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PERSPECTIVE

You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream.

Dhaka leader warns India's Northeast, alleges destabilisation plot

GUWAHATI
Hasnat Abdullah, a senior leader of Bangladesh's National Citizen Party, on Monday issued a sharp warning to India, claiming that Dhaka could shelter anti-India forces and isolate the country's northeastern states if New Delhi attempted to destabilise Bangladesh. Addressing an all-party protest rally at Dhaka's Central Shaheed Minar, Abdullah accused India of backing "chaos-creators" and trying to interfere in Bangladesh's electoral process. His remarks drew loud applause from sections of the gathering. He claimed Bangladesh could provide sanctuary to separatist and hostile groups and use that leverage to "sever the Seven Sisters" from India, a reference to the northeastern states. The comments carry strategic significance as Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram share land borders with Bangladesh. Abdullah also linked India to a recent attack on election candidate and right-wing activist Osman Hadi, rejecting the Election Commission's assessment that the incident was an isolated case. India has, in the past, accused militant outfits operating in the Northeast of using Bangladeshi territory as safe havens and transit routes, particularly during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Groups such as the National Liberation Front of Tripura and the All Tripura Tiger Force were alleged to have maintained camps across the border during that period. Indian security agencies have also flagged the activities of Islamist groups, including Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI) and Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh, for cross-border extremist operations affecting eastern India.

WHO SAID WHAT

On Vijay Diwas, we remember the brave soldiers whose courage and sacrifice ensured India had a historic victory in 1971. Their steadfast resolve and selfless service protected our nation and etched a moment of pride in our history. This day stands as a salute to their valour and a reminder of their unmatched spirit. Their heroism continues to inspire generations of Indians.
~ Narendra Modi, PM India

Supreme Court questions selective forensic testing of leaked Manipur audio clips

NEW DELHI
The Supreme Court on Monday expressed serious concern over why only portions of leaked audio recordings linked to the 2023 Manipur ethnic violence were sent for forensic examination, despite the full material being available before the court. A bench comprising Justices Sanjay Kumar and Alok Aradhe said it was "a little disturbed" by an affidavit filed on November 20 on behalf of the petitioners, which indicated that "only select clippings" of the audio recordings were forwarded for analysis. The court questioned why the entire 48-minute audio clip placed before it had not been sent to the National Forensic Sciences University (NFSU), Gandhinagar. The issue assumes significance as the NFSU had earlier concluded that the audio clips it examined were "tampered with", a finding that weakened allegations levelled against former Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh. Singh resigned on February 9 amid internal dissent within the BJP and sustained de-



mands for a leadership change in the violence-hit state. During the hearing, the bench noted that the affidavit-claimed by the respondents to have not been served on them-suggested selective submission of material. "Now this affidavit, which according to you has not been served upon you, states to the effect that only select clippings were sent..." the court observed. Senior advocate Prashant Bhusan, appearing for the petitioners, said it was possible that the complete set of recordings submitted to the court had not been forwarded to the NFSU. When counsel for the respondents sought time to respond, the bench pressed the issue, asking why the full audio was not examined earlier. "But why should time be wasted again?" the court remarked. Seeking clarity on the length of the recordings, the bench was told by Bhusan that the original audio ran for about 56 minutes, of which 48 minutes had been filed before the court. He added that the remaining portion could reveal the identity of the person who made the recording, disclosure of which could endanger his life. The bench remained unconvinced. "Once the entire tape was available with you, the entire tape ought to have been sent to the NFSU. Why should they send only this limited one?" it said, adding that the 48-minute clip should have been examined in full. Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati sought a week's time to respond to the affidavit. Taking it on record, the court listed the matter for further hearing on January 7. The case arises from a petition filed by the Kuki Organisation for Human Rights Trust (KOHUR), which has sought an independent special investigation team probe into the leaked audio recordings. The petition alleges that the recordings implicate Singh and elements of the state machinery in violence against the Kuki-Zo community-claims the former chief minister has denied. Earlier, on November 3, the Supreme Court noted that the NFSU had found the clips it examined to be edited and "not scientifically fit for forensic voice comparison". Bhusan, however, referred to another forensic report claiming at least one recording was unedited. The court has been closely scrutinising the forensic process. On August 19, it described the Central Forensic Science Laboratory's earlier exercise as "misdirected", noting that it had focused on voice matching rather than a broader assessment of authenticity. On August 25, the court referred the matter to the NFSU to determine whether the clips were modified or tampered with and whether the voices matched admitted samples. The proceedings are rooted in the wider context of the Manipur violence, which erupted in May 2023 following a 'Tribal Solidarity March' against a Manipur High Court order related to the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status. The violence has claimed more than 260 lives and displaced thousands amid prolonged clashes between Meitei and Kuki communities.

