANDING INDIAN BEHAVIOUR OVERSEAS

COL SHIV CHOUDHARY (RETD)

There is a peculiar transformation that occurs when many Indians step into an airport or land on foreign soil. It feels as though someone presses a hidden switch that brings out the most polite, patient, and disciplined version of people who, just hours earlier, honked at traffic lights, jostled in queues, or argued with taxi drivers at minutest of monetary gains. At immigration counters, they speak softly, follow instructions with near-military precision and some even apologise to automatic doors for not opening fast enough. The guy who crosses roads diagonally in India now waits for the green pedestrian signal as if taking an oath of citizenship. The man who flung his luggage at home now handles his trolley with the tenderness of a newborn.

Why does this behavioural shift occur? Are Indians naturally rebellious at home but obedient abroad, or does the environment shape us far more than we admit? Indian society has long honoured flexibility over rigidity. "Adjust hojao" is a cultural commandment. Overcrowded buses, erratic queues, unpredictable systems and casual rule-bending are normalised. When a rule becomes inconvenient, we instinctively find a jugaad. If a checkpoint appears, the route changes. If a policeman is absent, the red light becomes optional, and incorrect turn becomes a correct one.

This holds across regions, though expressed differently. In North Indian states like Punjab,

Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, a louder, more assertive public style is common. Queue merging, honking as a means of communication, heated arguments passed off as normal conversation, and a certain pride in outsmarting the system by a routine can be a routine. In the South, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and in metropolitan Mumbai, people generally show more patience in queues, lower tolerance for honking, and more predictable compliance with rules. Silence is more respected, aggression less glorified, and personal space more valued. Yet even here, bending rules isn't alien; it is simply done more quietly and with less public drama, perhaps in a courteous manner.

Why the instant transformation abroad? The shift begins the moment people realise they are entering a zone of strict systems and tight enforcement. The same person who negotiates a Rs 100 fine in India panics if a parking meter abroad flashes red. The traveller who argues about cabin baggage at an Indian airport pays extra abroad without debate. This is partly historical. For generations, laws in India were imposed from above. Following them was never internalised as civic duty; compliance became situational. After independence, the rulers changed but the psychology remained albeit the ruler disappeared, rules ruled.

Systems and enforcement are decisive factors. Discipline thrives only when systems work and enforcement is swift. In India, enforcement

often inspires neither fear nor respect. Helmets appear only when police are visible. Signals can be jumped. Littering fines exist mostly on posters. Illegal structures vanish one day and reappear the next. North versus south differences play out here too. In some states in India, rules are interpreted as negotiable. There the honking is instinctive, overtaking from any side is normal, loud dispute is a legitimate negotiation tool. Road rage, howling at weddings, drunken driving and physical expressions of celebration or anger are almost cultural. In Tamil Nadu and Kerala, honking is restrained, lane discipline comparatively better, and aggression socially discouraged. People stand in queues more naturally, speak more softly, and resist cutting lines because social disapproval is stronger. Mumbai, with its fast pace but orderly queues, often sets the gold standard for public discipline in India.

Abroad, however, everyone recalibrates instantly. No friendly inspector uncle, no deals, no influencing phone calls, no empty pockets and no exceptions. Break a law in Singapore or Germany, and consequences follow quickly and impersonally. Naturally, people align with the system because the system offers no room for negotiation.

A subtle psychological factor also operates. Indians abroad feel they represent the country. The same families who push through queues at Indian stations form perfect lines in foreign airports and also move along the right side of

roads and paths. People who shout across rooms back home whisper in hotel lobbies. Children who scatter toys across homes, disarrange books and clutter study tables in Indian homes behave like angels till duty free shops on return. Clean orderly spaces and what one observes influence behaviour. It is difficult to honk on quiet streets, litter on spotless pavements, throw empty water bottle, used disposal plates or wrappers on lush green road sides or talk loudly in peaceful cafés. Such an atmosphere is obtained all over abroad. Indians hold trash until they find a dustbin, wear headphones in public transport, carry empty bags to temporarily store waste and even forget the sound of their car's horn. Interestingly, the same regional behavioural contrasts soften abroad. The assertive North Indian mellows down, the soft-spoken South Indian becomes even more rule-bound, and the average Mumbaikar continues with the queues they are already used to.

These transformations show Indians are not inherently indiscipline. We simply adapt to the ecosystem. People who resist seatbelts at home buckle up abroad inside a stationary Uber. Those who speed through tolls in India turn into accountants abroad while counting exact change. The enthusiastic English accent appears, often regardless of whether the listener understands it. But the moment the plane lands back in India, the switch flips. Indeed, some passengers start calling home or cab drivers while few hundred nautical miles away.

Nagaland's Dzukou Valley Wildfire Enters Third Day; Aerial Firefighting Planned

KOHIMA

A wildfire raging in the ecologically sensitive Dzukou Valley of Nagaland entered its third day on Sunday, prompting authorities to plan aerial firefighting operations as strong winds continued to drive the flames towards the Japfu mountain range.

Officials said the fire, which broke out on Friday, has spread steadily due to dry weather conditions and gusty winds, raising serious concerns for the fragile ecosystem of the valley and public safety. Initial assessments indicated that around 1.3 square kilometres of forest land had been affected, but the damaged area has since expanded across rugged and largely inaccessible terrain.

An official of the District Dis-



ter Management Authority (DDMA), Kohima, said the district administration has decided to requisition an Indian Air Force helicopter equipped with a Bambi bucket through the Nagaland State Disaster Management Authority after reviewing the scale and intensity of the blaze. Aerial firefighting operations are expected to begin on Sunday.

