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**PERSPECTIVE**

**Lonely is not a feeling when you are alone. Lonely is a feeling when no one cares.**

**Respect Gandhiji's legacy: Bimol Akoijam**

**IMPHAL**  
Manipur Member of Parliament Angomcha Bimol Akoijam on Thursday raised four key concerns during the Lok Sabha discussion on the VB-G RAM G Bill, calling on lawmakers to move beyond partisan considerations and adopt a more consultative approach on legislation that affects citizens' rights and livelihoods.

Participating in the debate on December 17, Dr Akoijam began by stressing the need to safeguard the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi, warning against any attempt to dilute his historical and moral contributions. He recalled a widely cited observation that the modern world has been shaped by four towering figures-Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Albert Einstein and Mahatma Gandhi-pointing out that Gandhi stands apart as the only non-Jew among them. The MP underlined that Gandhiji's ideals remain foundational to India's democratic and ethical framework and deserve respect across political divides.

Shifting focus to landmark parliamentary enactments, Dr Akoijam described the Right to Information (RTI) Act and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) as among Parliament's most significant achievements. While RTI has strengthened democratic accountability by empowering citizens to question the State, he said MGNREGA derives its constitutional strength from the Right to Work, which flows from the Right to Life under Article 21 of the Constitution.

Expressing concern over continuing rural distress, the Manipur MP urged the government to strengthen the implementation of MGNREGA. He called for increasing the guaranteed number of workdays to 125-150 days and raising the minimum daily wage to at least ₹500, arguing that such steps were essential to ensure the legislation meaningfully supports rural livelihoods.

**WHO SAID WHAT**

**For the Tea Tribe community, the 3% reservation is more than a number, it is opportunity, dignity, and a future secured through fairness. Today, many families celebrate dignity, opportunity, and new beginnings ~ Dr. Himanta Biswa sarma, CM Assam**

## Shillong ropeway project clears key hurdles; construction to begin January 2026

**SHILLONG**

The Shillong Ropeway Project has cleared major administrative and technical hurdles and is moving steadily toward execution, marking a significant boost for Meghalaya's tourism infrastructure.

Progress on the project was reviewed during a meeting between the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Meghalaya Tourism Department on Tuesday, where officials expressed satisfaction with the pace of preparatory work.

Ground preparation has already commenced at the Lower Terminal Point in Riat Laban. Civil construction at the Lower Terminal, located near Madan Laban Nepali Secondary School, is scheduled to begin in January 2026. Work on the Upper Terminal near Shillong Peak is expected to start shortly.

The ropeway will span 896 metres and feature six towers with 8-seater detachable gondola cabins. Once completed, the project is expected to become operational by June 2028, although authorities are aiming to advance the



timeline and complete it by July 2027.

According to officials, the Lower Terminal will function as the 'drive' station, while the Upper Terminal will serve as the 'return' station. Both terminals will provide designated spaces for boarding and deboarding, along with essential passenger facilities.

The system will use a Monocable Detachable Gondola (MDG) technology supplied by French firm POMA. The ropeway will offer a four-minute ride, covering a vertical rise of 299 metres at a speed of 5 metres per second, with a carrying capacity of up to 600 passengers per hour.

Passengers will travel in enclosed cabins equipped with automatic doors, offering panoramic views of Shillong city and the surrounding hills.

Plans for both terminals include landscaped areas, cafeterias, kiosks, retail shops, tea and coffee outlets, waiting shelters, and public toilets.

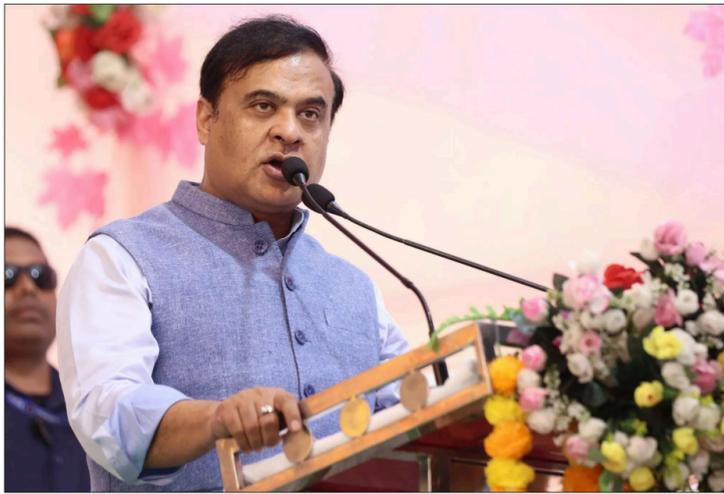
Officials said the ropeway is expected to significantly improve access to Shillong Peak, strengthen tourism in the state capital, create employment opportunities, and promote sustainable and eco-friendly tourism in Meghalaya.

**GUWAHATI**

With just months remaining before the 2026 Assam Assembly elections, political rhetoric has sharpened, with Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma launching a fresh attack on the Congress and outlining the BJP's electoral ambitions.

Speaking to the media at Vajpayee Bhawan in Guwahati on Thursday, Sarma claimed the Congress was not seriously preparing for the upcoming polls and asserted that the BJP was firmly positioned for victory in both 2026 and 2031.

"Congress seems to be preparing for 2036. As far as 2026 and 2031 are concerned, those elections are already settled," Sarma said. He alleged that while the Congress retained a limited and fixed vote base, it had failed to expand its reach or generate momentum on the



ground. "There is no visible groundwork or organisational preparedness from

their side," he added.

Highlighting the BJP government's record, Sar-

ma said the state had been governed efficiently over the past five years. "We have

governed Assam very well. This time, our clear target is to secure 50 per cent of the vote share," he said.

The Chief Minister also underscored women's representation under the BJP, stating that women leaders were now present at every level of governance. "From Zila Parishads to the Cabinet, women leaders are represented across all tiers," he said.

On alliance matters, Sarma said discussions with the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP)

and other NDA partners were progressing smoothly. "Talks with the AGP and our alliance partners are going on without any issues," he said.

The Chief Minister also took a swipe at Rajjor Dal chief and Sivasagar MLA Akhil Gogoi, questioning his political approach. "Akhil Gogoi needs to first win his own seat. Eventually, he will surrender himself to the Congress. What he says publicly cannot be implemented on the ground," Sarma remarked.

In a sarcastic aside, Sarma described Gogoi as a "digital leader," claiming he was largely active on social media. "He mainly argues digitally with people who comment on his posts. I sometimes watch his live sessions before going to sleep-it works as a stress reliever," the Chief Minister said.

## Mary Kom extends humanitarian support to IDPs in Manipur; offers free boxing training to children



**IMPHAL**

Legendary Indian boxer and Olympic medalist MC Mary Kom on December 17 extended humanitarian support to internally displaced persons (IDPs) affected by the ongoing conflict in Manipur, distributing blankets and offering words of solidarity and hope to families living in displacement.

Mary Kom visited the protest site at Lanboikhongnangkong in Imphal West, where the Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI) and IDPs have been staging a continuous protest since December 1. The agitation is seeking the resettlement of all displaced families by December 31, in keeping with the timeline earlier announced by the Manipur government.

During her visit, the boxing icon distributed blankets to IDPs as part of a humanitarian

outreach and interacted with displaced families, expressing empathy and appealing for peace and unity. She described the initiative as a small but meaningful gesture, noting that even limited assistance can bring comfort and a sense of hope to those enduring prolonged hardship.

In a significant announcement aimed at empowering children affected by the conflict, Mary Kom said that youngsters from IDP families who show an interest in boxing would be offered free training at her boxing academy. She underlined the role of sports in healing trauma, building discipline and restoring confidence, particularly among children who have witnessed violence and displacement.

