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## PERSPECTIVE

Countries like Australia have already banned social media for kids under 16 — and it's time India considers the same. Our children deserve real childhoods, stronger family bonds, and freedom from screen addiction. Our Govt has taken incredible steps for the nation's future, and this one could set another powerful example. Let's protect our kids today for a better India tomorrow.  
— Sonu Sood, Actor

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

IMPHAL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### WHO SAID WHAT



**Celebrating the 36th Anniversary of the Nobel Peace Prize conferred on His Holiness the Great 14th Dalai Lama at Chamling, Tawang Monastery. A true beacon of peace, may His Holiness's timeless message of compassion and harmony continue to spread across the world.**  
— Pema Khandu, CM, Arunachal Pradesh

## Hornbill Festival 2025 concludes, celebrating Naga culture and global ties

KOHIMA

The 26th edition of the Hornbill Festival 2025 culminated with pomp and gaiety at Unity Plaza, Naga Heritage Village in Nagaland's Kisama on Wednesday evening, as various cultural troupes performed to mark the closing ceremony.

The cultural show featured performances from various Naga tribes, each presenting their rich heritage through song, dance, and indigenous games.

Nagaland's Task Force for Music and Arts also enthralled visitors and well-wishers with their spectacular performances.

Nagaland Deputy Chief Minister TR Zeliang, Miss Nagaland 2025 Linoka K. Achumi, and other dignitaries lit the bonfire, marking the formal culmination of the festival.

In his festival message, Zeliang elaborated on why the Hornbill Festival is cherished as the "Festival of Festivals." He said the festival is a space where the traditions, culture, and cuisine of the Naga people are proudly showcased and celebrated.

"This festival has offered our tribes, villages, craftsmen, entrepreneurs, and youth a meaningful platform to present



our magnificent diversity and talents to the world. More than a celebration, it has served as a meeting ground where cultures intersect, generations connect, and aspirations take shape," he stated.

He noted that the misgivings about Na-

galand and the Naga people, often shaped by distance and misunderstanding, are now being dispelled as visitors experience "our warm hospitality, our kindness, and our rich cultural tapestry."

Tourism and Higher Education Minis-



IMPHAL

President Droupadi Murmu arrived in Manipur on Thursday for a two-day visit, her first trip to the state since assuming office, even as a statewide shutdown called by valley-based militant groups brought normal life to a halt.

Murmu flew into Imphal Airport aboard an Indian Air Force aircraft and proceeded by road to Lok Bhavan, located around 7 km from the airport, officials confirmed.

The President's engagements began later in the day with her scheduled attendance at a polo event organised by the Youth Affairs and Sports Department at Mapal Kangjebung (Imphal Polo Ground). She is also expected to join a banquet hosted by the Governor in the evening and may offer prayers at the historic Shree Govindajee temple.

According to the itinerary issued by the President's Secretariat, Murmu will participate in a civic reception, inaugurate several state projects, and attend a cul-

tural programme at the City Convention Centre.

On Friday, she is slated to attend the annual Nupi Lan commemorations before travelling to Senapati district. At Taphou Naga Village, she is expected to meet internally displaced persons (IDPs),

participate in a public event focused on the PM-JANMAN initiative, and interact with members of the Maram Naga Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG).

The visit coincides with a "total shutdown" called by CorCom, a coalition of seven valley-based mili-

tant outfits, effective from 1 pm on December 11 until the President departs.

The bandh paralysed daily activities across the Imphal Valley, with markets, schools and colleges remaining shut. Roads were largely deserted, including the key

airport-to-Raj Bhavan route, while major commercial hubs such as Khwairamband Keithel, Paona Bazaar and Thangal Bazaar remained closed. CorCom, however, exempted the observance of Nupi Lal Day on December 12.

Despite the bandh, authorities have deployed a multi-layered security grid to ensure the President's movement across sensitive zones.

Ahead of her arrival, the Kuki-Zo Council (KZC) issued a statement welcoming Murmu's visit and urging her to take note of the ongoing hardships faced by the Kuki-Zo community amid the ethnic violence that erupted in May 2023. The Council said her visit comes at a "critical juncture" for thousands of displaced families and expressed hope that her presence would draw national attention to long-standing tribal concerns.

Murmu's tour follows Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the state on September 13-his first since the outbreak of the ethnic conflict last year.

## IAF Chief reaffirms readiness for two-front war at Vijay Diwas

DIBRUGARH

Air Chief Marshal Amar Preet Singh, the IAF Chief, said during a media interaction at the IAF Station in Assam's Dibrugarh on Wednesday that the Indian Air Force is fully prepared to fight a two-front war if such a situation ever arises. The IAF chief was in Mohanbari to attend the Vijay Diwas function, which marks India's victory over Pakistan in the 1971 Indo-Pak War and the creation of Bangladesh. "We are fully prepared to give them (our enemy nations) a bloody nose if they attempt any kind of misadventure," he said.

Earlier in the day, the Indian Air Force successfully commemorated its historic 1971 war victory with a spectacular aerial display at Mohanbari, as part of the Vijay Diwas Celebration 2025.

He graced the event, which showcased the formidable power and precision of the IAF's fleet.

The day-long celebration, organised by Headquarters Eastern Air Command, attracted a large audience, including military and civil dignitaries, air veterans, and hundreds of school-children.

The flying display featured some of the IAF's most advanced aircraft, including Sukhoi Su-30 fighters, Dornier Do-228 surveillance aircraft, Antonov An-32 transport planes, and Chinook heavy-lift and Mi-17 helicopters.

The aerial demonstration, held from 9 am to 2:30 pm, highlighted the operational proficiency of the Indian Air Force.

In addition to the flying display, the event featured an exhibition and a

special movie release, both dedicated to commemorating the 1971 war that culminated in the liberation of Bangladesh. The commemoration holds profound significance for the Eastern Air Command, which conducted key air operations from bases like Mohanbari to secure air superiority and support ground troops. Air Chief Marshal Amar Preet Singh recalled the IAF's contribution during the historic war, highlighting the importance of jointmanship.

"I'm very happy to share the memories of that time. The way the Indian Air Force stood rock solid and delivered what was expected, whether it was the day operations in November, the quick ceasefire in the air, or the final blows such as the attack on the Governor's House in Bangladesh, which decisively brought the war to an end. In those 13 days of swift action by the Indian Armed Forces, I saw Pakistan buckle under pressure and call for a ceasefire," he said.

He further emphasised the essential coordination between the services.

"The operation was not only a major success for the Indian Air Force but also a significant example of jointmanship. Operations such as river crossings or air drops would not have been possible without close coordination between the Army and the Air Force. The way the three services operated together in the Western Sector, with the Navy also participating, taught us a very valuable lesson: joint operations can secure victory in a major way. I'm happy to say that the Indian Air Force continues to train and equip itself based on those lessons," he added.

## Assam CM takes stock of preparations for PM Modi's proposed visit to Namrup on December 21

DIBRUGARH

To take stock of the preparations put in place for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's scheduled visit to Namrup on December 21, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday held a meeting at the Chief Minister's Secretariat in Dibrugarh with several ministers, MLAs, and senior officials of the state government.

It may be noted that during his proposed visit to Assam on December 20 and 21, Prime Minister Modi will formally inaugurate the new terminal building of the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport in Borjhar, Guwahati and also unveil a statue of the Bharat Ratna Gopinath Bordoloi.

Moreover, during this visit to Upper Assam, the Prime Minister will lay the foundation stone for an ammonia-urea project in Namrup, to be built at a cost of around Rs 12,000 crore, with a production capacity of 12 lakh metric tonnes. PM Modi will also address a public rally.

During this evening's meeting, Chief Minister Sarma issued a series of directives to ensure seamless arrangements for all events the Prime Minister will attend, including security measures.



He asked the administration to ensure adequate light refreshments, drinking water, and hygienic facilities for the public attending the event, along with proper traffic control and parking arrangements, and availability of primary medical care.

The meeting was attended by Education Minister Ranaj Pegu, Water Resources Minister Pijush Hazarika, Power Minister Prasanta Phukan, Industries and Commerce and Public Enterprises Minister Bimal Borah, Cooperation Minister Jogen Mohan, Labour Welfare Minister Rupesh Gowala, several MLAs, and senior officials, including Chief Secretary

Ravi Kota.

Earlier today, Chief Minister Sarma also visited Namrup to inspect the venue of the proposed public meeting to be attended by the Prime Minister.

He held a meeting with the officials responsible for preparations, reviewed all arrangements in detail, and issued necessary instructions to ensure the event's smooth execution.

During the visit, Water Resources Minister Pijush Hazarika, Power Minister Prasanta Phukan, MLAs Taranga Gogoi and Terosh Gowala, Chief Secretary Dr. Ravi Kota, and senior officials of various departments were present.



Welcome Yumnam Rajeshwor Singh



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## Why Reading Matters

Reading looks simple from the outside. You pick up a book, turn a few pages, and sink into a story or an argument. Here's the thing: the act itself reshapes how you think, how you feel, and how you move through the world.

A good book slows you down just enough for your mind to catch up with itself. You step into a space where your attention isn't being yanked in every direction. That steady focus strengthens your ability to hold a thought, follow a thread, and finish something you start. Over time, it sharpens memory, deepens concentration, and trains your mind to stay with complexity instead of skimming across the surface.