Guwahati airport terminal ready ahead of PM Modi visit: Assam CM



GUWAHATI
Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday announced that the new terminal building at Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport in Guwahati is ready ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's scheduled visit to the state from December 20. The Prime Minister will inaugurate the new terminal during his two-day visit to Assam, Sarma said. Highlighting the terminal's distinctive design, the Chief Minister said the structure reflects Assam's cultural identity while incorporating elements of sustainable architecture. "The terminal is almost complete. It has been built using bamboo and foxtail orchids. It is very beautiful," Sarma told report-

ers in Lumding. According to official sources, the new facility-named the Bamboo Orchids Terminal-has an annual passenger handling capacity of 13.1 million. The terminal is expected to significantly enhance air connectivity between the Northeast and other parts of India, as well as strengthen links with Southeast Asia. The upgraded infrastructure will also improve cargo operations, with state-of-the-art processing and handling facilities aimed at boosting trade and logistics in the region. Sarma said Prime Minister Modi will participate in several official programmes following the inauguration. On December 21, the Prime Minister is scheduled to visit Namrup, the BJP headquarters, and the martyrs' memorial. Responding to allegations by the Congress of vote theft, the Chief Minister rejected the claims, describing them as illogical. He pointed out that the Congress has booth-level agents across Assam, making such allegations untenable. Sarma also spoke about preparations for the upcoming elections, saying the groundwork was nearing completion. "The work is almost finished, candidates are nearly finalised, and alliances are also ready. Women and promising youth will be given more opportunities, and their representation will increase," he said.

Centre prolonging peace talks, Nagas not fools, says NSCN(K) leader Niki Sumi

DIMAPUR
The Niki Sumi faction of the NSCN (K) on Monday accused the Centre of deliberately prolonging the Naga peace talks and asserted that the Naga people would not be misled by what it described as an attempt to conclude negotiations without a genuine political solution. Addressing a press conference at the Ceasefire Supervisory Board office here, NSCN(K) leader Niki Sumi called for unity among Naga political parties, civil society and apex tribal bodies to resolve the long-pending Naga political issue. He lamented growing divisions within Naga society, warning that fragmentation among civil organisations was fuelling factionalism within armed groups. "If civil society is divided, factions begin to emerge along tribal or village lines. The blame does not lie only with Naga political groups; divisions within civil society also contribute to the rise of factions," Sumi said. Stressing the need for consolidation, he urged the unification of the three major apex bodies-the United Naga Council (UNC) Manipur, the Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO) and the Nagaland Tribes Council (NTC)-to present a collective voice in negotiations. Alleging that New Delhi was adopting a strategy of delay, Sumi said, "The Centre thinks the Nagas will eventually get tired. But the

Naga people are not fools. If the intention is merely to end the talks without a real solution, the people are watching and will understand the reality." He further claimed that some Naga tribal and political leaders were misleading the public about their engagements with the Centre, alleging that several leaders who project proximity to high-level meetings were being "managed by Indian intelligence agencies to create divisions". "Creating factions is not our objective. Naga intellectuals and political groups must study the situation carefully so that we do not end up like the movement in Punjab. If political organisations become lethargic, a solution will never come," he said. On the ongoing deadlock in the peace process, Sumi contrasted the positions of the Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs) and the NSCN-IM, particularly over the 2015 Framework Agreement signed with the Centre. He argued that the NSCN-IM's insistence on a separate flag and constitution was contradictory if the Centre was unwilling to accept "integration" of Naga-inhabited areas in Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam with Nagaland. "Without integration, how will a flag or constitution cover the southern Nagas? Will the Centre break the boundaries of Manipur or Arunachal? If integration does