Calling for sustained collective efforts, Mary Kom urged the authorities and society at large to ensure that displaced families are rehabilitated with dignity and provided adequate security.

COCOMI Women Wing convener RK Tharaksa la welcomed Mary Kom's gesture, saying her presence and support on December 17 had given emotional strength and renewed encouragement to the IDPs. Members of the IDP community and COCOMI also expressed gratitude, describing the initiative as a powerful act of compassion at a time of deep distress.

## Manipur Governor inaugurates 18th state-level Orange Festival in Tamenglong



**IMPHAL**

Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla on December 17 inaugurated the 18th State-Level Orange Festival 2025 at the Mini Stadium in Tamenglong district headquarters, underlining the state government's emphasis on inclusive development, cultural preservation and sustainable livelihoods.

The Governor, accompanied by the First Lady, was received by MLAs Awangbow Newmai and Janghlemung Panmei, Deputy Commissioner Anghshim Dangshawa and other senior officials.

The inaugural programme featured presentations by the Orange Growers Association and a

series of cultural performances, including traditional war cries, folk dances by the Zeme and Rongmei tribes, and a tug-of-war involving participants from the Rongmei, Liangmai, Zeme and Inpui communities. Addressing the gathering, Governor Bhalla praised the unity and rich cultural diversity of Tamenglong and reaffirmed the government's commitment to promoting indigenous culture and strengthening local livelihoods.

Referring to the festival's theme, "Celebration for a Cause," he said the event not only celebrates the renowned Tamenglong orange but also serves as a platform to promote sustainable livelihoods and tourism in the region.

The Governor noted that the Tamenglong orange, which received the Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2017, accounts for over 50 per cent of Manipur's total orange production and has emerged as a major source of income for local farmers, particularly with the expansion of organic cultivation. He described orange as the One District One Product (ODOP) of Tamenglong and said the festival has grown into an important platform for farmers, artists and youth, while also spreading a message of peace, harmony and unity. Highlighting the district's natural beauty, cultural diversity and historical significance, Bhalla recalled the contributions of freedom fighters Haipou Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu, describing their courage and sacrifice as a lasting inspiration for the nation.

Later, the Governor participated in traditional fire-making and lamp-lighting ceremonies, formally inaugurated the orange competition, inspected exhibition stalls, and visited an orange orchard, where he interacted with local growers. The event was attended by Principal Secretary Arun Kumar Sinha, Commissioner (Horticulture) Thaituilung Panmei, Secretary (Tourism) Hungyo Worshang, Inspector General of Assam Rifles (East) Suresh Kumar Bhambu, senior Manipur Police officials, and people from across the state.



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## TRUMP'S FAIR DEAL PROMISE

President Donald Trump has declared that a 'fair trade deal' with India is forthcoming, asserting that once concluded, India will once again 'love' America. He framed it as a departure from past arrangements that, in his view, had been 'pretty unfair,' and suggested both countries were 'pretty close' to a deal that is 'good for everybody.'

The timing of Trump's statements matters because India's prior public posture has been muted while Washington has taken the lead in stating milestones. Trump's claim bears weight when viewed alongside India's increased oil imports from the United States and its simultaneous reduction in purchases from Russia—a combination that appears aligned with U.S. priorities. Data indicate India sourced about 36 per cent of its crude imports from Russia this year, and refiners are now actively seeking to reduce that share. India's biggest private refining group has signalled it will follow government guidelines in curtailing Russian-oil imports. The United States has interpreted this shift as removing a "sticking point" in trade discussions.

Oil and energy flows are likely to form the backbone of the deal. India's oil import profile shows that Russian crude has accounted for a large chunk of its supply, at times exceeding one-third of its total purchases. Yet tracking data show a significant drop in Russian volumes as refiners prepare alternatives. While Russia remains the top source, the upward movement of U.S. crude into the Indian market is evident: India's imports of American crude in October rose to about 540,000 barrels per day, the highest since 2022, underlining the attractiveness of U.S. grades amid favourable arbitrage conditions.

For the United States, the bargaining logic is clear. Washington has levied steep tariffs on various Indian imports—total duties of around 50 per cent have been reported in the context of India's continuing purchases of Russian energy. Under the envisaged deal, the U.S. is prepared to reduce those tariffs at some point, contingent on India's energy procurement and trade behaviour. Trump explicitly linked the reduction of tariffs to India's cut in Russian imports, saying that as the Russian-oil purchases have dropped very substantially, the U.S. will bring the tariffs down.

From India's perspective the calculus is more intricate. While New Delhi has not formally repudiated Trump's narrative—it has not denied that a deal is underway and has acknowledged talks are progressing 'very well'—it must balance strategic autonomy, energy security and diplomatic priorities. India's decision to diversify away from Russia is as much about global oil market pressure and sanction regimes as it is about negotiating with the U.S. For example, new sanctions against Russian producers have compelled Indian refiners to review Russian supply contracts, presenting New Delhi with an opening to shift sources.

Making increased U.S. oil imports a key element of the deal both aligns with Washington's objectives and offers India a path to restructure its portfolio: from heavy reliance on Russian barrels to a more diversified supply chain. The prospect that the deal will allow continued flow of Russian oil at reduced levels recognises India's energy compulsions: the country remains one of the largest crude importers globally, consuming over five million barrels per day, and switching sources wholesale in a short period would carry risks for domestic refining margins and supply continuity.

However, there are material caveats. First, despite reductions, India remains significantly tied to Russian oil: data show Russian imports accounted for roughly 34 per cent of its crude in September, and major refiners are merely poised to curtail purchases—not yet fully committed. Second, while U.S. imports are rising, they still represent a fraction of Indian needs and face competition from Gulf and other suppliers. Third, trade talks go beyond energy: sensitive sectors such as agriculture, digital trade, investment protections and tariffs loom large in the negotiations. India has transmitted trade proposals to Washington and is awaiting U.S. responses, signalling that energy alone will not seal the deal.

Politically, the bargain carries risks. Washington's public framing—invoking love and fairness—may convey American confidence but also raises expectations domestically in India and abroad. New Delhi must ensure that any accord protects its sensitive sectors, as it has emphasised, while avoiding the perception of succumbing to external pressure.

Moreover, because previous trade announcements have been followed by actual policy steps, this time appears no different: announcements have typically come from the U.S. side, India has adopted a low-publicity stance, and execution has followed. Yet that track-record also suggests that India will move cautiously, and the devil will be in the implementation.

If the deal unfolds as indicated, India stands to gain lower tariffs on its exports to the U.S., improved access for its services and manufacturing sectors, and a strengthened strategic partnership. The United States stands to deepen its export of energy, rebuild leverage in a critical Indo-Pacific relationship, and advance its broader economic agenda. On the other hand, India must manage the economic implications of redirecting energy imports, adjust to shifting supply-chain dynamics, and preserve flexibility in its foreign policy—especially given its continuing relationship with Russia and evolving role in multilateral groupings.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

"I bear the wounds of all the battles I avoided."  
- Fernando Pessoa

# SIR ACHIEVES CONSTITUTIONAL STRENGTH

ASHWANI KUMAR CHRUNGOO

Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls by the Election Commission of India (ECI) remained the most debated and discussed issue during the year 2025. It occupied the head and front lines in media, political circles, courts, legislatures and finally now in the parliament as well. The discussion in the parliament on this topic on 9th December, 2025 assumes a great importance as it may lead the parliament finally to some major electoral reforms in future course of time as well.

SIR is a part of the constitutionally sanctioned electoral process in India that the ECI is supposed to undertake periodically. It is in a way the periodic 'cleansing process' of the electoral rolls at the national level. Unfortunately, some important constitutional and legal processes that were supposed to be taken up earlier got delayed due to a number of reasons, some genuine and some not-genuine. These processes included the Delimitation exercise of the electoral constituencies, Census at the national level and the Special Intensive Revision of the electoral rolls. The last SIR was done in the year 2003 during the NDA rule when Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the Prime Minister of India.