There's also the emotional side. Fiction pulls you into lives you've never lived. You feel with characters, not just for them. That habit carries into real life, widening your sense of empathy and softening your responses. Non-fiction works differently. It hands you context, frameworks, and perspective. You begin to notice patterns, connections, and motives that once slipped past you.

What this really means is that reading doesn't just stack information. It shapes your worldview. You learn to question easy answers. You weigh ideas instead of accepting them at face value. You develop the muscle to step back from noise and think on your own terms.

Reading also sharpens your relationship with language. When you spend time with good writing, your ear grows more alert. You start to sense rhythm, structure, pacing, and precision. Slowly, your own expression becomes cleaner and more confident. Whether you write for work or for pleasure, books give you the raw material to articulate your mind with clarity.

Then comes the personal comfort it offers. A book can be company on a dull afternoon, a breather after a heavy day, a challenge when you're restless, or a refuge when the world feels too sharp. It manages to entertain, steady, and teach you, all at once, without demanding anything in return.

Reading isn't an escape from life. It's a way of moving through it with a wider mind, a calmer heart, and a deeper sense of how much human experience holds.

## Foreign campuses trigger Indian concerns

JOHN J KENNEDY

The decision to allow foreign universities in India is not just a policy shift, but indicates a profound change in the politics and economics of higher education. During his visit earlier this year, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer led a delegation of 14 university vice-chancellors, all of whom were exploring opportunities under the new University Grants Commission rules. The 2023 regulations allow the world's top 500 universities to set up campuses in India. No doubt, it shows India's openness to global partnerships. But behind the rhetoric lies a mix of economic, political, and ideological interests on both sides.

The National Education Policy 2020 aims to make the country a global education hub. However, instead of building up its own universities to reach that standard, the government has invited established Western players to fill the gap. And that raises a pertinent question: is India building a self-reliant education system, or merely outsourcing its academic aspirations?

From Britain's perspective, the rationale is primarily financial. Once flush with endowments and stable funding, many UK universities are struggling now. Inflation, capped tuition fees, and shrinking government grants have left them running deficits. Making things worse, tighter visa rules have curbed international student inflows, which once contributed £37.4 billion annually to the UK economy. Faced with this challenge, expanding into India appears to be a smart business decision. With millions of English-speaking students and a booming middle class, India is a lucrative education market. It's no surprise, therefore, that Starmer's government is keen to tap into it.

However, the worrying concern is that education looks less like a cultural exchange and more like a commercial export. British university degrees in India are marketed as aspirational, prestigious, and globally recognised. The pitch sounds compelling: 'a UK degree without leaving home'. But the reality is more complex. The costs will almost certainly be higher than those of Indian public universities, and the degrees may not carry the same global acceptance as those obtained by studying in the UK. Graduates of these Indian campuses, although technically earning UK-accredited degrees, may not enjoy the same post-study work rights as their counterparts who study in the UK.

Of course, these campuses promise access to international faculty, modern infrastructure, and globally aligned curricula. However, that promise will probably be limited to a small, affluent demographic. Much like India's top private universities, the new foreign campuses may offer quality education, but at prohibitive costs. In a country where public universities still educate the overwhelming majority, this trend risks widening the already deep divide between those who can afford premium education and those who cannot. This concern becomes clearer when we examine the condition of India's public universities. Many have faced budget cuts and growing administrative control over the past decade. At the same time, the government has actively courted private and foreign players. And now, through this new initiative, the government has conveyed that education is shifting from a public good to a private commodity. Treating education as a tradeable service undermines it as a public right.

Sadly, and quite ironically, India's own attempts at international collaboration haven't fared particularly well. The South Asian University, established in Delhi as a joint initiative of SAARC nations, was meant to be a symbol of regional cooperation. However, political interference, discrimination, and curbs on dissent have tarnished that vision. If India struggles to ensure academic freedom in a regional university it hosts, can it realistically guarantee autonomy for branches of powerful Western institutions?

Besides, there's the question of competition. Indian public universities, already burdened by limited funds, and bureaucratic hurdles, will now face competition from foreign institutions with global brand power and deeper pockets. Even partnerships between the two may become lopsided, with Indian universities relegated to a feeder or satellite status. Over time, this could trigger a quiet brain drain within the country itself, drawing the best faculty, diverting philanthropic funding, and further weakening the public education ecosystem.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

"We don't have to be smarter than the rest. We have to be more disciplined than the rest." - Warren Buffett

# Insightful Idea of Ease of Voting by Shri Naveen Jindal: A Needonomics Perspective



IN THE CHAIR : JAGDAMBIKA PAL

PROF. MADAN MOHAN GOEL

PROF. MADAN MOHAN GOEL  
PROPOUNDER, NEEDONOMICS & FORMER VICE-CHANCELLOR (THRICE)

Democracy flourishes not only through its institutions but through the active and willing participation of its citizens. In India—the world's largest democracy—this participation largely crystallizes during elections. Yet, voter turnout has remained between 60 to 70 percent, exposing a persistent gap between democratic potential and democratic practice. For a nation aspiring toward Viksit Bharat by 2047, this level of participation is inadequate and signals the urgent need to reimagine and redesign our electoral processes.

In this context, the insightful idea shared by Shri Naveen Jindal recently in Parliament "Ease of Voting in tune with Ease of Doing Business and Ease of Living" is timely, visionary, and nationally significant. It mirrors the aspirations of a modern India where convenience and efficiency enhance citizen empowerment. Needonomics School of Thought fully endorses this proposal, seeing it as essential for strengthening the democratic fabric of Bharat.

1 Democracy and the Challenge of Participation

A democracy derives legitimacy from the collective voice of its people. When a sizable proportion does not vote, the democratic mandate becomes less representative. India presents a paradox: political awareness has risen, youth engagement has grown, yet voting behaviour has not kept pace.

2 Several barriers weaken participation:

Urban migration and work-related mobility

Perceived procedural inconvenience

Long queues and limited infrastructure

Insufficient voter education

Weather-related obstacles

Distrust in political promises

Inadequate accessibility for senior citizens and persons with disabilities

For Bharat to truly become Viksit, voter turnout must rise towards 90 percent, matching global benchmarks of mature democracies.

3 Ease of Voting: A Timely and Transformative Reform

Just as reforms in ease of doing

business and ease of living have unlocked economic potential, the idea of ease of voting must now become a national priority. The principles that transformed business procedures—reducing friction, simplifying processes, and leveraging technology—can equally strengthen electoral participation.

Key pillars include:

Simplified registration and verification

Wider accessibility and convenience

Ethical and secure use of technology

Empowering citizens regardless of location

Voting should feel less like a burden and more like an empowered civic privilege.

4 Online Voting: Lessons from Digital Platforms

Indians routinely engage in online voting for programmes such as Indian Idol and Bigg Boss. These platforms offer valuable insights:

Indians are digitally confident and ready.

With over 850 million internet users and affordable data, digital India spans both rural and urban Bharat.

Online voting is intuitive and accessible.

Entertainment platforms have perfected user-friendly designs that allow millions to vote effortlessly.

Digital infrastructure can handle massive participation.

If such platforms can manage millions of votes instantly, a secure government-run system can certainly be developed for elections.

Online voting need not replace physical polling booths; rather, it should complement them—especially for: Migrant workers, Students, Travelling professionals, NRIs, Senior citizens and persons with disabilities

A hybrid voting model will widen democratic access and reinforce trust.

5 Needonomics Perspective: Enhancing Value, Reducing Waste

Needonomics—rooted in the principle of need over greed—provides a strong economic and ethical foundation for the idea of ease of voting.

According to Needonomics:

Resources must serve meaningful societal needs.

Democracy derives its value from maximum participation. Investments in voting infrastructure thus fulfill a

national need.

Processes should minimize waste.

Long queues, lost work hours, and travel costs represent societal inefficiency. Streamlined voting processes reduce these avoidable losses.

Citizens must be empowered with simplicity.

Systems designed with convenience promote responsibility and engagement.

Technology must be deployed ethically.

Secure digital voting aligns with the Needonomics mandate of ethical, transparent, and accountable innovation.

Thus, ease of voting is an ethical, economic, and human-centric reform essential for New Bharat.

6 Policy Recommendations for Implementing Ease of Voting

To operationalize this transformative idea, India must adopt the following measures:

1. Secure Online Voting Infrastructure

Aadhaar or DigiLocker-based verification

Blockchain-backed transparency

Multi-factor authentication

Remote voting for domestic migrants and NRIs

2. Stronger Voter Education

Nationwide campaigns emphasizing civic duty

Inclusion of electoral awareness in school and college curricula

Youth ambassadors for democratic participation

3. Flexible and Accessible Voting Options

Early voting windows

Home voting for senior citizens and PwDs

Mobile polling units in underserved regions

4. Simplified Voter Registration

One-time digital registration

Automatic updates through database integration

Mobile app-enabled voter services

5. Non-Monetary Incentives

Certificates recognizing democratic participation

CSR-led voting awareness drives

Community recognition for high-turnout localities

A Needonomics Call to Action

To conclude, India to emerge as Viksit Bharat and empowered nation, democracy must evolve from passive participation to proactive engage-

ment. Ease of Voting is not merely a procedural reform—it is a national mission aligned with digital India, inclusive governance, and the principles of Needonomics.