not happen, the flag and constitution have no value," Sumi said. Questioning the contents of the Framework Agreement signed on August 3, 2015, he said its details remained unclear even after years of negotiations. In contrast, he said the NNPGs were advocating acceptance of what was achievable at present, with the remaining demands to be pursued democratically in the future. "The NNPGs are saying: accept competencies now and fight for the remaining rights later through democratic means," Sumi said, urging Naga intellectuals and the public to objectively study both agreements and "accept the reality without emotion". The Centre and the NSCN-IM entered into a ceasefire in 1997, launching negotiations to resolve the decades-old Naga insurgency. After over 70 rounds of talks, the Framework Agreement was signed in 2015. However, negotiations have remained stalled over the NSCN-IM's demand for a separate Naga flag and constitution, which the Centre has refused to accept. Parallel talks with the Working Committee of the NNPGs began in 2017, culminating in the signing of the Agreed Position the same year. While the NNPGs have indicated willingness to move forward with an interim settlement, the NSCN-IM has maintained that it will not accept any solution without a separate flag and constitution.

Assam govt eyes mid-January target for key Barak Valley projects: Kaushik Rai

SILCHAR
Reiterating the Assam government's focus on timely and quality infrastructure development in the Barak Valley, Cabinet Minister Kaushik Rai on Tuesday said the state is targeting mid-January next year for the completion of major portions of several key projects, many of which have already crossed the 50 per cent progress mark. The Minister, who heads the Barak Valley Development Department, recently inspected the construction of the Integrated District Commissioner's Office and the Circuit House building as part of the government's ongoing monitoring of flagship infrastructure works in the region. Rai also chaired a high-level review meeting on the Barak Valley Secretariat project, where he directed the Public Works Department (Buildings) and the executing agencies to speed up construction without compromising on quality standards. Providing an update on the pro-



gress, Cachar District Commissioner Mriridul Yadav said both the District Library auditorium and the Barak Valley Secretariat have achieved over 50 per cent physical progress. "We are aiming to complete ma-

major portions of these projects by mid-January next year," Yadav told The Assam Tribune. Elaborating on the District Library project, the DC said the main auditorium will have a seating capacity of 850, while a 250-seat mini auditorium is also being built to meet a long-pending public demand in the district. On the Barak Valley Secretariat complex at Srikona, Yadav said work on core components is being fast-tracked, though certain facilities, including the auditorium and ancillary infrastructure, will be completed in subsequent phases. Describing the Secretariat as an aspirational milestone for the region, he said the administration hopes to host a state Cabinet meeting at the complex once it becomes operational. The review meeting was attended by senior officials of the PWD (Buildings), the District Commissioner, and representatives of the executing contractors, who were asked to adhere strictly to timelines while ensuring construction quality.

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TRUMP'S NEW WORLD ORDER

The US's penchant to increasingly walk away from global engagements or engage or commit to engage with the world only when optics around it are just right, or when there is something in it for America is beginning to change the global landscape quite significantly. America under Trump 2.0 presidency has been on the retreat for some time, but it was felt that it would not last, and that this trajectory will be corrected sooner than later. National Security Strategy, 2025 unveiled by the US recently has, however, belied all expectations in this regard. Trump has written down into the national strategy what he has said and done all this while with the usual Trumpian clarity that left no room for misunderstanding. But most of us misunderstood it anyway.

During past six decades, nations all across the world have always looked up to the US as an honest broker or a dependable mediator. But no more. The US today has officially chosen to be a nation driven by its own self-interests. Unlike in the past, it would not even now bother itself with what political systems countries have, as it decidedly retreats to its own backyard- the western hemisphere. It may have been made official now, but the finger prints of this hand-off policy were already visible on all important conflicts in one form or the other. Be it Israel-Hamas conflict or Russia- Ukraine war, the US's intervention in these two wars has been at best performative. We now know why it was so.