Ground-level firefighting efforts remain severely constrained due to steep slopes, dense vegetation and the remote nature of the affected area. The fire is burning in forest land belonging to Khonoma village, located west of Kohima.

Authorities said preliminary

investigations revealed that the blaze was accidentally triggered by four local trekkers who had lit a fire at their campsite. The situation worsened when the fire spread out of control after the trekkers left the site to fetch water. The trekkers were later trapped by the advancing flames and were rescued on December 13 by volunteers of the Khonoma Youth Organisation. Officials confirmed that the individuals have admitted to igniting the fire.

An aerial survey conducted by government agencies showed extensive damage to large tracts of virgin forest, with the fire spreading in multiple directions. The survey was carried out using a helicopter after drone assessment was ruled out due to the difficult terrain and limited accessibility.

Volunteers from the Khonoma

Youth Organisation are working alongside personnel from the police, fire and emergency services, forest department and disaster management authorities to contain the blaze. Officials warned that the fire continues to move slowly towards Hophera Thi near the Jotsoma-Khonoma border, increasing the risk of further spread into even more challenging terrain.

Dzukou Valley is renowned for its rare flora, alpine meadows and popular trekking routes. Conservation officials said prevailing dry conditions and strong winds have made the area particularly vulnerable to wildfires.

Authorities have urged the public to stay away from the valley and imposed a temporary ban on trekking and related activities until the fire is fully brought under control.

Manipur Police Arrest Six Militants, Recover Arms in Coordinated Valley Operations

IMPHAL

Manipur Police arrested six militants linked to three banned insurgent outfits and recovered arms, ammunition and communication devices during a series of coordinated operations carried out across Imphal West and Imphal East districts on December 13, officials said.

The most significant seizure was reported from the Canchipur area under Singjamei police station in Imphal West district, where two active extortionists of PREPAK (PRO) were apprehended. The arrested individuals were identified as Kshetri-mayum Abinash Singh (21) of Kakching Thonglan Pareng in Kakching district and Rajkumar Daniel Singh (31), also known by aliases Loyataba, Jessy and Naoton, a resident of Kwakeithel Thokchom Leikai in Imphal West.

Security personnel recovered a 9 mm pistol with a magazine loaded with 12 rounds, two rounds of .38 ammunition, three mobile phones and a two-wheeler from their possession.

In a separate operation, police arrested another active cadre of PREPAK (PRO), identified as Thangjam Priyobarta Singh (35) of Kumbi Mayai Leikai, Ward No. 6, under Kumbi police station in Bishnupur district. He was apprehended from his residence, officials said.

On the same day, two women cadres of UNLF (Koireng) were arrested from Moirangkampui Sajeb Makha Leikai under Porompat police station in Imphal East district. The arrested individuals were identified as Takhellambam Sanathoi Chanu (19), also known as Loingakpi, a resident of Tumukhong Awang Leikai, and Kongbrailakpam Rameshori Devi (19), known by multiple aliases including Langlen and Buchu, a resident of the locality where the arrest was made.

Over 5,000 Voters Join BJP Ahead of Tripura District Council Polls

AGARTALA

More than 5,000 voters from Tripura's tribal areas have joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a development considered politically significant ahead of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) elections scheduled for 2026.

Party leaders said as many as 5,050 voters from 1,706 families formally joined the BJP at a programme organised by the party's state unit. The event was coordinated by BJP general secretary Bipin Debbarma.

Addressing the gathering, Chief Minister Manik Saha accused the CPI(M) of having treated indigenous communities as merely a "ballot box" during its long tenure in power. He said the BJP followed a different approach, describing it as "a party that works for the people".

Referring to the Left's earlier electoral dominance in the state, Saha said the communists "used to start counting from 20 in Assembly elections" as they believed those seats were guaranteed. "But now

the communists are scared," he said, claiming that political awareness among tribal voters had increased significantly.

The chief minister also spoke about unity, using the term 'Thansa' to denote togetherness among "jati, janajati, Manipuri and minority communities". He said such unity was central to the party's vision of building a "new Tripura".

Saha said those who had joined the BJP had taken "the right decision at the right time" and expressed confidence about the party's prospects in the upcoming TTAADC elections. Indicating plans for large-scale mobilisation, he said, "When the bell rings for the TTAADC elections, a bigger meeting than today will be held in Khumulwng."

The programme was attended by BJP state president Rajib Bhattacharya and several ministers, including Santana Chakma, Sushant Chowdhury, Tinku Roy, Sudhangshu Das and Bikas Debbarma, along with MLAs and senior party leaders.

GUWAHATI

The investigation into Congress leader and Jorhat MP Gaurav Gogoi and his wife's alleged links with Pakistan will be handed over to a central agency, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Friday, citing the complexity of the case and limitations of a state-level probe.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a programme, Sarma said the matter involved multiple layers that could not be fully investigated by the Assam Police Special Investigation Team (SIT) alone.

"In a case where so much complexity is involved, it will not be possible only for the Assam SIT to investigate and unearth all aspects. The matter will, however, go to the central agency for further investigation," the Chief Minister said.

Sarma said the move would follow the completion of the SIT's work in the Zubeen Garg death

Gaurav Gogoi Pak links case too complex for state SIT, central agency to step in: CM



case, in which a chargesheet was filed on December 12. "Now that the SIT has submitted the chargesheet in the case related to Zubeen Garg's death, we will move to the case of Gaurav Gogoi," he added.

The Chief Minister further stated that once the Garg case enters

the regular trial stage, the state government would share certain documents related to the Gogoi matter. "These documents will be shared by the end of this month or early next month," he said.

Sarma, however, claimed that the findings gathered so far were

sufficient to draw conclusions. "Whatever the SIT has achieved in the Gaurav Gogoi case is sufficient to draw a conclusion against the accused," he said.