A democracy where voting is simple, accessible, and universal reflects moral strength and collective responsibility. As India marches toward 2047, let us ensure that every citizen's voice becomes an active force in shaping Viksit Bharat. Ease of Voting is not just an electoral improvement—it is a democratic necessity and a patriotic responsibility. Now is the time to act.

### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

The upcoming

₹ 12,000cr

Ammonia-Urea Plant in Namrup will be Assam's industrial game-changer and boost Bharat's fertiliser self reliance.

Adarniya

@narendramodiji will lay the foundation stone of the project on 21st Dec. Visited Namrup this evening to review preparations ~ Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM, Assam



## INDIA'S TRADE STRATEGY FINDING NEW MARKETS VITAL

DHURJATI MUKHERJEE

India's trade outlook is a subject of much discussion due to the changing and uncertain geopolitical condition. The government is quite worried about the matter and has rightly decided to clear the Rs 25,000 crore Export Promotion Mission as well as the Rs 20,000 crore additional free collateral credit to support exporters grappling with global trade uncertainty.

Priority support has been identified to sectors such as textiles, leather, gems and jewellery, engineering goods and marine products hit by the US tariffs. The mission will be implemented through two sub-schemes—the Niryat Protsahan (Rs 10,400 crore) and Niryat Disha (Rs 14,650 crore). These measures are expected to help exporters get better access to credit and innovation finance tools while aiming to address the logistics cost disadvantage. Additionally, the support may help exporters tap new markets and deal with branding and warehousing issues overseas.

Experts believe that the country should not depend on any single country but need to cultivate diverse interests with various nations. Even in areas of energy, no single supplier, even Russia, should provide more than a quarter of crude imports. Also, no single foreign source, whether Moscow or Paris, should supply more than 25-30% of defence acquisitions. The same

logic follows for electronics and related items with reference to China. Similarly, neither the US nor the EU should account for over a quarter of goods exports.

Meanwhile, the Trade and Economic Partnership (TEPA) with the European Free Trade Association—Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein—that came into force from October is a new feature in India's trade strategy. EFTA countries have pledged an investment of \$100 billion over 15 years, the first such commitment in any trade pact in the world.

The investment pledge is a quantum leap from the mere \$11.9 billion FDI from these nations over the past 25 years, according to the Commerce Ministry. With India's total FDI hitting \$81 billion in 2024-25, a 14% surge, the real flow in the coming years would obviously be much higher due to the opportunities created by EFTA.

Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal recently pointed out that beyond FDI, labour-intensive exports such as textiles and gems and jewellery are expected to boom, generating waves of employment. It is understood that EFTA's affluent consumers are greatly interested in our agro-products like tea and coffee as well as biscuits and confectionery, not to speak of quality rice and fruits such as grapes, mango etc. Fishermen may get opportunities

of exporting frozen shrimp, prawn and squid though high quality will have to be ensured.

India is quite strong in the sphere of service exports that includes informational technology, digital solutions, consulting and fintech and these now exceed \$340 billion and offset much of the country's oil bill. If both dependence on any country is reduced, no threat could affect its trade. Future risks lie in clean energy, rare earths, critical minerals and semiconductors. China's restrictions on rare earths are well-known and it is understood that the country is exploring tie-ups with Russia for rare earth processing.

By expanding trade with Europe, Africa, Gulf, Asean and Latin America and strengthening value chains within South Asia not just expands influence but also develops the country's image. The diversification of trade, both in matters of exports and imports, should be the target and experts believe that it may not be difficult to achieve this within a year or so. It goes without saying that diversification is imperative as it fits India's national interest.

Another region is the ASEAN circuit and India has the capability to reinforce its Indo-Pacific presence, reinvigorate trade and strategic ties in the region and recalibrate equations with key players in the increasingly multipolar Asia. Meanwhile, there are shared anxieties over China's assertiveness in the South China

Sea and the ASEAN states see value in India's quiet capacity building support and non-provocative naval presence. India ASEAN trade reached \$123 billion in 2024-25 with ASEAN exporting \$84.2 billion and India exporting \$39 billion with the trade balance remaining tilted. In 2022-23, cumulative foreign direct investment from ASEAN to India was \$156 billion and \$56 billion from India into it during the same period.

There are indications that India will reiterate the importance of progress on the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway and the Kaladan transport corridor—infrastructure programmes that have faced delays due to political instability. Digital connectivity and cross-border fintech have seen modest gains and India is expected to benefit from a diplomacy of equilibrium in the region. Thus, India's role as a steady partner becomes valuable to ASEAN countries and other regional actors such as Japan and Australia.

While efforts must be made to gear up exports to nations, which have henceforth not been the focus of attention in a big way, there are reports of Indian markets also consuming more than in previous years. Mention may be made here of leather and leather goods exports which are bracing for a 5-8% decline in exports in FY26, weighed down by the steep US tariff measures and weak global trade environment.

# Manipur petroleum dealers call one-day shutdown on December 13 after bomb threat

IMPHAL

Petrol pumps across Manipur's Valley districts and adjoining peripheral areas will remain shut for a full day on December 13, with the Manipur Petroleum Dealers Fraternity announcing a complete closure in the wake of a recent bomb threat that has heightened fears over worker and public safety.

The shutdown decision comes days after a hand grenade was found inside the restroom of Ibudhou Pakhangba Filling Station at Keikol along Koirengi Road on December 6. The explosive device, discovered with a letter warning of dire consequences if unspecified demands were not fulfilled, has triggered widespread concern



among fuel retailers already grappling with rising intimidation.

In a statement issued on Tuesday, the dealers' body condemned the escalating pattern of threats, extortion demands and harassment of staff, saying such incidents have made it increasingly unsafe to run operations. The fraternity said petroleum dealers have continued to provide essential services to the public, remaining operational even during emergencies in line with government directives.

The fraternity underlined the critical contribution of fuel outlets to Manipur's economy, noting that petrol pumps collect substantial taxes for the state exchequer - including VAT of ₹19.56 per litre on petrol and ₹10.11 per

litre on diesel. Monthly VAT contributions from fuel retailers are estimated at ₹25-30 crore, based on prevailing sales volumes.

Beyond revenue generation, each petrol pump employs between 10 and 15 regular staff members, along with additional indirect workers, drivers and handymen, making the sector one of the key employment providers in the state. Fuel outlets also support various community development initiatives through CSR activities carried out in coordination with civil society groups and local bodies. The dealers' fraternity stressed that unlike other commercial establishments, fuel outlets cannot adjust prices to offset illegal taxes or extortion demands, as petroleum prices are

fixed by the government. This leaves operators with no means to absorb growing unlawful financial pressures. Warning that repeated threats not only jeopardise public safety but also threaten the stability of the state's revenue flow and the regulated supply chain of petroleum products, the fraternity urged the government to intervene urgently. They noted that fuel stations have already recorded more than a 50% drop in sales since the outbreak of the ongoing crisis on May 3, 2023.

Concluding their statement, the Manipur Petroleum Dealers Fraternity cautioned that any further bomb threats or extreme monetary demands may force them to impose an indefinite shutdown of all petrol pumps across the state.

## Nagaland, Arunachal Forge Strategic Pact at Hornbill 2025

KISAMA

In a major push toward inter-state collaboration in the Northeast, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh on Tuesday held a high-level roundtable meeting at the Handloom & Craft Pavilion in Naga Heritage Village during the Hornbill Festival 2025. The dialogue-attended by senior officials from both states focused on expanding market linkages, strengthening institutional partnerships, and identifying long-term avenues for joint development.

The meeting spotlighted opportunities for cross-border cooperation in trade, tourism, youth and sports, art and culture, music, and agriculture and allied sectors. Officials from both states underscored the need to build stronger value chains, support enterprise development, and create formal Business-to-Business (B2B) and Business-to-Government (B2G) platforms to benefit artisans, entrepreneurs, and emerging industries.

Arunachal draws crowds as Hornbill 2025 State Partner

As the designated State Partner for Hornbill Festival 2025, Arunachal Pradesh showcased a wide range of indigenous products that drew strong visitor interest. The pavilion featured GI-tagged handicrafts, traditional textiles, local rice wines, homemade pickles, herbal wellness items, premium tea varieties, candles and fragrances resulting in impressive sales and robust footfall.

The overwhelming response, officials said, reflects growing national and global demand for authentic Northeastern products rooted in culture, craftsmanship, and indigenous knowledge systems.

Pact to drive unified Northeast development

During the engagement, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh formally signed a partnership agreement aimed at strengthening cooperation across multiple sectors such as tourism, music, art and culture, industries and commerce, youth and sports, and agriculture.

## TIPRA Motha 'unbeatable' in TTAADC, will outperform 2021 in 2026 polls: Pradyot Manikya Debbarma

AGARTALA

TIPRA founder and royal scion Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma on Wednesday asserted that his party remains the strongest force in the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC), claiming that "no one can defeat" TIPRA Motha given the continued groundswell of support among indigenous communities. Speaking after welcoming Mayabati Chakma-president of the BJP's Mohila Morcha unit in the 49-Chawmanu Assembly Constituency into TIPRA Motha, Pradyot said the steady stream of voluntary inductions reflects the party's deep-rooted influence in village areas.