No wonder, Trump's economic protectionism is deeply rooted in its new security policy too. The US will not any longer spend tax dollars where returns on investments are moderate or unsatisfactory, as its trade focus shifts from aid driven relations to investment based alliances with the countries. When Trump unleashed tariffs on the world, many commentators thought it was a temporary phenomenon and will soon end when supply side issues raise inflation in the US. They were wrong. Trump's tacked ideologically far right, and it is a much serious rightward lurch by Trump than ever thought.

NSS has treated Europe, the US's staunchest ally post WWII, badly as it sees it in throes of civilizational 'erasure' a far deeper problem than its continual economic decline typified by reduction in its share in global GDP from 25 per cent in 1990 to 14 per cent today. At the core of Europe's civilizational decline is seen to be unchecked illegal migration and persistent undermining of political liberty and sovereignty that NSS says has led to strife, free speech restraints, loss of self confidence and national identities. The report goes on to say that if the present trends continue, 'the continent will be unrecognizable in twenty years or less'. It has given shout out to the right and far right parties in Europe and called out the progressive parties currently in power in most of the Europe for being unrepresentative of their populace. Transatlantic alliance already under strain after 28 point peace plan announced by Trump on Ukraine conflict was met by Europeans with 19 point plan of their own now stands precariously on precipice.

NSS sees China as an economic and not a military threat. China's response to 2017 US's tariff policy of strengthening its hold on supply chains in low and middle income countries to blow the American tariff action out of water finds a special mention in the report. Despite its best efforts, the US has not been able to completely stall exports from China through its proxies although Chinese exports to the US have reduced to 2 per cent of its GDP from earlier 4 percent. Therefore, NSS seeks to rebalance the US's economic relationship with China on the principle of 'reciprocity and fairness'. In the NSS, US has not pushed back on the Chinese policies of predatory, state sponsored industrial strategies and subsidies, unfair trading practices, IPR theft and rare earths blackmail because the latter has many leversages vis-à-vis the US, one of which is its monopoly over the manufacturing of rare earth magnets (which are required in the manufacturing of mobile phones, automobiles, missiles, fighter jets etc.). Will China continue to have these leversages in future too or the US will erode some or all of them in the next few years as America seeks to re-industrialize itself? Will the US accept being forced out of Indo-Pacific? Will China then set itself up as a hegemon in Indo-Pacific? There is no way of answering these questions at this moment.

In NSS, the US has not committed to protecting Taiwan any more than it has sought to do in the past. Does it mean that if President Xi Jinping disturbs the status quo on Taiwan anytime in future, will the US intervene militarily? Will the US do so especially, as the tonality of NSS leaves no one in any doubt that the US does not expect to do war fighting on behalf of its allies or partners in future?

India, a middle power, which nurses an ambition to become a major power in not too distant future, has not been given any serious space in NSS. The reference on India is limited to encouraging it to contribute to Indo Pacific security, including through QUAD. The reason is simple: In the Trumpian economic calculus, India is not seen as a counterbalancing power against China.

The obvious inference from NSS is that the US and China may form a duopoly by striking some sort of a grand deal, leaving other countries like India in the cold. India, which has largely been frozen out of NSS, would, therefore, have to find a way to remain relevant in the global politics, especially as it expects to become the world's leading player in its own right within couple of decades.

Given India's comparative advantages (as a rising economic and strong military power), it should seriously start treating Indian Ocean as its backyard. This would require it to strengthen its armed forces, especially navy to be able to enforce its writ in the entire oceanic waters. If New Delhi controls Indian Ocean, the world will automatically get divided into three oceanic powers- the US in the Atlantic, China in the Pacific and India in the Indian Ocean. But will the US and China allow India to rise peacefully and challenge Sino-US duopoly in future? Does this mean that conflicts or strife could be touched off in and around Indian subcontinent (South Asia) to keep India bogged down so that its economy, which is forecast to be the fastest growing economy amongst the large economies going forward, crashes and all this talk of India becoming a 10 or 20 trillion dollar economy in next few years turns out to be an empty boast?