Two years ago, the government of India constituted a High Level Committee on simultaneous elections in the country. The Committee was headed by the former President of the Republic, Ram Nath Kovind. It comprised a team of wonderful, knowledgeable and experienced politicians, legal and constitutional experts and former senior bureaucrats. This committee after a hectic and thorough discussions with all the concerned stakeholders submitted its report to the President of India in March-2024 with positive recommendations to the government for simultaneous poll in the country primarily for the parliament and the legislative assemblies of the states.

The government is expected to take a decision on it followed by a number of steps at the level of parliament and the Election Commission of India. The parliament has already approved 33% reservation for women in the legislature which includes all the assemblies and the parliament. This is to be effective from the 2029 general elections. The exercises for the census and the delimitation of the electoral constituencies are also to be initiated in the next two years. The government is seriously focussed on completing all these constitutional exercises well before the year 2029.

In this context, the ECI took a decision to cleanse the electoral rolls of all the fake, duplicate and superfluous voters from the lists of voters. The constitution specifies a specific process for the ECI in this regard which is called the SIR (special intensive revision) of the electoral rolls. When the last SIR was done in the year 2003, it was expected that the ECI and the government of India would undertake a similar exercise in the next ten years. But that didn't happen and it got further delayed by almost a decade now. When the ECI took a decision to initiate this constitutional exercise in concurrence with the government of India, there was an unnecessary uproar in the camp of the opposition parties.

This uproar was so loud that it eclipsed all other issues and there was total focus on this issue of SIR at almost every level. SIR is basically aimed at updating the electoral rolls and there are only two qualifications to be eligible for becoming voters in India. These include

the age of 18 years and being a bonafide citizen of India. It is incumbent upon the voters to provide the documentary evidence in support of both the qualifications to the ECI. It is obvious that some voters would get deleted and some would make an entry into the rolls when the exercise is taken at the ground level. The whole exercise is also to ensure that no ineligible voter is included in the electoral rolls.

Generally speaking, there are four reasons for deletion of voters from the lists i.e. death of voters, migration of voters to other areas, duplication of name in the voters list at different places and/or bogus entries at different booths of one and the same person within the same constituency. When SIR is done by the Booth Level Officers (BLO), it is incumbent upon them to visit every house to confirm the voter's presence in the constituency. They get the forms duly filled and signed by each voter supported by presentation of the relevant documents as required by law supporting the two required qualifications.

All voters in India have a right to get registered as a voter at one place only. No citizen of India can have more than one vote and should ideally be registered in only one electoral constituency of the country. Having voted twice in an election is forbidden by law and is a crime. Long before, the ECI wanted to have all voters linked to their AADHAR cards in order to cleanse the voter lists of duplication problems. However, due to opposition from certain political parties at the political level and also in various courts including the Supreme Court of India, this link couldn't be legally established. The ECI and the government of India were restrained by the Apex Court from moving in this direction.

Every citizen of India is supposed to have his or her date of birth certificate and the document confirming his or her being a bonafide citizen of India. In this context, the ECI is within its rights to ask for the documents from the voters so that their registration is confirmed afresh through the process of SIR. The ECI in this connection after a long discussion with the government and the other stakeholders took a decision to initiate the exercise of SIR in the year 2025. In order to start with Bihar, which was going to the polls in the month of November 2025, it was chosen as an ideal state to begin the process. Accordingly, the exercise was initiated in the first half of the election year in the state.

The moment this announcement was made by the ECI, some opposition parties and groups and particularly the Congress opposed the idea of SIR and called the whole process as an attempt to make theft of the votes in favour of the ruling party at the centre. Rahul Gandhi, the LoP in the Lok Sabha called it "vote-chori" and also coined the slogan of "vote chor-gadi chor". He left no stone unturned to make it an issue of huge political and electoral controversy in the country. He thought in terms of bringing a political upheaval in the country through his campaigning on SIR against the ECI and the government of India and appealed to the Gen-Z to come on roads. He argued that the ECI was doing the exercise on behalf of the BJP and said this notwithstanding the fact that the SIR was a duly and constitutionally sanctioned exercise which was undertaken by the ECI a number of times earlier also.

The opposition made all attempts to create legal and constitutional hurdles in the SIR exercise besides converting the whole issue into a political controversy. Rahul Gandhi especially led a

'vote-adhikar yatra' in Bihar for three weeks and tried unsuccessfully to convince the public by his arguments in this regard. He was not paid great attention by the masses despite his huge investment in the yatra. Earlier also he blamed the ECI and the EVMs for his consistent failures in the electoral battles. The results of 2024 general elections gave him a false hope that his campaign against the government, BJP and the NDA was working and was thus advised by his close coterie to move into the campaign with more focus and intensity.

Rahul Gandhi took the issue to all available forums and platforms within and outside the country and attacked the ECI and the government besides the BJP and NDA on SIR. Parties, media-groups and lawyers close to him and the opposition camp took the matter to the Supreme Court of India. The ECI submitted before the apex court in no uncertain terms that the ECI was constitutionally authorised to undertake the SIR and stood its ground with firmness. The apex court didn't stop the ECI or the government from undertaking the SIR and instead upheld the view that the ECI was authorised by the constitution to do the same. Consequent upon the Supreme Court's decision and the stand of the ECI, the SIR was successfully done in Bihar well before the state elections held in November 2025. The results gave a crushing defeat to the Mahagathbandhan comprising RJD and Congress who were spearheading the campaign against the SIR.

The ECI on the successful completion of the whole exercise in Bihar, announced to go for the SIR in 12 other states including all those states and UTs that are going to the polls in the years 2026-27. The governments in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala again made a desperate attempt to raise the issue in the Supreme Court. However, the apex court didn't stop the exercise and instead considered the view to extend the dates for the exercise. It is important here to state that there is a lurking fear among the parties in government in these three states about the possibility of deletion of fake voters which are the vote-bank of these parties. These mainly comprise the illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan who have got possession of illegal Aadhar Cards, ration cards, voter cards and other identity cards in these states but don't have documents in regard to their Indian citizenship.

The Supreme Court of India in a recent observation in the case castigated any efforts to give these illegal immigrants any sort of assistance at the cost of the welfare of the original citizens of India. This was a historic view taken by the apex court and the left-liberal cabal of lawyers and former judges wrote a letter in this regard to the CJI criticizing his view. However, this didn't hold water and there was no change in the apex court's view in this regard. The West Bengal government led by the TMC supremo, Mamta Banerjee also, after creating a great ruckus on the issue at all available levels, has diluted her stand on the SIR issue. She said that there was a danger of 'the dismissal of the government in WB in case the reports of constitutional breakdown would be sent to the Centre' consequent upon opposition to the SIR being conducted by the Election Commission of India that has constitutional power to undertake the exercise.

Special Intensive Revision-SIR has assumed complete constitutional recognition and has also achieved functional success at the ground level particularly after its successful conduct in Bihar (where lakhs

of voters got deleted after the exercise) followed by the same exercise in other states. In UP, a large exercise in this regard is already in process; and in certain states dates have already been extended for its completion or are under such consideration. It is hoped that the SIR gets completed by the end of the next year in all states and UTs and the Electoral Rolls would be updated as per the law of the land and to the satisfaction of the all related constitutional bodies of the nation.