"There is no other party except TIPRA Motha that speaks about, and only for, the indigenous people," he said. "People may say anything, but our support is there in the villages, and even today no one can defeat us. Many people are joining of their own will-neither I nor the party have invited them."

Pradyot exuded confidence that TIPRA Motha would improve its performance in the 2026 District Council elections compared to its sweeping victory in 2021, when the party won a decisive mandate shortly after its formation. Responding indirectly to BJP general secretary Bipin Debbarma-who recently claimed that TIPRA Motha was losing its political grip-Pradyot dismissed the remarks as irrelevant. "Leaders may say anything, but on the ground the actual support is ours," he said. "In the next election in 2026, we will do better than in the 2021 TTAADC election." He added pointedly: "I don't respond to small leaders. If any big leader had said it, then I could have responded."

Pradyot also underlined that despite political differences, he maintains cordial relations with Tripura Chief Minister Dr. Manik Saha. "I have good communication with the Chief Minister and maintain a good relationship. People know the trust and the fact," he said.

## Assamese 'marginalised in our own land': CM Himanta Biswa Sarma

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday issued one of his strongest warnings yet on what he described as an escalating demographic crisis, asserting that nearly 40 per cent of the state's current population traces its origins to Bangladesh. Speaking in the inauguration of the newly built ₹170-crore Swahid Smarak (Martyrs' Column) in Boragaon on the occasion of Swahid Divas, Sarma said the indigenous Assamese community faces unprecedented marginalisation in its own homeland.

"Legalities apart, the Assamese are today marginalised in our own land; our culture is marginalised and the economy is fast shifting to those people who were never associated with our culture and history," the chief minister said, addressing a gathering that included families of martyrs of the Assam Movement.

Sarma, however, said he re-

mained hopeful of collective resilience: "One good thing is that there is a collective spirit to face it, and I am sure our new generation will keep on fighting. God will bless us and we will survive."

Honouring the 860 martyrs of the Assam Movement

The Swahid Smarak has been conceived as a permanent tribute to the more than 860 people who died during the Assam Movement- a mass uprising that began on December 10, 1979, demanding deletion of illegal migrants from voter rolls and a halt to further infiltration. Sarma recalled the triggering moment of the agitation: the death of 18-year-old Howly College student Khargeswar Talukdar, then secretary of the Bhabanipur Regional Students' Union, who was killed during protests against nomination filing by Begum Abida Ahmed, wife of then-President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed.

"At that time, I was a student of class five. I remember that pick-

ets were beaten so that she could go to Barpeta. Khargeswar was dragged by police and thrown into a ditch. That was the beginning," the chief minister said.

The movement rapidly intensified across the state-from Sadiya to Dhubri-demanding fair elections and clean electoral rolls. Sarma alleged that the then Congress government not only ignored these concerns but allowed illegal infiltration to flourish "for vote-bank politics," offering "only token homage" to the martyrs in the years that followed.

"Mercilessly killed": Sarma targets Congress, infiltrators

Sarma accused "illegal infiltrators" and the then Congress administration of responsibility for many of the deaths during the agitation, saying the martyrs were "mercilessly killed for raising their voice in favour of the fundamental issue of identity."

He also traced the roots of demographic change to pre-Inde-

pendence migration from East Bengal and later East Pakistan, arguing that decades of land availability and political patronage encouraged further settlement.

Government steps to protect identity, land and heritage

Listing the measures undertaken by the BJP-led government, Sarma said that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Assam has made "firm moves" to control infiltration. These include border sealing, plugging transit gaps with surveillance technology, and strengthening detection mechanisms. He also highlighted initiatives tied to the Assam Accord-particularly Clause 6-along with the expansion of tribal belts and blocks, protection of Satras, eviction drives from encroached lands, the promotion of indigenous languages, and the granting of classical language status to Assamese. These, he said, were "solemn tributes" to the martyrs and commitments to preserve Jati, Mati, Bheti.

## Assam University and RTU Hojai Join Hands for Sonbeel Utsav 2.0

SILCHAR

Assam University, Silchar, is gearing up to host Sonbeel Utsav 2.0 on 7 February 2026, an event designed to highlight the ecological, cultural, and scientific importance of Sonbeel, the largest freshwater wetland in Asia. This year's edition will be organised in collaboration with Rabindranath Tagore University, Hojai, a partnership aimed at strengthening academic ties and widening regional participation.

A preparatory meeting was held at Hemanga Biswas Sabhakshya in the Vice Chancellor's Secretariat. During the meeting, Assam University Vice Chancellor Prof. Rajive Mohan Pant said the Utsav aligns with the larger vision of Bemisal Barak, and added that the university is counting on support from people across the Barak Valley to make the programme a success.

Joining online, Rabindranath



Tagore University Vice Chancellor Prof. Manabendra Dutta Choudhury underlined how Sonbeel Utsav 2.0 could benefit both the Sonbeel area and the wider region.

Last year's inaugural edition drew strong participation from researchers, environmentalists, students, and local communities. Field visits, exhibitions, biodiversity discussions, and cultural programmes formed the core of Sonbeel Utsav 1.0. Experts spoke on pollution, siltation, loss of fish diversity, and the challenges faced by communities dependent on the wetland. The pro-

gramme created an effective platform where scientific understanding met local experience and laid the groundwork for this year's expanded event.

In this year's preparatory session, Prof. Arun Jyoti Nath, coordinator of Sonbeel Utsav 2.0, gave a presentation on the social roles taken up by Assam University after the first Utsav, including its support in creating homestay facilities at Sonbeel.

Although Sonbeel Utsav 2.0 will be a one-day programme, the organisers aim to make it more focused and engaging under the Bemisal Barak vision. With RTU Hojai joining in, the event will include cultural activities, awareness programmes, and discussions centered on sustainable development of the wetland. Assam University officials noted that the Utsav is more than an academic gathering. It is a collective regional effort to strengthen

ecological awareness, cultural identity, and responsible tourism, and they expressed confidence that people from across the Barak Valley will participate wholeheartedly.

The meeting was attended by Dr. Pradosh Kiran Nath (Registrar and Convener, Sonbeel Utsav 2), Dr. Subhdeep Dhar (Finance Officer), Prof. Piyush Pandey (Director, IQAC), Dr. Anghuman Sen (Director, Computer Centre), Prof. Anupam Das Talukdar, Prof. Amitabh Bhattacharjee, Prof. Syed Murtaza Alfarid, Dr. Aditi Nath, Dr. Joyshree Dey, Dr. Arnab Paul, Dr. Ajita Tiwari, Dr. Jagannath Barman, Dr. Sujit Ghose, Dr. Amit Kumar Das, Dr. Bishwa Ranjan Roy, Dr. Lurai Rangmai, Mr. Navajyoti Nath, Mr. Arijit Goswami, Mr. Swapnodeep Sen, Mr. Kutub Uddin, Mr. Sandeep Das, Mr. Bhaskar Goswami, and others.

## Cachar District Administration pushes for digital safety

OUR CORRESPONDENT

SILCHAR

The district administration used Wednesday's stakeholder consultation in Silchar to push for a sharper, collective approach to digital safety.

The meeting, held as part of the 16 Days Campaign to End Violence Against Women, brought together key departments and organisations working with women and children.

District Commissioner Mridul Yadav opened the discussion by saying that digital spaces now shape daily life as much as physical ones. He noted that women and children often face the highest risks online and argued that a strong prevention plan paired with fast, coordinated response systems is the only way to protect them. Here's what he underscored. Prevention has to start early, and it has to happen at home, in schools, and within communities. Families need digital literacy. Children should learn to spot risky interactions, misleading links, or unusual behaviour online. Teachers, parents, and field workers need to stay alert and offer guidance before problems escalate. The response side, he said, must be equally firm. Cyberbullying, online harassment, phishing, and financial frauds continue to rise, yet many victims do not recognise the threat or hesitate to report it. He pressed departments to take every complaint seriously and ensure it reaches the police, legal services, counsellors, or child protection units as required. Yadav also drew a link between digital misuse and social issues like elopement and child marriage, explain-

ing that many cases start with unsupervised online conversations. He pushed for wider awareness drives, better monitoring tools, and structured sensitisation programmes across the district.

He made it clear that digital safety cannot be handled by one department alone. Police, Women and Child Development officials, DLSA, DCPU, the Education Department, NGOs, CWC, OSC, and other partners must stay in constant communication if the district is to build a safer online environment. Calling digital protection a key part of modern governance, he urged all stakeholders to keep pace with evolving online risks rather than simply reacting to them. He said the goal is to empower every individual, especially women and children, to navigate the digital world with confidence. The event was organised by the Sankalp Hub for Empowerment of Women under the Women and Child Development Department. Assistant Commissioner Anjali Kumari, who also serves as the in-charge District Social Welfare Officer, was present along with representatives from the Police Department, Health, ASRLM, DLSA, the Local Complaint Committee under POSH, NGOs, CWC, OSC, and several district-level units.