Strategic commentators can't answer these questions as they don't practice clairvoyance. Much of India's rise though will depend on the policy choices it chooses to exercise. The seat on the international high table is for the taking, if India is so minded. China, on the other hand, is destined to keep growing as it has over the last three decades given the steady headstart it has over India and Europe. Even a slight fumble on the way will not dent its already achieved great power status.

The rise of the European continent (as a block) on the other hand will depend on current Russia-Ukraine war. If the war on the continent takes a turn for the worse and drags on for years and the main continental powers are drawn into it, the continent may possibly end up being scarred so much economically and militarily that its evolution as fourth power centre in future may be in jeopardy. The shape of a new global order in future will doubtless be impacted by the myriad of security and economic challenges facing these countries today.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Forever is composed of nows." -

Emily Dickinson

Maharaja Garib Niwaz: Builder of Manipuri Civilisation



MAHESHANA RAJKUMAR

REMAINING PART

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

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

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

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

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

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

A subtle psychological factor also operates. Indians abroad feel they represent the country. The same families who push

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

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

Michael W. Charney in his write up titled, "Demographic Growth, Agricultural Expansion, and Livestock in the Lower Chindwin in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries" on the religious reforms brought by Garib Nawaz in Manipur with emphasis on diet in particular had greatly influenced the Burmese kingdom. In this regard Michael Charney writes,

"Although specific details remain unclear, the Hindu prohibition of beef consumption being emphasized in mid-eighteenth century Manipur appears to have influenced Buddhist monks further down the river. Manipuri influence was especially influential among such Lower Chindwin monks as Shin Nyana, who worked extensively with a range of Sanskrit and Bengali secular and religious texts that they frequently translated into Burmese. The intersection of Hindu and Buddhist prohibitions on certain kinds of meats worked together to influence a drive among Lower Chindwin monks to establish animal sanctuaries throughout the region."

Garib Nawaz following the order of Hindu religious customs excavated the burial grounds for the predecessor kings, his forefathers and burnt the remains on the bank of Ningthee River.

Ningthee River (Chindwin River) was considered a sacred river of the Manipuri people. The last rite of King Garib Nawaz (Pamheiba) was performed at Tomphang Hiden at the bank of Ningthee River. The ashti of the king was immersed in Ningthee River.

The name "Manipur" is derived from Sanskrit name and it is noteworthy to pay some attention to important changes like how the name Manipur was coined in Garib Nawaz's reign. According to Jacques P. Leider it is only in the eighteenth century that Manipur became Hinduized by Brahmins coming from Bengal. The Burmese call the country "Kassay" and the author of the Lokabuyahakya states that the name "Manipura" was only adopted when a faction of the Manipuri court openly favored the changes promoted by the immigrant Bengal Brahmins in 1742.

Michael W. Charney emphasized the contributions of Manipuri Brahmins who played a significant role in shaping the perspectives of and cooperating in the literary activities of Chindwin-based Buddhist scholars and lay people in a powerful literary culture which existed from mid 17th century to 19th century known as "Chindwin Literary Culture" in Burma-Manipur Frontier.

Gharib Newaz selected the Chindwin River areas of Burma-Manipur Frontier and patronized the intellectual exchange among South Asian and Southeast Asian scholars. In fact, Chindwin River basin was the common borderland respected by both Manipur and Burma from the time of inception of their monarchies. Particularly, this borderland had been the lifeline to generate economy for Manipur. The Burmese and Manipuri courts both attempted to mark out the division of their territory in the area using both the rivers (Chindwin and Irrawaddy), which were held sacred by the Manipuris at least, and temples which would seem to indicate a religious border.

During Gharib Newaz's reign, the newly built Kowmawdaw Pagaoda at

Sagaing with Irrawaddy River was established as the dividing marker between the two realms. Between these two poles, the royal courts, the Chindwin appears as a transborder region culturally not completely dominated by one or the other, certainly by neither of the royal courts. The Chindwin area remained ethnically diverse, towns and other places known by different names by Burmese, Manipuris, and other groups, such as the Shan and Kadu.