The Assam government had earlier constituted an SIT to probe allegations levelled by the Chief Minister against Gogoi and his wife, Elizabeth Colburn, over their alleged links with Pakistan's intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). The SIT submitted its report to the Chief Minister on September 10.

Gogoi, who is also the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president, has strongly denied the allegations, describing them as baseless and comparing them to a "C-grade Bollywood film" destined to flop. He has repeatedly accused Sarma of making foreign-link allegations for political mileage and alleged that the charges are aimed at diverting public attention from governance-related issues.

Nagaland Job Aspirants Question Court Order, Seek Early Recruitment of Assistant Professors

KOHIMA

The Nagaland NET Qualified Forum (NNQF) and the Combined Technical Association of Nagaland (CTAN) have raised concerns over a recent single-bench court order relating to alleged backdoor appointments in the state's Higher Education Department and urged the government to immediately advertise 129 newly created Assistant Professor posts.

Addressing the media, representatives of the two organisations referred to the single-bench order passed in cases WPC(C)/340/2022 and WPC(C)/189-198/2023. The order held that the petitioners lacked locus standi to challenge backdoor or contractual

appointments as they were not NET-qualified at the time such appointments were made.

The NNQF and CTAN said the order, which has been widely discussed in public forums, could have implications beyond the petitioners. They argued that the ruling may effectively deprive educated unemployed youth in Nagaland of the right to question future backdoor appointments, thereby affecting their career prospects.

Terming the issue one of public interest, NNQF said it has filed an appeal before a division bench seeking a review of the order. Both organisations expressed hope that the judiciary would address their concerns.

The two bodies also flagged confusion surrounding the cre-

ation of 129 Assistant Professor posts and the earlier move to regularise 147 contractual Assistant Professors, which was later revoked. They pointed out that both orders carried the same Personnel and Administrative Reforms (P&AR) and financial clearance numbers, leading to uncertainty among job aspirants.

To seek clarity, the organisations said an RTI application was filed. The reply, they said, stated that the 129 posts were not created to accommodate the 147 contractual posts, despite the identical clearance numbers. According to NNQF and CTAN, the P&AR clearance was issued in 2022 and the financial clearance in 2023, while the attempt to regularise the 147 contractual posts took place in 2024 and was

revoked in 2025, followed by the creation of the 129 posts.

They warned that such inconsistencies could undermine public trust and called for greater transparency and accountability from the authorities. NNQF and CTAN also expressed concern that the long-awaited advertisement for the 129 Assistant Professor posts has not yet been issued. They added that the annual Common Educational Services Examination (CESE) notification is also pending.

Urging the state government to act without further delay, the organisations called for the immediate release of advertisements for both the Assistant Professor posts and the CESE, citing prolonged uncertainty and anxiety among aspirants.

NE Frontier Railway strengthens educational infrastructure across its jurisdiction

GUWAHATI

In a major step towards the development of educational infrastructure, the General Manager of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR), Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, laid the foundation stone for the construction of an additional double-storey building with 20 new rooms at Netaji Vidyapith Railway Higher Secondary School, Maligaon.

NFR has been carrying out series of important work across its jurisdiction, reaffirming its commitment to providing better learning environments for students of railway schools.

Kapinjal Kishore Sharma, CPRO of Northeast Frontier Railway said that, at Netaji Vidyapith Railway Higher Secondary School, several development works are underway alongside the construction of the double-storey building.

"These include setting up a dedicated laboratory complex, providing modern furniture, green boards, smart boards and CCTV systems, as well as establishing a digital library and upgrading computer lab facilities. Further improvements such as enhanced teacher rooms, upgraded toilet complexes, installation of water RO



units, creation of a music room, covered sheds, auditorium enhancement, fencing and development of the circulating area are also being taken up," he said.

The CPRO of Northeast Frontier Railway further said that, a number of important works, both completed and ongoing, are significantly transforming the educational infrastructure of railway school

across NFR. "Key initiatives currently in progress include the renovation and development of facilities at Railway Higher Secondary School, Maligaon, along with the creation of a modern playground, upgraded prayer ground, improved boundary wall, vehicle parking area, entrance gate and smart classrooms. Additionally, the construction and repair of the Dima-

pur Railway High School building and the renovation and improvement of Railway Higher Secondary School, Alipurduar are also advancing steadily," the CPRO of Northeast Frontier Railway said.

He also said that, in recent months, NFR has successfully completed several key projects.

"These include the repair and renovation of Railway Girls High School at New Jalpaiguri; development of playground and prayer ground, reconstruction of the boundary wall, creation of vehicle parking space and entrance gate, along with renovation and upgradation of Banimandir Railway Higher Secondary School at Siliguri.

Renovation and repair work at Railway Higher Secondary School in Lumding and upgradation of Railway Higher Secondary School at Badarpur have also been accomplished, further strengthening the educational infrastructure across the zones. These initiatives reflect NFR's long-term vision and sustained efforts to enhance academic facilities, strengthen basic infrastructure and create modern, student-centric spaces that empower students with well-equipped and safe learning environments," he said.

He further said that, with continuous upgrades, planned expansions and a strong focus on digital and infrastructural development, NFR remains committed to nurturing educational excellence and supporting the academic growth of children across its jurisdiction.

Meghalaya Government Moves to End Decades-Old Land Disputes in Tura



SHILLONG

The Meghalaya government has begun handing over land pattas under long-term lease arrangements to eight localities in Tura Town, a move seen as a major step towards resolving decades-old disputes over encroached government land.

Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma said the initiative aims to address long-pending issues between residents and the General Administration Department (GAD). Over the years, several government properties and office spaces in Tura had been encroached upon, resulting in prolonged court cases, eviction notices and recurring law-and-order challenges.