Discussions ranged from digital threats and legal protections to financial safety and workplace rights under POSH 2013. By the end, departments had a clearer sense of each other's roles and left with a stronger, coordinated plan to address cyber risks across Cachar.

## Assam Governor Acharya attends closing ceremony of 4th National Barpeta Book and Science Fair

BARPETA

Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya attended the closing ceremony of the 4th National Barpeta Book and Science Fair held at the Municipal playground in Barpeta town on Wednesday.

Upon reaching the fair venue, Governor Acharya paid rich tributes to Barpeta's cultural and historical legacy, recalling the sacrifice of Khargeswar Talukdar, the first martyr of the Assam Movement, on the occasion of Martyr's Day today.

On the occasion, he paid his rich homage to the martyrs of the Assam Movement. He observed that Barpeta has long stood as a fulcrum of Assam's socio-cultural, literary and intellectual evolution.

Addressing the gathering on the occasion, the Governor highlighted Barpeta's enduring role in nurturing Assamese culture, literature, art and socio-intellectual development.

He commended the Barpeta Book Fair Committee for successfully organising the fair for four consecutive years, calling it a noteworthy initiative to preserve Assam's literary and cultural consciousness.

Quoting the Sanskrit verse, "There is no friend like knowledge, no wealth like knowledge, and no joy greater than



knowledge," the Governor emphasised India's age-old tradition of valuing learning.

He recalled Barpeta's deep literary legacy, enriched by towering figures such as Srimanta Sankardeva, Shri Shri Madhavdeva, Mathura Das Burha Ata,

Dr Banikanta Kakati, Ambikagiri Raychoudhury, Chandraprabha Saikiani and many other renowned personalities in literature, science and social reform.

Governor Acharya praised the book fair for its special activities for children, science exhibitions and creative pro-

grammes, stating that fostering a love for books among children builds character, sensitivity and a strong foundation for the nation's future. Citing Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the Governor remarked that "books build bridges between cultures" and stated that literature and knowledge unite humanity beyond language and geography.

He further noted that India's knowledge heritage, shaped by ancient universities like Takshashila and Nalanda, is being revitalised under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Governor also highlighted initiatives in Assam under Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, including the development of Bordowa Than, global recognition of the Charaideo Maidams, inauguration of Swahid Smarak Kshetra and the conferment of Classical Language status to Assamese.

The Governor, on the occasion, urged the people to contribute wholeheartedly toward India's goal of becoming Viksit Bharat by 2047.

He expressed hope that Assam and its people continue progressing on the path of unity, peace, development and prosperity. The programme was attended by Minister Panchayat and Rural Development, who is also the Chairman of the Granthamela Committee Ranjeet Kumar Dass, District Commissioner Barpeta Rohan Kumar Jha, Scientist, CSIR-NEIST, Jorhat Dr Bipul Das, Executive Director, Bongaigaon Refinery Nayan Kumar Baruah along with a host of other dignitaries.

Quest!

Lack of sleep and going to sleep irregularly can lead to early death.

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[www.northeastintegrationally.in](http://www.northeastintegrationally.in)

## IndiGo cancels 60 flights from Bengaluru; CEO Piter Elbers to appear before DGCA



5,463 pilots as of March 20, 2025.

However, as per data presented by Minister of State for Civil Aviation Murlidhar Mohol on December 8 in reply to a Member's question, IndiGo had employed 5,085 pilots.

Keeping a tight watch on IndiGo's operations, the DGCA has decided to station its personnel at IndiGo's headquarters, as it steps up oversight on India's largest airline, which continues to cancel dozens of flights despite saying operations have stabilised.

The DGCA has formed an oversight team of eight senior captains, and two of them, along with two government officials, will be stationed at IndiGo's Gurgaon headquarters to monitor cancellation status, crew deployment, unplanned leave, and routes hit by staff shortages.

These teams will submit a daily report to the regulator, as per an order.

Pilots' body Federation of Indian Pilots (FIP) in the recent past alleged that while all other airlines have provisioned pilots adequately and remain largely unaffected due to timely planning and preparation, the current disruption at IndiGo was the direct consequence of the airline's "prolonged and unorthodox lean manpower strategy across departments, particularly in flight operations."

Despite the two-year preparatory window before full FDTL implementation, the airline "inexplicitly adopted a hiring freeze, entered non-poaching arrangements, maintained a pilot pay freeze through cartel-like behaviour, and demonstrated other short-sighted planning practices," it said.

to a combination of internal and external "unanticipated" events.

These "include minor technical glitches, scheduled changes linked to the start of the Winter season, adverse weather conditions, increased congestion in the aviation system, and implementation of/ and operation under the updated crew rostering rules," Mehta said.

It is significant to note here that other Indian carriers also faced these "unanticipated external events", but their operations remained largely unaffected.

It is pertinent to mention that, IndiGo has seen its pilots' strength depleting by 378 pilots in the last nine months despite its chief operating officer and Accountable Manager, Isidro Porqueras stating to the DGCA in a letter last December that "the overall impact of implementing the proposed changes above (now-implemented FDTL) norms would amount to an approximate 3 per cent increase in crewing requirements."

As per a reply in Parliament to a member's question earlier this year, IndiGo had employed

## Amit Shah accuses opposition of spreading lies about SIR, tarnishing image of India's democracy

NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah launched a strong attack on the Congress and other opposition parties on Wednesday, accusing them of spreading lies about SIR, tarnishing image of India's democracy and asserted that the Modi government "will not allow infiltrators to get voting rights".

Replying to the debate on electoral reforms in the Lok Sabha, Amit Shah hit back at issues raised by opposition parties including Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi.

Amit Shah, who faced interruptions from Congress members over his remarks, said the government is ready to discuss all issues according to rules.

He said that Opposition wanted a discussion in the name of Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls or SIR, but such a discussion cannot take place in this House because the responsibility for Special Intensive Revision lies with the Election Commission, and the Commission does not work under the Government.

Amit Shah said that it had been decided to hold a discussion on electoral reforms, but most members of the Opposition spoke about SIR instead.

He said that for the past four months, one-sided lies have been spread about SIR, and attempts are being made to mislead the people of the country. He said that the Election Commission was constituted under the Articles of the Constitution and is, in a sense, a constitutional body.

The Constitution defines a voter's eligibility, qualifications, and conditions for being a voter in Article 326. He said the first condition is that the voter must be a citizen of India and not a foreigner. He said that based on the three qualifications, a person's eligibility to be an Indian voter is decided, and all three aspects must be examined by the Election Commission.

The Home Minister said that Article 327 empowers the Election Commission to recommend laws related to electoral rolls, delimitation, the conduct of elections, and other connected matters. Article 327 gives the Election Commission complete authority to prepare the electoral rolls according



to this interpretation.

He said Special Intensive Revision has taken place several times in the past and it has been opened for the first time.

He stated that periodic intensive revision of the electoral roll is necessary, and therefore, the Election Commission decided that it would be conducted in 2025.

Shah hit back at Rahul Gandhi over his allegations.

"There are three criteria of vote theft. First, when there's an invalid voter, second, when you win an election through wrong measures, third, when you defy the mandate. I would like to tell you about three incidents of voter chori. First, after independence, the country's PM was to be elected... Sardar Patel got 28 votes, and Jawaharlal Nehru got two votes. But Jawaharlal Nehru became the Prime Minister," he said.

"Indira Gandhi got elected from Rae Bareilly, Raj Narain approached the Allahabad High Court that this election did not happen according to rules. HC decided that Indira Gandhi did not win the election appropriately and declared it void. This was also vote theft. They brought a bill in Parliament

that no case can be registered against the PM," he added.

He also referred to a court case in Delhi that Congress leader Sonia Gandhi "became a voter before becoming an Indian citizen".

Amit Shah said that Congress's defeat is "certain" and not because of a change in voter lists.

"In his press conference, the LoP levelled allegations that the voter list is not corrected and needs to be rectified. So, what is SIR? It is the procedure to sanitise the voter list. He is opposing even when we are undertaking the process. It doesn't matter if the voter list is new or old, your defeat is certain; the voter list doesn't have to do anything with it," Shah said.

He said that the BJP never has to face anti-incumbency. "Anti-incumbency is only against those who work against the public interest. It is true that the BJP had to face anti-incumbency very rarely... But it is not as if we have never lost an election after 2014... Double standards won't work in a democracy. When you win, EC is great. When you lose, EC is useless and works at BJP's behest," he added.

The Home Minister Shah said that a provision was introduced in 2010 that a person's name cannot be struck off the electoral roll. He said that if intruders decide who will be the country's Prime Minister or a state's Chief Minister, can any country's democracy remain secure?

Shah stated that a voter should not be able to vote in more than one place. He said that SIR is only the cleansing of the electoral roll, but it hurts the political interests of some parties. Shah said that foreigners should not be given the right to vote to elect this country's Parliament or state legislatures.

He said that whether the electoral roll is old or new, a party's defeat is not caused by the roll - it results from anti-incumbency faced by those who act against public interest.

Shah said that when we lose elections the Opposition does not oppose the electoral roll, but when there is a heavy defeat like in Bihar, they oppose the rolls.