(The author is a senior BJP and KP leader)

### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

**Delighted that Anini has been conferred the "Best Emerging Adventure Destination" at the 17th ATOAI (Adventure Tour Operators Association of India) Annual Convention in Srinagar. A proud and happy moment. This recognition highlights Anini's immense natural beauty and adventure potential. Congratulations to all who made this possible. ~ Pema Khandu, CM, Arunachal Pradesh**



## BE IN HARMONY WITH NATURE

NASEEB BHAGAT

Nature has a vast stock of resources if we talk in terms of water, air, sunlight, minerals, biodiversity, etc., to meet our needs but not our greed. It is our prime duty to protect nature and natural resources so that they can be sustained for future generations also. Our ancestors were wise enough and always took care of resources for their effective management and conservation. They were always cautious towards resources and wisely used them without any wastage and kept water resources clean, be it wells, springs, ponds, or ghats. Likewise, they always preferred local species for plantation as they knew the significance and their associated benefits. In some cultures, such as Kashmiri Pandits, plantations were a ceremonial event on birth and marriage occasions. In Hindu mythology, cutting of fruit-laden trees is considered a sin, and plants are not disturbed after sunset because it is the nesting and resting place for birds after dusk. They were well acquainted with environmental ethics as they incorporated them into every ritual and occasion for the welfare of nature. Our forefathers offered the first fruit of every plant or crop yield to the Almighty God/deity for prosperity and wellness of family members, domestic animals, and agricultural production. Many trees were considered sacred, such as Peepal, Bargad, Tulsi, Banana, Plaash, Chandan, Ber, mango, etc., and their leaves or twigs were used in rituals. Many animals such as monkeys, elephants, snakes, fish, etc., were worshipped as incarnations of God and Goddess.

If we talk about the life of people 200 years back, the

lifestyle of people was quite eco-friendly and closely interwoven with nature. Needs were limited, which easily got fulfilled from the nearby environment. Mats, baskets, and buckets made from locally available plants including Sehtoot, Typha, Dhaman, etc., had very low carbon footprints as compared to the present generation. The artistic work such as making baskets, mats, buckets, plates, and cups from plants was more advanced, and nowadays plastics and polythene are replacing all those items. I still remember the days of my childhood in the village when there were a variety of crops and mixed cropping culture was quite common. In wheat crops, mustard was cultivated in rows or sometimes scattered, which was quite common. Similarly, Barseem, a multi-cut fodder or locally called Shattalla, had field margins decorated with flaxseed and sparsely with mustard or rye. In the kandi area, fencing material in the form of hedges of Adusa, Saintha, Garney, etc., was common, which had edible fruits and medicinal values also.

There is a large decline in our food crops as 45 hybrid varieties have replaced thousands of our traditional varieties of food crops. Crops such as jowar, bajra, and ragi are seldom grown by farmers. The use of agro-chemicals in the form of fertilizers, pesticides, and weedicides has changed the soil quality and chemical composition adversely and also the biota of soil. These chemicals are responsible for soil and water pollution also. The extent of these agro-chemicals is so much magnified that they have entered into the body of man also through the food chain.



### Message



**Climate change is Earth's quiet cry for care and compassion. Each green deed—planting a tree, saving energy, reducing waste—is a promise of hope.**

**When mindful choices become daily habits, we heal the planet gently and gift a greener tomorrow to generations yet to come.**

**Er. Tapash Roy, Kolkata**

**NEIR 2026**

# From intoxication to abandoned rescue: Akhil Gogoi flags explosive allegations in Zubeen death probe

GUWAHATI

Rajior Dal president and Sibsagar MLA Akhil Gogoi on December 17 levelled a series of explosive allegations while addressing a press conference on the Special Investigation Team (SIT) chargesheet filed in connection with the death of legendary Assamese singer Zubeen Garg.

Referring to the SIT's findings, Gogoi outlined alleged acts of negligence and criminal intent against all seven accused named in the chargesheet, which investigators believe contributed to Garg's drowning in Singapore on September 19.

According to Gogoi, the chargesheet places the gravest responsibility on Garg's manager, Siddharth Sharma. Citing the document, he alleged that Sharma allowed Garg to swim while intoxicated and without safety equipment, in disregard of explicit medical advice from treating physician Dr Hitesh Barua, who

had warned the singer to stay away from water and fire. Sharma is also accused of ignoring Garg's history of epilepsy, failing to obtain a medical fitness certificate for travel, and dismissing repeated vomiting as mere gastric trouble.

The chargesheet, Gogoi said, further alleges that Sharma had plans to "retire the victim and make maximum financial gains" from him, with evidence of investments in ventures such as Mahavir Aqua, Hotel Heritage and transport businesses. One of the most serious accusations cited is that Sharma allegedly told others "Jabo de, jabo de" ("let him go") when Garg was in danger, thereby preventing timely rescue.

Shekhar Jyoti Goswami, described as one of Garg's closest associates since 2013, has been accused of instigating the singer to enter the water by saying "Tate jao bola" ("let us go there"). Despite being in a position to intervene, Goswami allegedly signalled a thumbs-up to others

on the yacht to defuse alarm when concerns were raised about Garg's safety. The chargesheet claims he failed to prevent Garg from swimming without a life jacket despite his intoxicated and exhausted condition, leading to water ingestion and bodily injury.

Event organiser Shyam Kanu Mahanta has been accused of providing Garg with a bottle of whisky against medical advice, fully aware of the risks involved. He allegedly failed to provide separate accommodation for Amritprabha Mahanta, compelling her to stay with Garg and facilitating his drinking. Despite meeting the singer's management team on the morning of the incident, Mahanta is accused of making no safety arrangements and not cancelling the yacht trip despite public medical advisories on Garg's epilepsy. The absence of medical preparedness allegedly resulted in Garg missing the "golden hour", with an ambulance arriving 75 minutes after

the incident.

Amritprabha Mahanta, according to the chargesheet, allegedly contributed to excessive alcohol consumption by staying with Garg for two consecutive nights prior to the incident. She is accused of not informing Garg's manager, event organisers or his wife about his additional drinking and lack of sleep. The document further claims she encouraged Garg to swim despite his condition, recorded video footage immediately before the drowning without alerting the captain, and disclosed information about his medications only after the incident.

DSP Sandipan Garg, the singer's cousin, has been accused of instigating the 226-metre swim to the beach and failing to restrain Garg despite being seated next to him. The chargesheet alleges he entered the water only after NRIs raised an alarm, failed to save Garg despite proximity, delayed informing the captain, and bore responsibility for water

ingestion and submergence of Garg's mouth and nostrils.

The SIT submitted its 3,500-page chargesheet on December 12 before the Chief Judicial Magistrate's court in Guwahati after examining over 300 witnesses. Four accused—Siddharth Sharma, Shyam Kanu Mahanta, Shekhar Jyoti Goswami and Amritprabha Mahanta—have been charged with murder under Section 103(1) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. Sandipan Garg has been charged with culpable homicide not amounting to murder under Section 105, while two personal security officers, Paresh Baishya and Nandeshwar Bora, have been charged with criminal breach of trust under Section 316(5).

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has earlier described Garg's death as "plain and simple murder" and not an accident. The chargesheet, brought to court in four trunks, contains evidence collected from Singapore and across As-

sam.

However, Gogoi reiterated his criticism of the probe, terming the chargesheet "politically motivated" and alleging it was prepared without proper ground verification in Singapore. He dismissed it as "a piece of fantasy" and "Himanta Biswa Sarma's election manifesto for 2026" rather than a credible murder investigation.

Meanwhile, Garg's wife, Garima Saikia Garg, welcomed the filing of the chargesheet and expressed hope for swift justice through the judicial process. The Chief Minister has indicated that a fast-track court may be sought to expedite the trial.

With the case now entering the trial stage, public interest remains intense across Assam, with reports suggesting that several local lawyers have declined to represent the accused in what has become one of the state's most closely watched legal proceedings.

## Assam CM gives Rs 5 lakh aid to families of Arunachal road mishap victims

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday met the bereaved families of labourers killed in a fatal road accident in Arunachal Pradesh and announced financial assistance to support them during their time of grief.