The missionary dynamism of Gharib Newaz influenced Chindwin Buddhist monastics and the young prince who later became King Bodawpaya of Burma thus may provide an example of the orientation between literary culture and religious culture moving across communities, although other factors, such as longstanding disputes regarding the value of physically distancing oneself for meditative purposes from the everyday world and other doctrinal disputes over interpretation of the Vinaya would also have been at work in the latter case. Nevertheless, Manipuri Hindu zeal may have provided a model for Buddhist monastics in the Chindwin to follow.

In 1782, keeping this in view, King Bodawpaya brought the Konbaung Burma's "Suddhama Reformation" a reformation which gave emphasis on Burmese intellectual life, monastic organisation and practice, patronizing the characteristic peculiarities of the Chindwin Literary Culture resulting in the promotion of intellectual exchange between Manipuri and Burmese societies.

The Tai book in new Shan script "Shan History in Ancient Times" authored by Hsur Lahn Hsao (Merng Paeng), 2005, in pages 60-64 in the list mentioned the names of the Tai dynasty kings from 2512 BCE onwards. In point no. 19 of the said book Garib Nawaz name is written with a spelling error as Guyaed Nawaz (1672-1734 AD).

The kingdom of Manipur was one of the semi-independent states of the Mong Mao Long and Mogaung kingdoms. The political entity of Tai kingdom of "Mong Mao Long" in ancient time functioned in the most dynamic manner. The centre of power shifted frequently between the smaller states or chiefdoms. Sometimes they were unified under one strong leader, sometimes they were not. The Shan scholar Sai Kam Mong observes:

"Sometimes one of these smaller states strove to be the leading kingdom and sometimes all were unified into one single kingdom. The capital of the kingdom shifted from place to place, but most of them were located near the Nam Mao River (the "Shweli" on most maps today).

Sao Saimong Mangrai a renowned Shan scholar in his book titled, "The Shan States and the British Annexation", 1965, mentioned enthronement of Mongpo Sawbwa (king) by Garib Nawaz.

J. George Scott's book, "Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States", Part I, Vol.1, 1900, records in the region of Mong Kawng or Mogaung, comprising ninety-nine Mongs, among which the following were most important, - Mong Long (Assam) followed by Kahse (Manipur), part of Arakan, the Yaw country, Kale, Hsawng Hsup (Sumjok), Mong Kong Mong Yawng etc.

The Tai kingdoms of northwest Burma and Cachar kingdom were vassal states of Manipur. The close affinity Manipur shared with the Tai kingdoms of northwest Myanmar in Garib Nawaz's reign indicated Manipur was part of the Tai/ Shan confederacy.

After in-depth analysis of the Tai accounts above it is well established beyond doubt that Maharaja Garib Nawaz was indeed an emperor and not just the ruler of Manipur in his prime but also the ruler of Mogaung kingdom in northern Burma. D.G.E. Hall referred to Manipur as trans-Chindwin mountain kingdom of Manipur, and Garib Nawaz was the ruler of Manipur.

Garib Nawaz had tirelessly worked hard in the interest of the nation with the religious and cultural reforms against all the odds as the ruler of Manipur though the reforms were opposed by some section of the people. It's an undeniable fact that the religious and cultural dynamism brought almost all the ethnicities of Manipur into Kshatriya fold that actually inspired and transformed Manipur into a very powerful kingdom. Garib Nawaz was able to build a largeroyal army which enabled him to consolidate and strengthened his position in order to thwart any attempts of the enemies from attacking Manipur and to safeguard her motherland from the religious warfare of the Theravada Buddhism.

It is high time the great emperor Garib Nawaz (Pamheiba) should be cherished and remembered not only

by the Manipuris but should also find a respectable place in the Indian history books in the making of the history of Southeast Asia.

The Two-Day National Seminar on Maharaja Garib Niwaz: Builder of Manipuri Civilisation collaborated by Manipur Seva Samiti, organised by College Development Council, Manipur University and sponsored by Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi should take up proactive role to highlight the greatness of Emperor Garib Nawaz of Manipur, and make his name remain in the consciousness of every Indian mind.