He said that voter verification is a constitutional process, and by raising questions on this constitutional process and levelling baseless allegations, the opposition is working to tarnish the image of the Election Commission worldwide. By doing so, the opposition is also damaging the image of India's democracy in the world.

Amit Shah said that since Narendra Modi became Prime Minister in May 2014, the opposition has had objections. He said that the NDA has won three Lok Sabha elections and 41 state assembly elections - that is, a total of 44 elections - while opposition parties have also won 30 assembly elections. If there is any irregularity in the voter list, then why did the opposition parties take oath after winning elections and why did they even contest them? He said the purification of the voter list is a demand of the opposition itself, and the Election Commission is doing exactly that.

He said when the argument of tampering with EVMs did not convince people, the opposition made "vote theft" an issue and launched a yatra across Bihar, but they still lost. He said that the reason for the opposition's defeat is their own leadership, not EVMs or the voter list.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Trump's 'gold card' program goes live, offering US visas starting at \$1 million per person



WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump announced Wednesday that his long-promised "gold card" was officially going on sale, offering legal status and an eventual pathway to U.S. citizenship for individuals paying \$1 million and corporations ponying up twice that per foreign-born employee.

A website accepting applications went live as Trump revealed the start of the program while surrounded by business leaders in the White House's Roosevelt Room. It is meant to replace EB-5 visas, which Congress created in 1990 to generate foreign investment and had been available to people who spend about \$1 million on a company that employs at least 10 people.

Trump sees the new version as a

way for the U.S. to attract and retain top talent, all while generating revenue for federal coffers. He's been promoting the gold card program for months, and once suggested that each card would cost \$5 million, though he more recently revised that to the \$1 million and \$2 million pricing scheme.

The president said all funds taken in as part of the program will "go to the U.S. government" and predicted that billions would flow into an account run by the Treasury Department "where we can do things positive for the country."

The new program is actually a green card, effectively offering permanent legal residency with the chance for citizenship.

"Basically, it's a green card but much better," Trump said. "Much more

powerful, a much stronger path."

The president made no mention of requirements for job creation for applying corporations or on overall caps on the program, which exist under the current EB-5 program. Instead, he said he'd heard complaints from business leaders who had been unable to recruit outstanding graduates from U.S. universities because they were from other countries and lacked permission to stay.

President Donald Trump speaks during a roundtable discussion with business leaders in the Roosevelt Room of the White House, Wednesday, Dec. 10, 2025, in Washington.

Trump signs order creating \$1 million US 'gold card' visa, pitches \$5 million 'platinum card' "You can't hire people from the

best colleges because you don't know whether or not you can keep the person," Trump said.

Trump has built his political career around clamping down on the U.S.-Mexico border and championing hard-line immigration policies. His second administration spent its first 10-plus months launching mass deportation pushes and sweeping immigration crackdowns that have targeted cities including Los Angeles and Charlotte.

But he's also drawn criticism from leading voices of his "Make America Great Again" movement for repeatedly suggesting that skilled immigrants should be allowed into the U.S. — something the gold card program could facilitate.

Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said the program will include \$15,000 for applicant vetting and that the thorough process used to scrutinize backgrounds would "make sure these people absolutely qualify to be in America." Companies will be able to receive multiple cards, but will be limited to one individual per card, he said.

Lutnick also said the current green card holders earn less money than the average American, and that Trump wanted to change that.

"So, same visas, but now just full of the best people," Lutnick said.

Investors' visas are common around the world, with dozens of countries offering versions of "golden visas" to wealthy individuals, including the United Kingdom, Spain, Greece, Malta, Australia, Canada and Italy.

Trump said the program means the U.S. is "getting somebody great coming into our country because we think these will be some tremendous people" and singled out top U.S. college graduates from China, India and France as among those who will possibly be receiving gold cards.

"The companies are going to be very happy," he said.

### European nations agree to consider weakening protections for migrants dating to World War II



BRUSSELS

As sympathy for immigrants erodes around the world, European nations agreed Wednesday to consider changes that rights advocates say would weaken migrant protections that have underpinned European law since World War II.

The consensus coalesced as mainstream political parties across Europe have adopted tougher migration policies as a way to blunt the momentum of far-right politicians exploiting discontent over immigration, even though illegal border crossings are actually falling.

Members of the 46 countries that make up the Council of Europe acknowledged "challenges" posed by migration while reaffirming their respect for the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights, the council's secretary general, Alain Berset, told journalists after discussions in Strasbourg, France.

Berset described the 75-year-old convention as a "living instrument."

While nations reaffirmed their commitment to the rights and freedoms of the convention, they also recognized countries' responsibility to "safeguard national vital interests such as security."

The convention and the court, which handles complaints against the council, have been increasingly criticized by some member states, including Italy, Denmark and the United Kingdom. They argue that they are too limited in how far they can go to tackle illegal migration and deport migrants who commit crimes.

Ministers of the 46 countries will now begin debating a political declaration on migration to be adopted in May and a new recommendation to deter human smuggling, Berset added. The council, which is not an European Union institution, was set up in the wake of World War II to promote peace and democracy.

Growing consensus for a new interpretation

Discussions over the need to reform or reinterpret the convention as it relates to migrants began last year after

nine nations signed a letter attempting to curtail the power of the court, the council's independent legal arm. The group of nations argued that the court's interpretation of rights and obligations prevented them from expelling migrants who commit crimes and keeping their countries safe.

Berset defended the court's independence at the time, but support for a tougher stance has only grown. While Berset sought to downplay the division, 27 nations signed a separate statement on Wednesday calling for a less restrictive interpretation of the law, echoing the arguments made last year. "A right balance has to be found between the migrants' individual rights and interests and the weighty public interests of defending freedom and security in our societies," it read.

Andrew Forde, co-founder of the AGORA group of academics, researchers and lawyers, said Wednesday's conclusions and the statement signed by two-thirds of the members showed clearly that the majority of governments supported a more conservative understanding of the convention based on political interest.

"For the first time in the history of the Council of Europe, member states have pinpointed a specific group of people that they want to afford fewer rights protection to," said Forde who previously worked for the council.

Meanwhile, the prime ministers of Denmark and the UK published an op-ed Tuesday in the Guardian newspaper calling for tighter migration controls to deny entry to those seeking better economic opportunities as opposed to fleeing conflict. "The best way of fighting against the forces of hate and division is to show that mainstream, progressive politics can fix this problem," wrote Mette Frederiksen and Keir Starmer.

## Rooted in Language, Rising in Learning: How NEP-2020 Is Transforming Classrooms in the Northeast

Few sights capture the quiet revolution unfolding in the Northeast's schools as vividly as a language fair on an ordinary winter morning. In one corner, children recite age-old folktales in Mising and Karbi; nearby, a group sings traditional Ao and Khasi songs; on another table, students translate proverbs from Dimasa or Tiwa into English. What appears to be a colourful school event is, at its core, a profound shift in educational thinking—a shift aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which places language, identity, and comprehension at the centre of foundational learning.

In a region where more than 220 languages shape social life, memory, and worldview, NEP-2020 is not a routine policy update. It is a proposal to rebuild Indian education on the foundation of a child's first language—something that holds particular power, and urgency, in the Northeast.

**A History of Languages Overlooked**  
For decades, the Northeast lived a paradox in schooling. While the region is one of the most linguistically diverse parts of India, the languages spoken in homes, communities, and tribal councils rarely found a place in classrooms. English and dominant regional languages like Assamese, Bengali, or Hindi were projected as essential for economic mobility. Tribal languages, meanwhile—Mising, Karbi, Tiwa, Rabha, Dimasa, Ao, Konyak, Khasi, Garo, Bodo, and dozens more—were sidelined, ignored, or treated as inadequate vehicles of academic knowledge.

This created a long-term but poorly understood human cost. Children often entered school with minimal understanding of the language of instruction. Their earliest interactions with textbooks were alienating. Participation dropped, conceptual learning weakened, and confidence eroded. Parents, worrying about their children's futures, pushed English-medium schooling, even if it meant leaving behind the home language.

NEP-2020 directly confronts this historic tension. It argues that identity and opportunity need not oppose each other, and that learning is strongest when rooted in the language a child knows best.

**Why the Mother Tongue Matters: Evidence Across India and the World**  
The policy's emphasis on mother-tongue instruction is not ideological—it is supported by decades of global research.

UNESCO and UNICEF consistently show that children learn 30-40% faster in their first language.

A 2023 NCERT study found that primary students taught in their home language scored nearly 20% higher in foundational literacy and numeracy.

Research from Azim Premji University demonstrates that these students transition more successfully to English and additional languages later—often performing at higher levels than children who began in English-medium classrooms.

For the Northeast, this data is transformative. A single district—say, West Karbi Anglong or Mon-may—has five to ten languages, each with distinct scripts, oral traditions, and phonetic systems. Treating this diversity as an obstacle has damaged learning outcomes for decades; NEP suggests it can instead be a strength.

**Change on the Ground: From Karbi Anglong to Meghalaya**

Early results from the region show just how powerful this shift can be.

In Karbi Anglong, mathematics lessons delivered in Karbi produced a 25% improvement in conceptual understanding within six months. Students who had once struggled with basic numeracy began solving problems confidently because the language barrier had been lifted.