"Pleased to hand over land pattas through long-term leases to eight localities," Sangma said, describing the decision as a practical solution to a complex and

sensitive problem.

The chief minister said the initiative follows a model implemented in Williamsnagar two to three years ago, which the government considers to have been successful. Under the new arrangement, the land will continue to remain government revenue land, but households currently residing on it will be granted long-term leases based on "specific, transparent criteria".

According to Sangma, the policy is designed to provide clarity and security to both the government and residents, while preventing future disputes. "This approach will help avoid further litigation and bring long-term stability," he said.

The first phase of the exercise covers localities that have already agreed to the process. These areas have undergone surveys, including drone and digital mapping, as well as public hearings conducted over the past two years. Localities that have not yet given consent will be taken up in a second phase.

The government has stressed that participation in the process will remain voluntary and that no locality will be compelled to join. Officials said the decision balances state ownership of land with the realities faced by long-settled residents and is expected to contribute to planned and orderly urban development in Tura Town.

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A 390-year-old bonsai tree survived the bombing of Hiroshima. Later, the tree was gifted to the U.S. and it still lives in Washington, D.C.

Over 700 officers commissioned as Army, IAF hold Passing Out Parades in Dehradun, Hyderabad



NEW DELHI

The services of the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force were joined by more than 700 officers, men and women on Saturday following the Passing Out Parades held at their respective academies.

The Indian Military Academy (IMA), Dehradun, resounded with pride, tradition and military splendour as the 157th Passing Out Parade (POP) was conducted at the historic Drill Square, while the Combined Graduation Parade (CGP) took place at the Air Force Academy (AFA), Dundigal, Hyderabad, on the same day. According to the IAF, the AFA POP marked the successful culmination of pre-commissioning training of Flight Cadets from the flying and ground duty branches of the Indian Air Force. Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan reviewed the parade and conferred the President's Commission on the graduating Flight Cadets of the 216 Course.

A total of 244 Flight Cadets, including 215 men and 29 women,

graduated on the occasion. The service of Armed Forces personnel formally begins from the day the President, as Supreme Commander, grants the commission. On the occasion, six officers from the Indian Navy, eight officers from the Indian Coast Guard and two trainees from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam were awarded 'Wings' on the successful completion of flying training, while 'Brevets' were conferred on five officers after completing their navigation training. The IAF's commissioning ceremony also included the administration of oaths to the newly commissioned Flying Officers, who pledged to safeguard the sovereignty and honour of the nation, in the presence of proud family members.

Addressing the gathering, General Chauhan emphasised the need to create and sustain asymmetry to win future wars, underlining technology as a decisive factor.

He stressed the importance of AI-driven data fusion, man-robot teaming, autonomous and unmanned systems,

and operations in the cognitive domain. Referring to Operation Sindoor as a testimony to the IAF's unparalleled professionalism, he said it must be guided by the principles of JAI - Jointness, Atmanirbharta and Innovation - which will shape India's future combat power, and encouraged the officers to serve boldly and lead fearlessly.

At the Indian Military Academy, the 157th POP marked the commissioning of Officer Cadets into the Indian Army, reflecting the rigorous training, discipline and indomitable spirit instilled at the institution.

Chief of the Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi reviewed the parade and congratulated the newly commissioned officers, praising their discipline, leadership and endurance. He urged them to uphold the rich traditions of the Army and reminded them that commissioning signifies the beginning of a lifelong commitment to the nation, demanding honour, discipline and selfless service.

A total of 525 Officer Cadets from various courses, along with 34 cadets from 14 friendly foreign nations, were commissioned into the Indian Army, symbolising the strengthening of India's defence leadership and enduring military partnerships.

The ceremonies at both academies were witnessed by parents, family members, senior officers and distinguished guests, and concluded with the traditional 'Antim Pag', as the young officers marched forward, ready to uphold the sovereignty, honour and ideals of the nation.

NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has filed a chargesheet against 17 accused persons, including four foreign nationals and 58 companies, after uncovering an extensive, well-organised transnational cyber fraud network operating across multiple States in India.

In October 2025, the three main Indian associates had been arrested. The investigation has revealed that a single coordinated syndicate created an extensive digital and financial infrastructure to defraud thousands of unsuspecting citizens through misleading loan apps, fake investment schemes, Ponzi and MLM models, bogus part-time job offers, and fraudulent online gaming platforms, according to an official statement from the Central agency.

The case was registered on the basis of inputs received from IAC, the Ministry of Home Affairs, which indicated that large numbers of citizens were being cheated through online investment and employment schemes. Although initially appearing as isolated complaints, detailed analysis by the CBI revealed striking similarities in applications used, fund-flow patterns, payment gateways, and digital footprints, pointing to a common, organised conspiracy.

Investigation revealed that the cyber criminals adopted a highly layered and technology-driven modus operandi, involving the use of Google advertisements, bulk SMS campaigns, SIM-box based messaging systems, cloud infrastructure, fintech platforms and multiple mule bank accounts. Each stage of the operation—from luring victims to the collection and movement of funds—was deliberately structured to conceal the identities of the actual controllers and evade detection by law enforcement agencies.

CBI's investigation exposed the backbone of the fraud network in the form of 111 shell companies, incorporated using dummy directors, forged or



misleading documents, fake addresses and false statements of business objectives.

These shell entities were used to open bank accounts and merchant accounts with various payment gateways, enabling rapid layering and diversion of proceeds of crime. Analysis of hundreds of bank accounts revealed that more than Rs 1,000 crore was routed through these accounts, with one account alone receiving funds exceeding Rs 152 crore within a short span.