The Chief Minister personally handed over ex gratia payments of Rs 5 lakh each to the next of kin of 21 workers from Assam who lost their lives when the truck they were travelling in plunged into a deep gorge in Anjaw district. The accident occurred on the night of December 8 on the Hayuliang-Chaglagam road while the vehicle was transporting labourers from Tinsukia district.

All the deceased hailed from the Dhelaghat area of the Gillapukri Tea Estate. Expressing profound sorrow over the tragedy, Sarma offered condolences to the affected families and prayed for the recovery of the lone survivor, who suffered serious injuries in the crash. He directed officials to ensure that the injured worker receives the best possible medical treatment.

The Chief Minister's Office said the government has also approved an additional Rs 1 lakh from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund to cover the medical expenses of the injured labourer.

Of the 22 people onboard the truck, only one worker, identified as Budheswar Deep, survived. After the vehicle fell into the gorge, he managed to make his way to a nearby General Reserve Engineer Force (GREF) camp at Chipra nearly two days later. Authorities became aware of the accident only after he reached the camp and informed them of the incident.

## Drone ban imposed near military camps in Nagaland's Mon district



DIMAPUR

The Mon district administration in Nagaland on Wednesday imposed a blanket ban on the flying of drones and other unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) over or near military establishments and sensitive installations, citing security concerns. The restriction has come into force with immediate effect and will remain in place until further orders.

In an official directive, Mon District Magistrate Wennyei Konyak instructed all citizens, resi-

dents, visitors, organisations and media personnel to strictly refrain from operating drones or UAVs in and around Assam Rifles camps, military installations, and other restricted or notified areas across the district.

The order follows complaints from the Assam Rifles, which reported instances of unauthorised civilian drone activity in the vicinity of its camps in Mon district. According to the administration, such activity poses a serious threat to security, public order and safety.

The district magistrate warned that violations of the ban would invite legal action under relevant laws. Security agencies have also been authorised to neutralise, jam or confiscate drones found operating in contravention of the order, as deemed necessary.

Authorities said the move was taken as a preventive measure to safeguard sensitive locations and ensure the safety of both security forces and the general public.

## Meghalaya: Hundred Drums Wangala Festival Committee to host Narang Festival at Chibrage on December 18

SHILLONG

The Hundred Drums Wangala Festival Committee (HDWFC) will organise the Narang Festival on December 18 at Chibrage in the Garo Heritage Village, Wangala Aodam, to celebrate the agricultural heritage of the Garo Hills, with a special focus on Komila (orange), one of the region's most widely cultivated crops.

The festival will be held from 12:30 PM to 2:00 PM and is aimed at highlighting traditional farming practices while promoting community participation through a range of competitive and cultural activities.

As part of the programme, the organisers have lined up several competitions, including the Sweetest Orange Competition, the Largest Orange Competition, and the much-anticipated Komila



(Orange) Eating Competition, all of which will carry cash prizes.

According to the HDWFC, oranges for the Orange Eating Competition will be provided by the committee, while participants will be required to register by paying an entry fee of ₹300. The competition will be conducted under strict rules to ensure transparency and fairness. Contestants will be given one minute to eat as many oranges as possible, with the highest number consumed determining the winner. Oranges must be peeled before consumption and fully swallowed, failing which participants may be disqualified. Members of the HDWFC will not be allowed to take part.

The Champion, First Runners-Up and Second Runners-Up in the Orange Eating Competition will receive certificates along

with cash prizes of ₹5,000, ₹3,000 and ₹2,000 respectively.

The Sweetest Orange and Largest Orange competitions will each carry a cash prize of ₹3,000. Participants in these categories are required to bring their own oranges for evaluation. All competitors will be briefed at the venue before the contests begin.

The Narang Festival will feature competitions during the day, followed by a musical concert in the evening. The highlight of the evening programme will be a performance by Riprap, the legendary band from the Garo Hills, which is expected to draw large crowds.

Inviting the public to participate and attend, the HDWFC described the Narang Festival as a vibrant celebration of agriculture, culture and community spirit in the Garo Hills.

## Attack on resettled IDPs exposes failure to disarm armed groups: Congress MP Bimol Akoijam

NEW DELHI

Congress MP Angomcha Bimol Akoijam on Thursday expressed serious concern over what he described as a "coordinated attack" on recently resettled internally displaced persons (IDPs), calling the incident deeply disturbing and indicative of major lapses in security arrangements.

Addressing the media, Dr Akoijam said the attack highlighted the failure to effectively disarm armed elements, raising serious questions about the government's approach to post-conflict rehabilitation and the safety of vulnerable communities. He stressed that efforts to



resettle displaced families would remain futile unless their security was ensured on the ground.

"The coordinated nature of the attack clearly shows that the process of disarming armed groups has not been properly carried out. This is a matter of grave concern, and the government must take immediate and appropriate action," the Congress MP said.

Dr Akoijam added that he had raised the issue in Parliament, urging the Centre to review its security strategy and fix accountability. He said he would continue to press the matter in the House until concrete steps were taken to protect intern

## Meghalaya Congress stages protest in Shillong after court dismisses ED case against Gandhis

SHILLONG

The Meghalaya Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) on December 17 staged a protest meeting at Congress Bhavan in Shillong, condemning what party leaders described as the misuse of central investigative agencies to target political opponents. The protest came a day after a special court in Delhi rejected the Enforcement Directorate's prosecution complaint against Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi in the National Herald money laundering case. Citing the court's decision, the MPCC reiterated its charge that investigative agencies are being deployed for politically motivated prosecutions under the present government. Addressing party workers, Congress leaders accused the BJP of following a pattern of announcing raids, selectively leaking allegations and conducting media trials without producing substantive evidence. They pointed to the Rouse Avenue Court's refusal to take cognisance of the ED's complaint as vindication of their stand. According to the MPCC, the court observed that the complaint lacked a valid predicate offence, a mandatory legal requirement for invoking the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). Party leaders said this finding exposed fundamental flaws in the manner in which the ED has been used under the cur-

rent dispensation. Congress leaders maintained that Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi have committed no wrongdoing, asserting there was no personal enrichment, diversion of public funds or criminal gain. They argued that the prosecution's failure to meet basic legal thresholds reinforced their claim that the case was driven by political intent rather than legal merit. The protest also highlighted broader concerns over what the MPCC termed the erosion of institutional neutrality through the "weaponisation" of central agencies for partisan purposes. Party representatives reaffirmed their commitment to democratic values, constitutional principles and the rule of law. Referring to the court order of December 16, MPCC leaders described it as a significant setback for the Enforcement Directorate. The Rouse Avenue Court declined to examine the allegations on merit, observing that the prosecution itself was unsustainable, and rejected attempts to rely on a private complaint or subsequent procedural developments in the absence of a legally registered offence. Concluding the protest, Congress leaders said that while the party would continue to face challenges with transparency and resolve, its focus remained on issues affecting ordinary citizens, including unemployment, rising prices, agrarian distress and the weakening of democratic institutions.

## Fresh Violence Rocks Manipur Hours After IDP Resettlement; Indefinite Bandh Called, Inquiry Panel Extended

KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

**MANIPUR:** Fresh violence erupted in Manipur's Bishnupur district late Tuesday evening, shattering tentative peace efforts and triggering fresh fears of displacement, just hours after internally displaced persons were resettled in the area.

According to official sources, unidentified armed assailants opened fire and launched projectiles using locally made bomb launchers, commonly known as Pompi, from hill areas of Kuki-dominated Churachandpur district. The attack targeted fringe Meitei villages of Phougakchao Ikhai and Torbung in Bishnupur.

The timing could not have been more sensitive. The firing began only hours after the Director General of Police concluded a high-level security review in Churachandpur and barely a day after 389 Meitei IDPs from 97 families were officially resettled in the affected villages.