In Meghalaya, classroom storytelling sessions in Khasi have transformed formerly hesitant

students into enthusiastic narrators. Their willingness to speak, discuss, and ask questions has increased dramatically—an essential foundation for foundational literacy and critical thinking.

In several Mising and Dimasa-majority schools, teachers observe that children taught in their home languages show a stronger sense of identity, greater participation, and more willingness to engage with English later. These are not merely academic successes. They represent a deeper psychological transformation—a sense among children that their voices matter, that their cultures belong in school, and that learning need not require shedding one's identity.

**Language as a Carrier of Knowledge: Indigenous Wisdom in Classrooms**

One of the most powerful elements of NEP-2020 is its emphasis on integrating indigenous knowledge systems into mainstream learning. In the Northeast, this means that the teachings encoded in local languages—knowledge about forests, soil, stars, agriculture, food, ecology, and community ethics—can finally enter classrooms.

Many tribal languages contain scientific precision:

“Traditional terrace farming techniques in Nagaland are explained in Ao, Lotha, or Angami with conceptual clarity.

“Forest management practices in Arunachal's Apatani and Nyishi communities are passed down through language-specific vocabulary.

“Folk mathematics in Khasi and Garo traditions teaches measurements using local metaphors.

“Local astronomy among tribes in Manipur or Mizoram uses star names and seasonal markers absent in mainstream textbooks.

When these systems are taught in the mother tongue, children not only understand them more deeply, they recognise them as legitimate knowledge—not just folklore. This blend of cultural knowledge and modern curriculum strengthens both competence and conscience.

**Language Fairs: More Than Celebrations—Laboratories of Learning**

Activities like storytelling, translation exercises, and multilingual recitations are not decorative events. They represent the pedagogical heart of NEP-2020.

A Karbi or Tiwa child translating a proverb first into Assamese and then into English is not simply performing a task. She is:

“practising comparative reasoning

“building semantic understanding

“learning to think in multiple cultural frameworks

“developing intellectual flexibility

Such practices produce students who are not just literate, but culturally literate—capable of navigating the complex multilingual realities of India with confidence and clarity.

**Challenges Ahead: Scripts, Resources, and Parental Anxiety**

Despite these gains, implementation is far from easy.

1. Lack of standardised scripts and written materials

Many tribal languages remain primarily oral. Without structured textbooks, standardised orthographies, and graded reading material, teachers often construct content on their own.

2. Shortage of trained teachers  
Having speakers of the language is not enough. Schools need teachers trained in pedagogy, translation, curriculum design, and child psychology.

3. Parents' fears about English proficiency

Perhaps the most significant barrier is social perception. Many parents worry that mother-tongue instruction will slow English acquisition and reduce job opportunities. These fears, shaped by decades of English-medium dominance, persist even when data shows the opposite.

Addressing these challenges requires investment—financial, intellectual, and emotional—from governments, communities, teachers, and civil society.

**A Region Poised to Lead India**  
Despite the challenges, the Northeast is uniquely poised to become a national model for multilingual education.

States are already innovating:  
“Assam has initiated multilingual textbooks in Karbi, Bodo, and Mising.

“Arunachal Pradesh is integrating Sherdukpen, Nyishi, Apatani, and Wancho languages into foundational learning.

“Meghalaya is expanding Khasi and Garo-medium teaching tools, supported by community-driven content creation.

Studies from ASER, NCERT, and Pratham confirm measurable improvements—better comprehension, increased student engagement, and stronger retention rates.

But the real transformation is not in numbers. It is in the quiet confidence of children who discover that their language is not a barrier but a bridge.

**The Deeper Stakes: Identity, Confidence, and National Integration**

Mother-tongue education is not merely an academic intervention—it is a social and national project.

When a child learns in her own language, she experiences dignity. When she sees her culture represented in textbooks, she sees herself reflected in national life.

And when she learns English and Hindi later with confidence, she becomes fully capable of contributing to the wider Indian and global community. This balance—rootedness with mobility, identity with opportunity, culture with capability—is precisely what NEP-2020 envisions.

In a country as diverse as India, national integration cannot mean linguistic erasure. It must mean fostering self-respect in every community so they can participate in the larger national story without abandoning their roots. The Northeast, with its centuries-old tradition of multilingual coexistence, demonstrates that this vision is not only possible but practical.

**A Civilisational Shift in Education**  
NEP-2020 is, in essence, a civilisational statement. It asks India to reimagine education not as a race toward English or a mechanical acquisition of skills, but as a holistic process that preserves culture, strengthens intellect, and nurtures identity.

In the Northeast, this vision gains its most vibrant expression. Here, where rivers and mountains divide languages but unite communities, the policy becomes more than an administrative blueprint—it becomes a cultural renaissance. Every time a child narrates a folktale in Dimasa, or sings a Karbi lullaby, or solves a mathematics problem using concepts she first learned in her own tongue, she embodies the future NEP imagines: a future where tradition and modernity walk together.

**Conclusion: The Northeast's Quiet Educational Revolution**

The language fair that opens this narrative is not simply an event. It is a metaphor for a larger transformation—the growing realisation that children learn best when learning begins with who they are.

NEP-2020 gives India an opportunity to repair decades of linguistic neglect, especially in the Northeast. It allows schools to embrace the immense cultural wealth that tribal languages carry. And it demonstrates that far from hindering English proficiency or global mobility, mother-tongue education strengthens the cognitive pillars needed for both.

If implemented with sincerity and collaboration, the Northeast could emerge not just as a beneficiary of NEP-2020 but as its guiding example. A region that shows India—and the world—how education rooted in identity can produce citizens who carry both pride and progress, both tradition and innovation. In the hills, valleys, and riverbanks where hundreds of languages bloom, a new model of learning is already taking shape—one in which children soar higher precisely because they begin from the ground of their own language.

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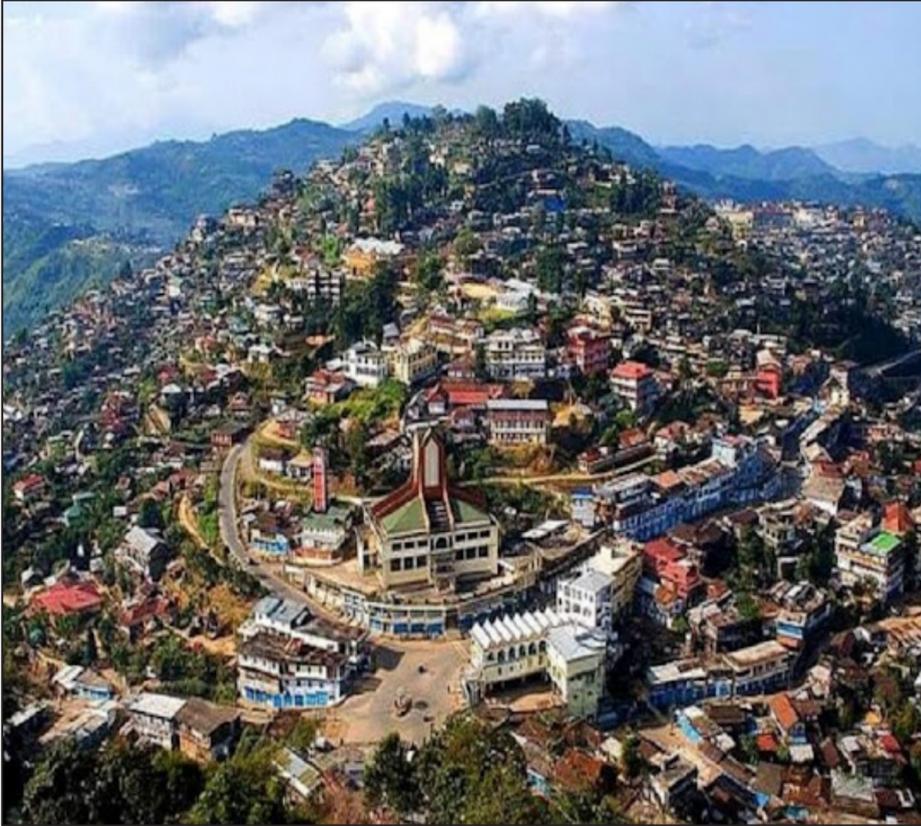
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Depression can not hit a moving target.