Searches were conducted at 27 locations across Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand and Haryana. During these searches, the CBI seized digital devices, documents, and financial records, which were then subjected to detailed forensic examination. The analysis revealed extensive

communication links and operational control by Foreign nationals directing the fraud network from abroad.

Significantly, a UPIID linked to the bank accounts of two Indian accused was found to be active in a Foreign location as late as August 2025, conclusively establishing continued foreign control and real-time operational oversight of the fraud infrastructure from outside India.

The investigation established that, from 2020 onwards, shell companies were incorporated in India at the instance of Foreign handlers, namely Zou Yi, Huan Liu, Weijian Liu and Guanhua Wang.

Their Indian associates procured identity documents from unsuspecting individuals and used them to incorporate companies and open bank accounts.

These entities were then systematically used to channel proceeds from cyber fraud, which were layered across multiple accounts and platforms to obscure the money trail and the ultimate beneficiaries.

CBI has charge-sheeted the four Foreign masterminds, their Indian associates, and 58 companies involved in the conspiracy. Prosecution has been launched against the accused persons under Criminal Conspiracy, Forgery, use of Forged Documents and the Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Act, 2019.

This case forms part of CBI's sustained action under Operation CHAKRA-V against organised and transnational cyber-enabled financial crimes.

INTERNATIONAL

'No doubt it has worsened': Anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies intensify across Europe

LONDON

In the past year, tens of thousands hostile to immigrants marched through London chanting "send them home!" A British lawmaker complained of seeing too many non-white faces on TV. And senior politicians advocated the deportation of longtime UK residents born abroad.

The overt demonization of immigrants and those with immigrant roots is intensifying in the UK — and across Europe — as migration shoots up the political agenda and right-wing parties gain popularity.

In several European countries, political parties that favor mass deportations and depict immigration as a threat to national identity come at or near the top of opinion polls: Reform UK, the Alliance for Germany and France's National Rally.

President Donald Trump, who recently called Somali immigrants in the US "garbage" and whose national security strategy depicts European countries as threatened by immigration, appears to be endorsing and emboldening Europe's coarse, anti-immigrant sentiments.

Amid the rising tensions, Europe's mainstream parties are taking a harder line on migration and at times using divisive language about race.

"What were once dismissed as being at the far extreme end of far-right politics has now become a central part of the political debate," said Kieran Connell, a lecturer in British history at Queen's University Belfast.

Immigration has risen dramatically over the past decade in some European countries, driven in part by millions of asylum-seekers who have come to Europe fleeing conflicts in Africa, the Middle East and Ukraine.

Asylum-seekers account for a small percentage of total immigration, however, and experts say antipathy toward diversity and migration stems from a mix of factors. Economic stagnation in the years since the 2008 global financial

crisis, the rise of charismatic nationalist politicians and the polarizing influence of social media all play a role, experts say. In Britain, there is "a frightening increase in the sense of national division and decline" and that tends to push people toward political extremes, said Bobby Duffy, director of the Policy Unit at King's College London. It took root after the financial crisis, was reinforced by Britain's debate about Brexit and deepened during the COVID-19 pandemic, Duffy said.

Social media has exacerbated the mood, notably on X, whose algorithm promotes divisive content and whose owner, Elon Musk, approvingly retweets far-right posts.

Across Europe, ethnonationalism has been promoted by right-wing parties such as Alliance for Germany, France's National Rally and the Fidesz party of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

Now it appears to have the stamp of approval from the Trump administration, whose new national security strategy depicts Europe as a collection of countries facing "economic decline" and "civilizational erasure" because of immigration and loss of national identities. The hostile language alarmed many European politicians, but also echoed what they hear from their countries' far-right parties. National Rally leader Jordan Bardella told the BBC he largely agreed with the Trump administration's concern that mass immigration was "shaking the balance of European countries." Policies once considered extreme are now firmly on the political agenda. Reform UK, the hard-right party that consistently leads opinion polls, says if it wins power it will strip immigrants of permanent-resident status even if they have lived in the UK for decades.

The center-right opposition Conservatives say they will deport British citizens with dual nationality who commit crimes.

A Reform UK lawmaker complained

in October that advertisements were "full of Black people, full of Asian people." Conservative justice spokesman Robert Jenrick remarked with concern that he "didn't see another white face" in an area of Birmingham, Britain's second-largest city. Neither politician had to resign. Many proponents of reduced immigration say they are concerned about integration and community cohesion, not race. But that's not how it feels to those on the receiving end of racial abuse.

"There is no doubt it has worsened," said Dawn Butler, a Black British lawmaker who says the vitriol she receives on social media "is increasing drastically, and has escalated into death threats."

UK government statistics show police in England and Wales recorded more than 115,000 hate crimes in the year to March 2025, a 2% increase over the previous 12 months.

In July 2024, anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim violence erupted on Britain's streets after three girls were stabbed to death at a Taylor Swift-themed dance class. Authorities said online misinformation wrongly identifying the UK-born teenage attacker as a Muslim migrant played a part. In Ireland and in the Netherlands, protesters often demonstrate outside municipal meetings in communities where a new asylum center is proposed. Some protests have turned violent, with opponents of asylum-seekers throwing fireworks at riot police. Across Europe, the main focus of protests has been hotels and other housing for asylum-seekers, which some say become magnets for crime and bad behavior. But the agenda of protest organizers is often much wider.

In September, more than 100,000 people chanting "We want our country back" marched through London in a protest organized by a far-right activist and convicted fraudster Tommy Robinson. Among the speakers was French far-right politician Eric Zemmour, who told the crowd that France and the UK

both faced "the great replacement of our European people by peoples coming from the south and of Muslim culture."

Mainstream European politicians condemn the "great replacement" conspiracy theory. Britain's center-left Labour Party government has denounced racism and says migration is an important part of Britain's national story.