The people of Manipur should not forget the history in 18th century after Manipur came under Ramanandi fold as stated earlier attained zenith of her power and an Asiatic power in Southeast Asia in the reign of Garib Nawaz. The idols of Rama, Lakshman and Ha-

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Since 2014: IITs have increased from 16 to 23 IIMs have increased from 13 to 21 IIITs have increased from 9 to 25, 16 new IIITs. Central Universities have increased from 40 to 48. AIIMS have increased from 7 to 12, of which 16 approved are 12 established. This would not have been possible had the govt not been spending on the Education Sector. - Smt @nsitharaman during her reply to the Discussion on the Supplementary Demands for Grants - First Batch for 2025-26 in #Lok Sabha. ~ Nirmala Sitharaman Office



manu were worshipped and the Ramji Prabhu Temple was built by Garib Nawaz in Imphal. It's very unfortunate that Ramji Prabhu Temple today is lying in a dilapidated condition and needs world-class upgradation unlike Shree Shree Govindaji Temple which has been renovated several times and its one of the prime attractions of Manipur.

It is not late for the Manipur state government to honour the great emperor Garib Nawaz and name places in his memory, and establish museums and historical sites, and fund historical preservation which will provide a tangible link to know the great emperor for both locals and visitors and to ensure his legacy isn't lost to time.

(The writer is an independent researcher and the author of "Vedic Imprint in Southeast Asia: with special reference to Manipur" and on the Two-Day National Seminar on Maharaja Garib Niwaz: Builder of Manipuri Civilisation, he presented the seminar paper on the sub theme: Religious and Cultural Changes during the period of Garib Niwaz on 13, December, 2025 held at Manipur University)

CONCLUDED

'Crash course on failures': Congress targets BJP MLAs' Delhi meet on Manipur



IMPHAL

The Manipur Congress has launched a sharp attack on the BJP after more than 30 of its legislators travelled to New Delhi for a meeting with the party's central leadership, alleging that the exercise failed to address the state's prolonged law and order crisis.

Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee president Keisham Meghachandra Singh on Sunday described the BJP legislators' visit as "a crash course on how to justify administrative failures," accusing the ruling party of focusing on political optics instead of urgent corrective action on the ground.

His remarks came after a meeting of the BJP Manipur Legislature Party at the party headquarters in New

Delhi, where 34 MLAs including two from the Kuki-Zo community met senior leaders to discuss what the BJP termed "peace and progress" in the violence-hit state.

Sharing photographs from the meeting on social media platform X, Keisham said the BJP had "reduced its MLAs to students attending crash courses in Delhi" instead of restoring normalcy in Manipur.

The BJP, in an official post, said the meeting was held in the presence of BJP national general secretary (organisation) B L Santhosh and the party's Northeast coordinator Sambit Swaraj. According to the party, discussions focused on the prevailing situation in Manipur and pathways to peace and development.

Party sources said deliberations

also included the possibility of forming a popular government in the state at the earliest and exploring enhanced financial assistance from the Centre to fast-track development initiatives.

Manipur has remained on edge since ethnic violence between Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities erupted in May 2023, leaving more than 260 people dead and displacing thousands.

President's rule was imposed in the state on February 13 following the resignation of Chief Minister N Biren Singh. Although the Manipur Legislative Assembly has a term until 2027, it has been placed under suspended animation, leaving the state without an elected government amid continuing instability.

Western Dzukou fire largely contained, authorities keep watch

KOHIMA

The forest fire in Western Dzukou has been largely contained, with no active flames detected, though authorities are continuing to monitor the area as a precautionary measure.

Deputy Commissioner Kohima B. Henok Buchem, NCS, on Monday visited the fire-fighting base camp at Khonoma along with SDO (Civil) Sechi-Zubza Imliakum, Nodal Officer Thejangulie Zao, District Commandant Home Guards, Civil Defence and SDRF Wopenthung, and officials from the police, forest and fire emergency services.