# NIER, Kohima & Kisama

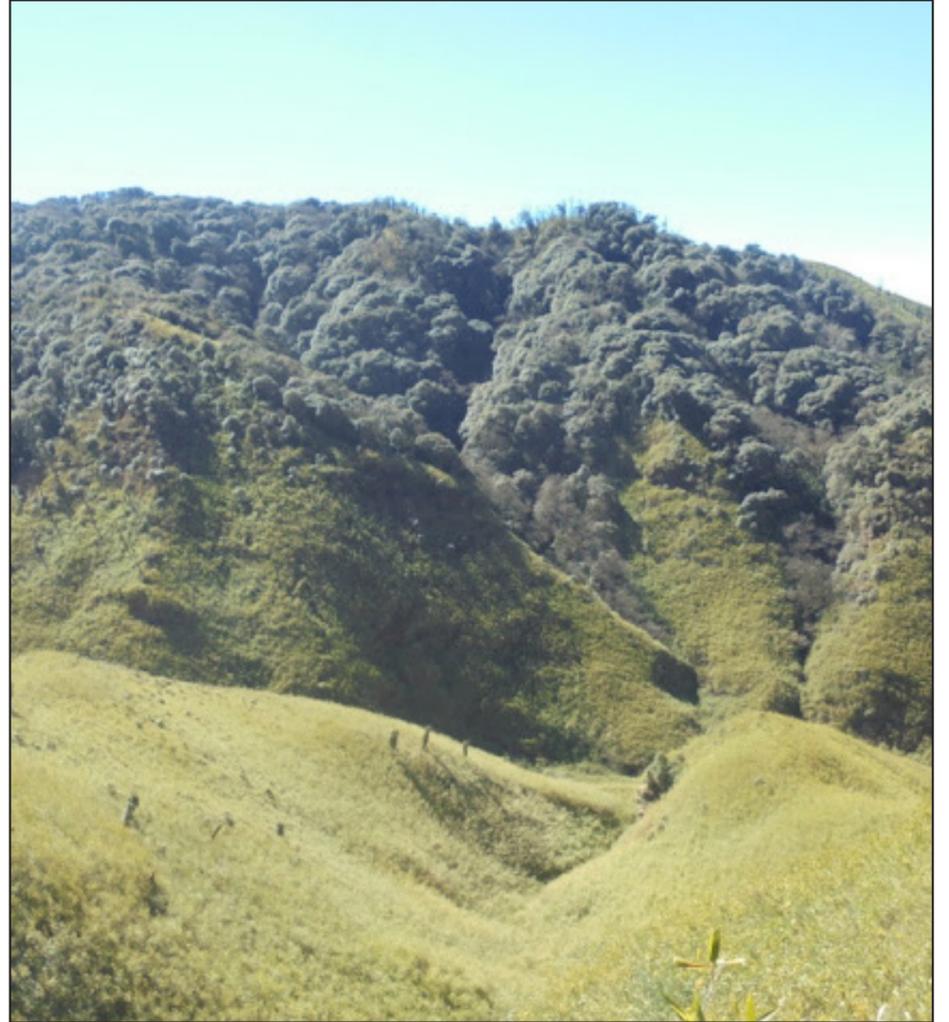


**N**agaland's Kohima rises. Hills layered over hills. Roads that twist without apology. Clouds that float low enough to brush rooftops. The city sits at the crest of Nagaland with a kind of quiet authority. It doesn't bother competing with the drama of Shillong or the sprawl of Imphal. Kohima has its own mood—measured, thoughtful, and anchored in memory.

The rally (NEIR) will hold its activities on January 18 (Kohima Activities – Kisama). Kisama Heritage Village in Nagaland serves as the venue for the Hornbill Festival and offers visitors a window into the culture and traditions of the state's many Naga tribes. The site features sixteen traditional morungs, striking ceremonial gates, open arenas and amphitheatres, bamboo halls and shops, and even a World War II museum. To understand Kohima, you have to start with the land. The city climbs and folds along ridges,

making every neighbourhood feel like a lookout point. Houses perch on slopes with a confidence that seems impossible if you're used to flat ground. Streets rise sharply, flatten for a breath, then rise again. Even walking here feels like a negotiation with gravity. But once you settle into the rhythm, you realise the hills aren't obstacles. They are the city's identity.

And at the center of that identity is the Kohima War Cemetery. You can't talk about the city without acknowledging this place. It's not a tourist spot; it's a reminder. Rows of white headstones stretch across manicured terraces overlooking the valley. The silence feels intentional. The Battle of Kohima was decisive, brutal, and historic, and the cemetery holds that memory with a dignity that shapes the city's relationship with its own past. People who grow up here carry an awareness that their home once stood at the turning point of a global conflict. That gives Kohima a kind of depth you feel even if you don't articulate it.



But Kohima isn't defined by grief. It's defined by resilience. The city rebuilt itself, expanded, and grew into Nagaland's political heart. Legislative buildings, government offices, educational institutions—they form the administrative spine. But look closer and you'll see a city that balances governance with the rhythm of everyday life: morning markets buzzing with local vegetables and smoked meats, schoolchildren climbing steep lanes, church bells ringing clean across the hills.

Kohima's culture doesn't live in museums. It lives in kitchens, street corners, and gatherings. Food here is straightforward and grounded. Smoked pork cooked to perfection, bamboo shoot adding sharpness, axone giving that familiar fermented punch, boiled vegetables carrying the taste of the soil—meals reflect Nagaland's relationship with its land. Even ingredients sold in small markets tell stories: local herbs that heal, wild fruits that surprise you with a sudden sweetness, fresh fish carried from nearby rivers, and chili varieties that don't believe in moderation.

Cafes and bakeries have carved their own space in the city's newer rhythm. Run by young entrepreneurs, they blend global influences with local comfort. You hear soft music, see students sharing notes, and spot travelers catching their breath after a long climb. Kohima's youth culture is subtle but sure of itself—music gigs, fashion pop-ups, photography walks, and conversations that shift easily from politics to football to indie bands.

Then there's the church. Christianity shapes the city's social fabric. Sundays feel different. Roads go quieter. Homes fill with families getting ready for service. Choirs practice harmonies that float across neighbourhoods. Churches are not just places of worship—they're community anchors, places where relationships form, where people feel held.

And yet, Kohima embraces modernity with surprising energy. New buildings push upward wherever the terrain allows. Fleets of taxis weave through traffic. Shops carry everything from handcrafted shawls to Korean skincare to the latest sneakers. The city absorbs trends without losing itself. You see traditional shawls paired with denim jackets, folk songs blending with rock, and heritage merging with modern expression in a way that feels natural, not curated.

Walk through the heart of the city and you'll notice how layered the place is. The State Museum holds textiles, weapons, ornaments, and everyday objects from tribes across Nagaland. But the real living archive sits outside, in the people themselves. You hear many languages in a single afternoon. Angami elders discussing community affairs. Ao college students planning events. Visitors from

other tribes and states blending into the city's flow. Kohima never feels homogeneous; it feels coordinated.

Now, talk to anyone about Kohima during December and one word comes up: Hornbill Festival. Though technically held at Kisama Heritage Village, just outside the city, the festival transforms Kohima's atmosphere. It brings the entire state together. Dance, craft, music, food, sports, and cultural performances share space without competing. What matters is representation, not spectacle. Visitors come with expectations of color and energy, but what they often leave with is an understanding of how rooted these traditions are.

Move beyond the central parts and Kohima reveals a calmer side. Villages on the outskirts hold onto older ways of living. Terraced fields carve patterns across hills. Families tend to gardens with care passed down through generations. The air grows colder, cleaner, more patient. This blend of urban growth and rural continuity gives the city dimension.

Nature shapes everything here. The climate dictates routines. Fog rolls in from nowhere. Rain changes plans instantly. Winter carries a chill that makes community gatherings warmer. Even during busy hours, look up and you'll find green ridges framing the city like protectors. Kohima doesn't forget that it exists because the hills allow it.

Now let's talk about the city's challenges. Urban congestion is real. Roads struggle to support the growing population. Landslides during heavy rain remain a threat. Expansion is limited by geography, forcing the city to grow vertically or outward in narrow belts. But Kohima meets these challenges with a kind of steady pragmatism. People adjust. Plans shift. Communities support each other.

What you learn quickly is that Kohima isn't a city built around convenience. It's built around meaning. Conversations matter. Community matters. History matters. Faith matters. Respect matters. You sense it in the way people greet each other, in how they navigate disagreements, in the way the city pauses to honor memory while still stepping into the future. Kohima isn't about spectacle. It's about depth. It's a city that asks you to slow down, adapt to its altitude, listen to its silences, and pay attention to its conversations. Walk its steep lanes long enough and the city begins to make sense. You recognize its mix of heritage and ambition. You grasp its balance of tradition and youth. You feel its collective memory shaping its present.

Kohima stays with you not because it overwhelms you, but because it grounds you. It reminds you that cities don't need to shout to be powerful. Some speak softly, from the hills, with stories that echo long after you've left.



## BARAK FESTIVAL

JANUARY 10-12, 2025

### ACTIVITY PROGRAM



**10 JAN**  
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 The Top performances will be invited to perform in the Main Event.  
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**11 JAN**  
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 Potential Issues and Challenges of Barak Valley to be discussed by stakeholders.  
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[www.krcfoundation.org](http://www.krcfoundation.org)



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Adventure Sports, Art & Culture Promotion

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**12 JAN**  
**River-Climate Conclave**  
 Climate Change will influence on Climate Change, pollution and river flooding. The Conclave will focus on the importance, technical and practical of River Basin Planning & Geography, river flow and sedimentation in River Barak, Climate Change.



**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 for students, parents, teachers, members.



**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 (College).  
 In the online event, various students of NE India Schools and Colleges can participate.



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 NE CULTURAL FEST  
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 BOOK CLUB | PUBLIC SPEAKING | QUIZ | RACE | MARCH | CONCLAVES



**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



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



**11 JAN**  
**film festival**  
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 Water Colour and Oil and Sawdust Painting