At the same time, it is taking a tougher line on immigration, announcing policies to make it harder for migrants to settle permanently. The government says it is inspired by Denmark, which has seen asylum applications plummet since it started giving refugees only short-term residence.

Denmark and Britain are among a group of European countries pushing to weaken legal protections for migrants and make deportations easier.

Human rights advocates argue that attempts to appease the right just lead to ever-more-extreme policies.

"For every inch yielded, there's going to be another inch demanded," Council of Europe human rights commissioner Michael O'Flaherty told The Guardian. "Where does it stop? For example, the focus right now is on migrants, in large part. But who is it going to be about next time around?"

Politicians of the political center also have been criticized for adopting the language of the far right. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said in May that Britain risked becoming an "island of strangers," a phrase that echoed a notorious 1968 anti-immigration speech by the politician Enoch Powell. Starmer later said he had been unaware of the echo and regretted using the phrase.

Germany's center-right Chancellor Friedrich Merz has hardened his language on migrants as the Alternative for Germany has grown more powerful. Merz caused an uproar in October by saying Germany had a problem with its "Stadtbild," a word that translates as "city image" or cityscape

At least two dead, 8 injured in shooting at Brown University in US; suspect still at large



PROVIDENCE

At least two people were killed and eight others injured after a gunman dressed in black opened fire at Brown University on Saturday, during final examinations on the Ivy League campus, authorities said.

Police officers spread out across the campus and into an affluent neighborhood lined with historic brick homes, searching classrooms, backyards and porches after the shooting erupted.

The suspect was a male in dark clothing who was last seen leaving the engineering building where the attack happened, said Timothy O'Hara, Deputy Chief of Police.

Authorities believe the shooter used a handgun, according to a law enforcement official familiar with the investigation who spoke on condition of anonymity as the probe remains ongoing.

Rhode Island has some of the strictest gun laws in the United States. Last spring, the Democratic-controlled Legislature approved an assault-weapons ban that will bar the sale and manufacture of certain high-powered firearms, though not their possession, when it takes effect next July.

"The unthinkable has

gear led students out of some campus buildings and into a fitness center.

The shooting took place inside the Barus & Holley building, a seven-storey complex that houses Brown University's School of Engineering and its physics department. The university's website says the facility contains more than 100 laboratories, along with dozens of classrooms and offices.

Engineering design exams were underway there when the shooting occurred.

Brown senior biochemistry student Alex Bruce was working on a final research project in his dorm directly across the street from the building when he heard sirens outside and received a text about an active shooter shortly after 4 p.m.

"I'm just in here shaking," he said, watching through the window as a half-dozen armed officers in tactical gear surrounded his dorm. He said he feared for a friend who he thought was inside the engineering building at the time.

Students in a nearby lab hid under desks and turned off the lights after receiving an alert about the shooting, said Chiangheng Chien, a doctoral student in engineering who was about a block away from the scene. Mari Camara, 20, a junior from New York City, was coming out of the library and rushed inside a taqueria to seek shelter. She spent more than three hours there, texting friends while police searched the campus. "Everyone is the same as me, shocked and terrified that something like this happened," she said.

President Donald Trump told reporters that he had been briefed on the shooting and "all we can do right now is pray for the victims."

"It's a shame," he said in brief remarks at the White House.

ASEAN-India Tourism Professionals Exchange Programme 2025 Opens in Guwahati with Delegates from Ten ASEAN Countries



GUWAHATI

The ASEAN-India Tourism Professionals Exchange Programme 2025 began in Guwahati with two days of intensive interactions between tourism professionals from India and ten ASEAN Member States. Organised by the Assam Tourism Development Corporation Ltd. (ATDC) under the aegis of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, the exchange is being held from 12 to 17 December across Guwahati, Kaziranga and New Delhi. It aims to strengthen regional tourism linkages by integrating the North East into ASEAN travel circuits through business meetings, trade sessions and collaborative networks of tour operators and policymakers.

This effort builds on India's participation at MATTA Fair 2025 in Kuala Lumpur, where ATDC showcased Assam and the North East as emerging destinations under the ASEAN-India Year of Tourism. The current exchange seeks to translate that interest into tangible partnerships by bringing ASEAN stakeholders to Assam to experience its products, infrastructure and community-led tourism models firsthand.

Forty-one delegates from ASEAN are attending: Cambodia (4), Indonesia (8), Lao PDR (4), Malaysia (4), Myanmar (4), Philippines (3), Singapore (3), Thailand (4), Timor Leste (2) and Vietnam (5). They are joined by representatives of key Indian industry associations and regional organisations. Over the first two days, the group participated in formal sessions, B2B interactions and site visits designed to deepen professional ties.

On 12 December, the visiting delegates arrived in Guwahati and boarded a sunset cruise on the Brahmaputra, which showcased Assam's river-based tourism and community experiences along its banks. The following day featured the formal inauguration at Hotel Mayfair, Guwahati, followed by structured B2B meetings between tour operators from the

North East, the rest of India and ASEAN countries, concluding with a cultural evening featuring Assamese music, dance and cuisine.

Reflecting on the broader goals of the exchange, Shri Pabitra Margherita, Hon'ble Minister of State for External Affairs and Textiles, said, "The ASEAN-India Tourism Professionals Exchange Programme reaffirms our belief that tourism can strengthen regional cooperation and people-to-people ties. When professionals from across the region collaborate, design itineraries and share insights, they build partnerships that last well beyond a single event. India offers diversity of landscapes and experiences; ASEAN brings vibrant markets and travellers seeking authenticity. Together, we can develop routes that respect culture, protect ecosystems and empower local entrepreneurs. This initiative will help define that shared agenda for the coming decade."