Security personnel returned fire, leading to an exchange that lasted nearly an hour before reinforcements brought the situation under control. While no casualties were reported, several properties were damaged, and panic spread among recently rehabilitated families. During subsequent combing operations, joint security teams recovered three Pompi launchers from ag-



ricultural fields in nearby Kuki-dominated areas.

The incident has triggered sharply opposing narratives. Meitei residents and civil society organisations alleged the attack was a deliberate attempt by Kuki militants to sabotage rehabilitation efforts and force renewed displacement. The Kuki-Zo Council, however, expressed grave concern over the resettlement itself, describing the Torbung area as a buffer zone and terming the move provocative, particularly during the Christmas season.

As tensions escalated, a group of women activists announced an indefinite bandh across Manipur. They stated that protests would continue until a formal and mutually accepted agreement is reached between the Meitei and Kuki communities to end the ongoing conflict.

Separately, Samarou Naorem Apunba Meira Paibi and Samarou IDP members launched a scathing attack on the central government. The organisation's secretary, Oinam Chaoba Chanu, accused the Centre of pursuing a divide-and-rule approach and

failing to prevent repeated attacks. He also highlighted the absence of a comprehensive rehabilitation plan for thousands of IDPs who have spent over three years in relief camps.

Amid the renewed unrest, the Union government extended the tenure of the Commission of Inquiry probing the 2023 Manipur ethnic violence. A notification issued on December 16 extended the panel's deadline to May 20, 2026. Headed by former Gauhati High Court Chief Justice Ajai Lamba, this marks the fifth extension granted to the commission tasked with examining the causes, spread, and administrative lapses linked to the violence that began in May 2023.

The extension comes against the backdrop of recent political engagements, including separate meetings of Meitei and Kuki BJP MLAs with the party's central leadership in New Delhi, as well as tripartite talks involving the Ministry of Home Affairs and Kuki militant groups under the Suspension of Operations agreement.

Additional security forces have since been deployed in Bishnupur, and investigations are underway. Yet the attack has raised uncomfortable questions about security preparedness in buffer zones, the effectiveness of ongoing peace initiatives, and perceived asymmetries in disarmament.

For families who had only just returned home, the fear of being displaced once again now looms large, underscoring the fragile gap between political dialogue and the volatile realities on the ground in Manipur.

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High compensation costs kept IndiGo's international flights flying amid domestic chaos

# G RAM G bill: Opposition's protest march in Parliament complex, Kharge vows to take fight to streets



NEW DELHI

India's largest domestic airline chose profitability over the suffering of lakhs of its domestic passengers during its recent operational crisis. From December 1 to 9, IndiGo triggered a massive aviation disruption by cancelling nearly 4,290 domestic flights, impacting passengers across the country.

The startling reality, however, is that despite citing multiple issues for the meltdown, the airline cancelled only 60 international flights during the nine-day period.

The primary reason was the significantly higher compensation payable to international passengers compared to domestic flyers.

Data shared by IndiGo shows that international cancellations accounted for just 2% of the nearly 2,700 international flights operated during the period. The airline operates around 300 international flights daily, connecting 44 destinations,

tion payable for international flight cancellations is nearly 13 times higher than that for domestic passengers. Additionally, airlines must provide hotel accommodation to international flyers who need to stay overnight, and ticket refunds result in significantly higher per-flight losses.

For domestic cancellations, IndiGo announced compensation ranging from Rs 5,000 to Rs 10,000 per ticket, depending on the timing of the cancellation. Passengers informed at the last minute are entitled to compensation at the higher end of the range.

In the case of an international flight cancelled from India, the return leg also stands cancelled. Since this often involves a foreign jurisdiction, international norms govern compensation for the departing flight.

Under European Union passenger rights regulations, cancellations can attract compensation of up to 600 euros or 520 pounds, approximately Rs 64,000 per ticket, applicable to both EU and non-EU airlines. Exceptions apply only in cases such as bad weather or security threats. These rules do not apply to US-bound flights, where consumer protection laws are less stringent.

When asked about the compensation paid for international flight cancellations, IndiGo declined to share specific figures. "We are governed by Indian and international rules for claims, and we abide by them," the airline said.

an official said.

"The 2% cancellations were for reboot (crew recovery). These were flights with basic loads (low passenger counts) to ensure customer inconvenience was minimised," the official added.

Notably, even on December 5, when IndiGo announced the unprecedented cancellation of all its flights from Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport, international operations continued.

As the crisis raged through the first week of December, a senior airline executive told, "When such a severe operational crisis is unfolding, the airline somehow manages to keep most of its international operations afloat. That is quite a mystery!"

Even on December 5, when IndiGo announced the unprecedented cancellation of all its flights from Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport, international operations continued.

The explanation lies in commercial considerations. The minimum compensa-

## NEW DELHI

Several opposition MPs on Thursday took out a protest march inside the Parliament House complex against the G RAM G bill and demanded its withdrawal, as Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge vowed to fight the government's move in Parliament and in the streets.

Behind a huge banner of 'Mahatma Gandhi NREGA', they marched from the Gandhi statue at Prerna Sthal to Makar Dwar, raising slogans against the government.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, AICC general secretary K C Venugopal, DMK's K Kanthimozhi, TR Ballu, A Raja, IUML's ET Mohammed Basheer, Shiv Sena (UBT)'s Arvind Sawant and RSP's N K Premchandran, among others, participated in the protest.

"The Modi government has not only insulted the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, but has also crushed the right to work, which was instrumental in bringing about socio-economic transformation in India's villages," Kharge said in a post on X in Hindi after the protest.

"Against this tyranny of the ruling dictatorial government, we will fight from Parliament to the streets," Kharge said.

Senior Congress leader Sonia Gandhi joined the protesting MPs and participated in the demonstrations at Makar Dwar.

Speaking to reporters, Venugopal said, "Today, Parliament is witnessing the murder of democracy.

By removing the name of Mahatma Gandhi from NREGA they



are trying to kill the democratic values as well as the ideology of the Father of the Nation."

The Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Bill to replace the UPA-era MGNREGA is being debated in Parliament.

The Opposition has been strong-

ly opposing the Bill, accusing the government of insulting Mahatma Gandhi and diluting the provisions of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005.

According to the bill, it will provide a statutory guarantee of 125 days of wage employment in

a financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to undertake unskilled manual work.

Within six months from the date of commencement of the VB-G RAM G Act, states will have to make a scheme consistent with the provisions of the new law.

# INTERNATIONAL

India accelerates free trade agreements to counter US tariffs and expand exports

## NEW DELHI:

India has accelerated a push to finalise several free trade agreements over the next few months to offset the impact of steep US import tariffs and widen export destinations during growing global trade uncertainties.

New Delhi is in advanced talks with the European Union, New Zealand and Chile and this week is set to sign its first agreement under the renewed push with Oman, according to Indian officials who spoke on condition of anonymity as the details are not yet public.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to be in Oman's capital Muscat when the India-Oman free trade agreement, or FTA, is signed Thursday, officials said. The deal aims to boost bilateral trade and push India's exports of engineering goods, textiles, pharmaceuticals and agricultural products, officials said.

FTAs are a central pillar of India's economic strategy as it seeks deeper integration into global supply chains, stronger export growth and sustained job creation. By lowering tariffs and setting predictable trade rules, the pacts would help Indian businesses remain competitive and expand access to newer markets.

With global trade increasingly shaped by tariff disputes and geopolitical tensions, India is betting that a wider network of trade agreements will help cushion external shocks and anchor its export ambitions.

The stepped-up negotiations come as Indian exporters face pressure from higher US import tariffs of 50%, which went into effect in August.

While the two countries have been negotiating a bilateral trade



agreement, the tariffs have weighed on sectors such as textiles, auto components, metals and labor-intensive manufacturing.