Speaking about Assam's tourism vision, Shri Ranjeet Kumar Das, Hon'ble Minister of Tourism, Government of Assam, said, "Assam's tourism story is entering a new phase of growth that is structured, data-driven and globally connected. Our participation in the ASEAN-India Tourism Professionals Exchange Programme 2025 marks an important milestone in positioning the state as a serious player in international tourism cooperation. The Government is working to ensure that investments in infrastructure, hospitality and digital promotion are matched with strong community involvement. The goal is to build a tourism economy that is competitive, responsible, and capable of standing alongside the best destinations in the region."

Stressing the importance of the exchange, Kumar Padmapani Bora, IRS, Managing Director, Assam Tourism Development Corporation, observed, "This exchange is a decisive step towards turning long-standing cultural links between India and ASEAN into working tourism partnerships. During our sessions in Assam and Delhi, we want delegates to experience our wildlife, tea heritage and river tourism while connecting with local operators and communities who bring these experiences to life. When

tour circuits include homestays, community guides and conservation initiatives, travellers leave with meaningful memories and host regions see economic benefit.

Our goal is sustained cooperation that draws more ASEAN visitors to the North East and distributes growth equitably. MATTA Fair showed the promise; this week carries that momentum forward."

The programme's design underscores Assam and the North

East as India's natural link to ASEAN, both geographically and culturally. Delegates are visiting Kaziranga National Park and nearby tea gardens to interact with guides, lodge operators and local entrepreneurs involved in conservation-based tourism, reaffirming Assam's position as a gateway for nature and heritage experiences.

Discussions during the opening phase focused on improving regional connectivity, particularly through new air links and upgraded highways in the North East, and on the upcoming terminal at Guwahati International Airport, expected to make access easier for international travellers.

Delegates also discussed itineraries connecting Assam with other North Eastern states and destinations across South and South-East Asia, supported by coordinated marketing and digital campaigns.

The Guwahati leg has set a constructive tone for the remaining sessions in Kaziranga and New Delhi, where policy consultations with the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of External Affairs and ASEAN missions will extend the ideas generated in Assam. The relationships forged during the first two days are expected to lead to familiarisation tours, joint promotions and collaborative product development that will increase visitor movement between ASEAN countries and the North East in the future.

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Before you talk, listen. Before you react, think. Before you criticize, wait. Before you pray, forgive. Before you quit, try.

“THE NORTH-EASTERN STATES, INDIA’S DOOR TO PROSPERITY”



COL. (DR.) AKS MACHHRAL, M-IN-D, VSM (RETD)

1. From Ancient Roots to a Vision for Tomorrow.

The North-Eastern region of India is a world unto itself rich in heritage, unique in geography, and unmatched in potential. Encompassing eight states Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya, and Sikkim, the area forms a natural land bridge between India and the dynamic economies of Southeast Asia.

This is not merely India’s border.

This is India’s opening to the world.

2. Ancient Origins and Civilizational Links.

Long before the formation of modern states, the North-East was home to ancient kingdoms and vibrant tribal republics:-

Assam’s Kamarupa Kingdom, mentioned in epics and the Puranas, stood as a major power for centuries.

Manipur’s Meitei civilization, with its sophisticated script and martial traditions, formed one of the oldest living cultures in Asia.

Ahom rule in Assam (1228-1826) created a formidable state that defeated multiple Mughal invasions.

Arunachal’s tribal polities maintained independent systems rooted in indigenous Donyi-Polo faith.

Tripura’s Manikya dynasty, one of the longest surviving royal families, connected Bengal with Southeast Asia.

The North-East was never isolated.

It was a crossroads of:-

Sanskritic influence.

Indigenous traditions.

Buddhist routes.

Taoist and Southeast Asian cultural flows.

The region was a thriving confluence, not a frontier.

3. Colonial Disruption and the “Buffer Zone” Approach

The British, realising the region’s

strategic location, imposed artificial barriers:-

Dividing tribes across borders.

Restricting movement through Inner Line Regulations.

Detaching the region administratively from mainland India.

Exploiting resources without building infrastructure.

For the first time, the North-East became a “remote region” in the colonial imagination far from the truth of its deep civilizational belonging.

4. Post-Independence Challenges.

After 1947, a combination of factors slowed the region’s integration:-

Difficult terrain.

Limited roads and railways.

Cross-border insurgency.

Misunderstanding between Delhi and local communities.

Ethnic tensions and lack of economic opportunity.

Yet, despite these obstacles, the region held firmly to the Union of India, often defended by its own brave sons and daughters.

5. The North-East as India’s Strategic Shield.

The region shares 5,812 km of international borders with the following:-

China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal.

This makes it:

India’s eastern military shield.

A critical gateway for defence logistics.

Home to key airbases and mountain formations.

Central to counter insurgency and border management.

Vital for Indo-Pacific strategies.

Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim are especially crucial in India’s strategic posture against China, while Assam serves as the logistical heart.

6. Natural Wealth and Economic Potential

The North-East is blessed with ex-

traordinary resources:

Water and Hydropower:

One of the richest hydropower basins in Asia

(e.g., Siang, Subansiri, Lohit, Dibang)

Oil, Gas, Coal:

Assam is India’s oldest and still one of the largest petroleum-producing regions.

Agriculture and Horticulture, World-famous varieties:

Assam Tea.

Muga Silk.

Naga Chilli.

Sikkim Apples.

Manipur’s Black Rice.

Tourism:

Unmatched landscapes: Tawang, Cherrapunji, Loktak Lake, Kaziranga, Majuli, Dzukou Valley.

Bamboo and Forest Wealth:

North-East holds 66% of India’s total bamboo reserves.

Cultural Economy:

Handicrafts, dance, textiles, indigenous art, martial traditions.

The potential is vast, waiting to be harnessed.

7. Connectivity: The Game Changer

Over the last two decades, connectivity has become the North-East’s greatest transformation tool:

Bogibeel Bridge.

Dhola-Sadiya Bridge.

Broad-gauge railway expansion.

New national highways and tunnels.

Airports in major state capitals.

India - Myanmar - Thailand Trilateral Highway.

Kaladan Multimodal Project.

Act East Policy enabling trade with ASEAN

The North-East is no longer a cul-de-sac.

It is emerging as India’s economic corridor to Asia.

8. The Cultural Strength: Unity in Diversity.

The North-East demonstrates how India’s diversity strengthens national unity:

200 plus tribes

180 plus languages

Indigenous faiths coexisting with Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity.

Rich festivals - Igam, Bihu, Sekrenyi, Ningol Chakouba, Chapchar Kut.

Deep respect for nature and community.

Strong martial ethos in Assam Rifles, Army, CAPFs.

This cultural richness is one of India’s greatest soft powers.

9. The North-East Today: Challenges and Hope.

Challenges persist.

Migration pressure.

Insurgency remnants.

Unemployment.

Infrastructure gaps.

Drug trafficking.

Border tensions.

Ecological vulnerability.

But hope is stronger:

Rising startups.

New universities.

Digital connectivity.

Tourism boom.

Greater political stability.

Youth-led innovation.

Increase in women’s participation.

Deepening integration with the rest of India.

The North-East is standing at a turning point.

Closing Reflection, A Call to Action.

India’s future prosperity will be shaped not in isolation, but in connection, internal and external. And the North-East is the hinge upon which this connection swings.

If nurtured with sensitivity, respect, and long-term vision:

The North-East can become India’s economic engine:

It can serve as the cultural lighthouse of Indian diversity.

It can anchor the Act East policy, linking India to global markets.

It can stand as the strategic shield of the nation.

But this requires:

Sustained investment,

Genuine emotional integration,

Empowerment of local communities,

Environmentally sensitive development,

And a national commitment that the North-East is not a distant frontier but an intimate part of the Indian soul.

The North-East is not the end of India. It is the beginning of a new India.

A stronger India.

A prosperous India.

A united India.

Author’s Note.

The North-East has always held a special place in my heart, not merely as a soldier who has served on distant frontiers and all the states of North-East, but as an Indian who recognises the region as a living bridge between our ancient civilisation and our emerging global future. From the snow-fed valleys of Arunachal to the serene lakes of Manipur, from the vibrant festivals of Nagaland to the deep spiritual ethos of Assam, I have witnessed a cultural unity that is profound yet often understated.

In this context, the upcoming North-East Rally being organised under the banner of KRC holds immense significance.

The rally, which is being flagged off by His Holiness Jagadguru Shankaracharya Swami Amritanada Devtirath Ji Maharaj of Shri Sharada Sarvagya Peeth, Jammu & Kashmir at Silchar when entering North-East states in Jan 2026, is not merely an event, it is a symbol of awakening. It represents a renewed commitment to bringing together the diverse cultural heritage of the North-Eastern states, fostering emotional integration, and rekindling the civilizational unity that has always defined Bharat. Such initiatives remind us that connecting hearts is as important as building roads and bridges.

With this article, I attempt to bring together the entire story of the North-East from its ancient origins to the present moment of opportunity so that readers may appreciate its immense value and understand why the North-East must be at the centre of India’s rise in the 21st century.

Note:- Data collected from open sources to compile the article for better perception of readers.



BARAK FESTIVAL

JANUARY 10-12, 2025

ACTIVITY PROGRAM





10 JAN
NE Cultural Fest
 Any Form of Art and Cultural showcase can be showcased here.
 The Top performances will be invited to perform in the Main Event.
 Schools, Colleges, University Department, Individual & Group Competition.



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



11 JAN
Barak Valley Conclave
 Potential Issues and Challenges of Barak Valley by different stakeholders.
 Includes: NGOs, and Governmental institution for development, awareness, awareness, environment, and preservation programs. Participation through invitation only. Different rewards are provided.



12 JAN
River-Climate Conclave
 Climate change will accelerate on Global Change, climate and environment. The Conclave will focus on the importance, technical and practical of River Barak, Planning & Geography, environment and development in River Barak, Climate Change.



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



10 JAN
Media Conclave
 Media Conclave: Media Conclave, Workshops, and the Fund, Talks and Conferences are part of the 'Barak Festival 2025'. Theme: 'One for All, All for One'.
 Media Conclave: Workshops, Seminars, and Conferences are part of the 'Barak Festival 2025'. Theme: 'One for All, All for One'.
 Workshops: Journalism, Photography, Design & Creative Arts, Sports, Games, Animation, and more.

Barak Festival

Adventure Sports, Art & Culture Promotion



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11 JAN
5E For Success Conclave
 The 4th Annual Success Conclave is going to be held on the theme: 'From School to Campus to Corporate'. Schools, Educational Institutions and corporate houses can join the Conclave as sponsors.
 Quiz and Group Discussion for Barak valley Schools & Colleges, Extension School, (Public Speaking) Colleges.
 In an online event, various students of NE India Schools and Colleges can participate.



10 JAN
Media Conclave
 Media Conclave: Media Conclave, Workshops, and the Fund, Talks and Conferences are part of the 'Barak Festival 2025'. Theme: 'One for All, All for One'.
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 Workshops: Journalism, Photography, Design & Creative Arts, Sports, Games, Animation, and more.

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

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

Barak Festival

Band Night | 10 JAN
 Musical Night | 11 JAN



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



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



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