"India is clearly using FTAs as a strategic tool to diversify export markets and soften the impact of steep and uncertain US tariffs," trade analyst Ajay Srivastava said.

In all, India has 15 FTAs covering 26 countries and six preferential trade agreements with another 26 nations while negotiating with more than 50 other partners, Srivastava said.

Once the ongoing talks conclude, India will have trade agreements with virtually all major global economies except China, he added.

India signed comprehensive economic cooperation and trade agreements with the UAE and Australia in recent years, lifting bilateral trade with both countries. In May, Britain and India announced they agreed on a hard-wrought FTA that will slash tariffs on products including Scotch whisky and English gin shipped to

India and Indian food and spices sent to the UK.

The recent agreements have reinforced the case for faster negotiations and clearer frameworks for business, officials said.

"India is negotiating several FTAs" at a time of challenges in global trade, Trade Secretary Rajesh Agarwal told reporters this week. "I see positive progress on several of these, next year."

Despite renewed momentum, challenges remain as Indian negotiators face pressure to protect small farmers and domestic industries even as trading partners push for greater market access.

India and the US hoped to have the first tranche of a bilateral trade agreement by the fall, but it has not come through as ties have strained following India's unabated purchase of discounted Russian crude oil. Washington says the purchases help fund Moscow's war machine in the ongoing war with Ukraine.

In recent weeks, there have

been signs of tempers cooling. Modi applauded Trump's peace plan to end the Russia-Ukraine war and the two leaders recently spoke over the phone to discuss mutual interests including trade.

A team of US negotiators led by Deputy Trade Representative Rick Switzer visited New Delhi last week and held talks with Indian officials.

Switzer discussed an India-US economic and technological partnership as well as opportunities to boost two-way trade, India's Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

New Zealand's Trade and Investment Minister Todd McClay met his Indian counterpart Piyush Goyal last week. They discussed key aspects of an FTA and explored ways to advance the negotiations for mutual benefits, Goyal said on X.

EU Trade and Economic Security Commissioner Maros Sefcovic also met Goyal last week to review progress on the India-EU FTA and explore ways to resolve issues and advance negotiations.

Airline's focus now on resilience, root cause analysis, rebuilding: IndiGo CEO Pieter Elbers



## MUMBAI

IndiGo Chief Executive Officer Pieter Elbers on Thursday said the airline's focus now is on three things - resilience, root-cause analysis and rebuilding, after the domestic carrier inconvenienced and caused hardship to lakhs of passengers across airports by cancelling thousands of flights earlier this month.

In a video message to employees on Thursday, Elbers said the focus of IndiGo is now on rebuilding the airline post-stabilisation of operations, and that the airline's Board has appointed an external aviation expert to conduct a comprehensive root-cause analysis.

"On December 9, I shared the stabilisation of IndiGo's

operation. After that, we restored our network to 2,200 flights today (Thursday).

Now we focus on three things: resilience, root cause analysis and rebuilding (the airline)," Elbers said.

Attributing the disruptions seemingly to a "compounding effect of several factors," he said, "an external aviation expert has been appointed by the Board to conduct a comprehensive root cause analysis." Elbers said he, along with the leadership, will travel across the network to meet the employees and understand the challenges they faced during the disruptions.

These were the employees on the ground, who faced severe backlash and public ire during the over a week-

long massive disruptions at the Rahul Bhatia-controlled private carrier, as the airline failed to provide even basic amenities or proper information while abruptly cancelling hundreds of flights every day.

IndiGo cancelled thousands of flights between December 1 and December 9 due to a lack of proper planning and crew shortages in implementing the new regulations on pilots' duty periods and rest, which were put in place from November 1.

A DGCA panel is already probing the operational disruptions at IndiGo.

Besides, the government has already slashed IndiGo's current winter schedule by 10 per cent following large-scale flight cancellations earlier this month.

## Beyond the Gun: Building Peace, Institutions, and Trust in the Northeast

For much of independent India's history, the Northeast was framed almost exclusively through the language of conflict. Insurgency, ethnic unrest, and demands for autonomy shaped both national imagination and policy responses. News from the region was often filtered through reports of ambushes, ceasefire talks, or security operations, leaving little room for a fuller understanding of its social complexity, cultural depth, or economic promise. That narrative, however, has begun to change. Over the past decade, violence has declined sharply, armed movements have weakened or entered negotiations, and peace agreements have redrawn the political map. As the sound of guns fades, a more difficult and consequential question has emerged: can peace be converted into accountable governance and meaningful improvements in everyday life?

The reduction in violence across the Northeast is no longer anecdotal; it is borne out by data. Insurgency-related incidents have fallen by more than seventy per cent since 2010, while civilian casualties have dropped by nearly ninety per cent. States once synonymous with militancy now report long periods of calm. Tripura, which endured decades of insurgent activity, has witnessed near-complete normalisation following sustained political outreach, coordinated security measures, and structured rehabilitation of former militants. In Assam, the 2020 Bodo Peace Accord marked a decisive break from a turbulent past, ending years of armed struggle and reorganising governance under the Bodoland Territorial Region. Similar settlements in Meghalaya and Karbi Anglong have further narrowed the space for insurgent influence.

These outcomes underline a significant shift in the state's approach. Security operations alone did not deliver peace; dialogue, political inclusion, and rehabilitation were equally central. The emphasis moved from suppressing dissent to addressing its roots, offering former combatants pathways back into civilian life through education, livelihoods, and political participation. By integrating peace agreements with constitutional mechanisms, authorities sought to replace alienation with stakeholding and confrontation with negotiation.

At the heart of this strategy lies a simple but demanding premise: development cannot take place without peace, and peace cannot endure without development. Recent policies have attempted to bind these two objectives together. Negotiated settlements are now routinely accompanied by economic packages, institutional restructuring, and long-term infrastructure commitments. Investments in roads, railways, airports, and digital connectivity have accelerated, reducing the region's physical and psychological distance from the rest of the country. Cross-border trade corridors and improved links with neighbouring countries have reinforced

the idea that peace is not merely the absence of violence, but the foundation for citizen-centric

governance and economic opportunity.

Yet the retreat of insurgency has also exposed deep-seated governance challenges that violence once obscured. Weak service delivery, limited employment opportunities, administrative fragmentation, and overlapping authorities have long constrained development. In several areas, the coexistence of state governments, autonomous councils, and traditional institutions has produced blurred lines of responsibility and accountability. Peace accords have often expanded the powers of autonomous bodies, but these institutions frequently struggle

with inadequate

equated finances, limited administrative capacity, and jurisdictional disputes.

Addressing these gaps is now central to the post-conflict transition. Efforts are underway to strengthen coordination between state administrations and autonomous councils, align local institutions with national development schemes, and improve transparency in fund utilisation. While progress is uneven, there is a growing recognition that autonomy must translate into effective governance rather than parallel systems that breed confusion. Where accountability mechanisms are strengthened and community participation is encouraged, local institutions are beginning to function as instruments of empowerment rather than sources of friction.

The aspirations of the region's youth lend urgency to this transformation. The Northeast has one of the youngest populations in the country, with rising levels of education and exposure but persistent barriers to quality employment. This mismatch carries risks. In the past, economic frustration fed political radicalisation; today, unmet expectations could undermine fragile stability. To counter this, the focus has shifted to skill development, entrepreneurship, and locally rooted enterprises. Central and state schemes aim to align vocational training with regional opportunities in agriculture, tourism, handicrafts, renewable energy, and services. The objective is not merely job creation, but the building of sustainable livelihoods that anchor young people to their communities and give them a tangible stake in peace.

This internal transition is mirrored by a broader reimagining of the Northeast's place within India's national vision. Once perceived as a distant frontier, the region is now increasingly viewed as a strategic bridge to Southeast Asia under the Act East Policy. Improved connectivity with Bangladesh and Myanmar, inland waterways on the Brahmaputra and Barak rivers, and cross-border energy and trade initiatives are repositioning the Northeast as a gateway rather than a cul-de-sac. If managed inclusively, this shift could unlock new growth pathways, transforming geography from a constraint into an advantage.

Scepticism, however, has not disappeared. Critics point to unresolved issues such as the long-pending Naga political

settlement, sporadic ethnic tensions, and occasional outbreaks of localised violence as evidence that peace remains fragile. These concerns are not without basis. The region's diversity, while a source of strength, also demands sensitive governance and constant dialogue. Yet the difference today lies in how such challenges are addressed. Political engagement, institutionalisation, safe-



guards, and community-based mechanisms increasingly take precedence over purely security-driven responses, signalling a maturing approach to conflict management.

What distinguishes the current phase from earlier attempts at stabilisation is the emphasis on mainstreaming rather than containment. Former insurgents are encouraged to contest elec-

tions and participate in democratic processes. Grievances that once triggered armed mobilisation are more likely to be channelled through administrative or judicial avenues. Development programmes increasingly stress consultation and local ownership, recognising that imposed solutions rarely endure. Setbacks still occur, but they are met with corrective policy measures rather than a wholesale retreat to militarised strategies.

In the end, the true measure of success will not be the number of peace accords signed or the kilometres of roads built, but the quality of governance that follows.

Peace must be reflected in functioning schools, reliable healthcare, accessible justice, and institutions that command public trust. It must create economic opportunities that allow citizens to imagine a future rooted in their own region rather than elsewhere. The journey from armed silence to accountable governance is neither quick nor linear, but it is the only path to lasting stability. The Northeast today stands at a pivotal moment.

The decline of violence has opened space for democratic deepening, economic integration, and strategic engagement. Whether this opportunity is fully realised will depend on the ability of institutions to remain responsive, transparent, and inclusive. If governance rises to this challenge, the region can finally move from the margins to the mainstream of India's political and economic life—not as a problem to be managed, but as a partner in national progress.

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# NEIR 2026 Can Become a Platform for Action and National Integration: Prof Madan Mohan Goel



KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

Professor Madan Mohan Goel, former Vice Chancellor and founder of the Needonomics School of Thought, has extended his best wishes to NEIR 2026, describing the rally as a timely and meaningful initiative for the Northeast. In a video message, he said the rally has the potential to bring together thinking

minds who are genuinely committed to the region's uplift, not merely at the level of ideas but through sustained and practical action.

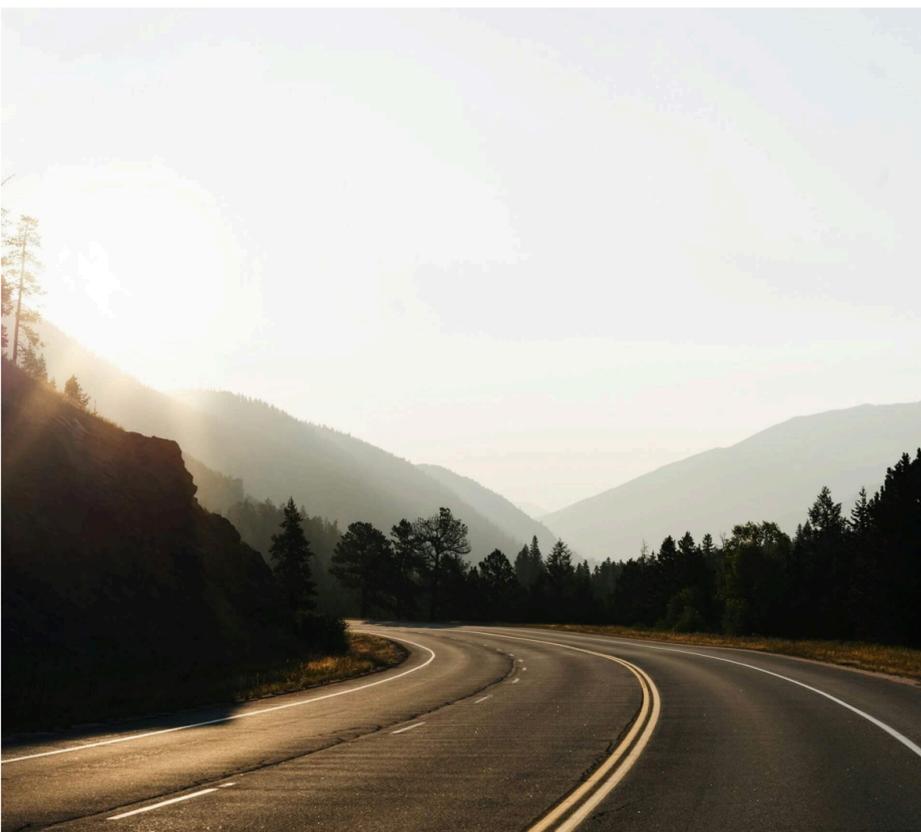
Professor Goel observed that NEIR 2026 goes beyond symbolism. According to him, the initiative brings focus to real time achievements, ongoing developmental efforts, and the lived realities of the North-

east, enabling the rest of the country to engage with the region in a more informed and constructive manner. He said such an approach is essential for building long term understanding and cooperation.

Highlighting its broader significance, he noted that the rally would help underline the importance of the Government of India's Act East Policy and its deep connection with national integration. He added that initiatives like NEIR 2026 can play a critical role in aligning regional development with national priorities. Professor Goel made a special mention of Biswadeep Gupta, Managing Trustee of the KRC

Foundation, acknowledging his leadership and commitment in taking forward what he described as a noble initiative. He also appreciated the vision and efforts of the organisers and assured them of his full support for the movement.

The month long mega event will be flagged off from Kolkata on January 4 and will conclude in Guwahati on February 4. Concluding his message, Professor Goel conveyed his warm wishes to the organisers and expressed confidence that NEIR 2026 will emerge as a strong platform for dialogue, awareness, and inclusive growth in the Northeast.



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NEIR 2026

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**KRC FOUNDATION**

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 | Canyoneering | Sport Climbing | Disaster Management Technique | Water Sports  
 www.krcfoundation.org



**11 JAN**  
**Barak Valley Conclave**  
 Potential, Issues and Challenges of Barak Valley by different youth organizations.  
 Includes: MOCA, and D-governance and reform for rural upland, watershed, water conservation, and preservation programs. Participation through invitation only. Different rewards are provided.

## BARAK FESTIVAL

**JANUARY 10-12, 2025**



**12 JAN**  
**River-Climate Conclave**  
 Climate change will accelerate on Ganges, Brahmaputra and other flowing in the Conclave will focus on the importance, technical and protection of River Barak. Training & Geography competitive and certification. River Barak, Climate Change.



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



**10 JAN**  
**Media Conclave**  
 Media Conclave: Media 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, Chess, and more.

## Barak Festival

Adventure Sports, Art & Culture Promotion

**BROADCAST PARTNER**

**REGISTER HERE**

CONTACT: [info@krcfoundation.org](mailto:info@krcfoundation.org)  
 WP: 0721300019

**10-12 JAN**  
**Science Studio**  
 Real 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'

**10 JAN**  
**Band Night**  
 Musical Night | 10 JAN

## Barak Festival

Band Night | 10 JAN  
 Musical Night | 10 JAN

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

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

**10-12 JAN**  
**Book Bank**  
 #NoOneLeftBehind Campaign | Books Bank | Donate | Reuse | Recycle

**Book Club**  
 Meet Authors, Publishers, Read & Discuss, Buy and Sell Books

**Painting Carnival**  
 Water Colour and Oil and Sawdust Painting Campaign



## STUDENT INTERNSHIP

Discover valuable experience and learn more about the Industry.

**APPLY NOW**

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