During a briefing, representatives of the Khonoma Youth Organisation, SDRF personnel and other government agencies reported that an earlier inspection team had found smoke emerging from burnt bushes but no active fire. The smoke was said to be under control, with Khonoma Youth volunteers, SDRF and Forest Department staff stationed at the site. Indian Air Force helicopters were deployed to suppress residual smoke, using Bambi buckets for aerial water dousing. As a safety measure, Western Dzukou has been temporarily closed to the public. Khonoma Youth leaders thanked all agencies involved for their support, noting that volunteer-led response efforts were made possible through prior training organised by the Angami Youth Organisation and conducted by the SDRF. The adviser of the Khonoma Youth Organisation also acknowledged the role of the Deputy Commissioner, in his capacity as chairman of the District Disaster Management Authority, for effective coordination, describing the operation as a successful example of disaster response. While helicopter crews from Kharagpur, along with youth volunteers and SDRF teams, expressed confidence that the situation was under control, officials agreed to send another trekking team to Western Dzukou on Tuesday to reassess ground conditions. Buchem commended the collective effort and particularly praised the commitment and compassion shown by the people of Khonoma.

Assam launches automated SMS alert system to tackle student absenteeism

GUWAHATI

Assam Education Minister Dr Ranaj Pegu on Monday launched the Automated SMS Alert System to reduce student absenteeism across the schools in the state. The Department of School Education, Assam, through the Shiksha Setu Application, tracks daily attendance for teachers and students. As per a study conducted by UNICEF, it has been observed that there are issues of student absenteeism in schools due to various reasons, such as family issues, lack of awareness of parents, etc. To address the problem and improve student attendance, the Department of School Education launched a new, state-of-the-art Automated SMS-Based Absenteeism Alert System.

Assam Education Minister Dr Ranaj Pegu said this technology-driven initiative is a crucial step towards strengthening student attendance, promoting educational continuity, and enabling timely, focused interventions to mitigate dropout risk across all schools in the state. According to the Department of School Education, the system will trigger standardised SMS notifications for students who remain continuously absent for five consecutive days. These alerts will

be automatically generated at fixed five-day intervals (i.e. on 5th, 10th, 15th days of absence) and will continue until the concerned student resumes attendance, ensuring persistent engagement with the family and school.

"Alerts are customized and will be sent simultaneously to two key stakeholders - Class Teachers; Class Teachers will receive focused alerts clearly mentioning the concerned student name, class and section, enabling them to contact the parents to bring the students back to school; Parents/Guardians; Parents will receive a direct and concise reminder regarding their child's continued absence, prompting them to send their child to school," the Department of School Education said in a press statement.

The press statement also stated that, in recognition of the state's linguistic diversity, the SMS alerts will be delivered in five official languages - Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Hindi and English. "To maximize reach and comprehension, messages in each district will be sent in a minimum of two relevant local languages, based on the geographical and demographic profile," said in the press statement.

Nagaland rolls out e-challan system to end cash-based traffic enforcement

KOHIMA

Cash transactions in traffic enforcement are set to become a thing of the past in Nagaland with the rollout of the e-challan system, a digital initiative aimed at enhancing transparency, accountability and road safety.

The system was officially launched on December 15 at the District Transport Office in Dimapur by Commissioner and Secretary of the Transport Department Robert Longchari. The e-challan platform allows traffic violations to be detected, recorded and penalised electronically, replacing the traditional paper-based challan process.

Addressing the gathering, Longchari said the transition to digital enforcement would significantly reduce scope for manipulation and improve efficiency in traffic management. He described the elimination of cash handling as a major step towards clean governance and more citizen-friendly



transport services.

He also acknowledged the coordinated efforts of the Traffic Police, the Home Department and the National Informatics Centre (NIC), noting that inter-departmental collaboration was crucial for the successful implementation of the system.

According to Longchari, the e-challan platform will help improve compliance with traffic rules by ensuring that violations are systematically tracked, thereby encouraging responsible driving behaviour. He added that the gov-

ernment plans to extend the system to all districts and integrate automatic surveillance cameras to further strengthen enforcement and data collection.

The data generated through the platform, he said, would support evidence-based policymaking in the transport sector, contribute to state revenue and advance digital governance in line with the vision of "Viksit Nagaland".

Delivering the keynote address, NIC Senior Technical Director and State Informatics Officer Lanusungum Aier outlined the evo-

lution of transport digitisation in India, starting with the Sarathi and Vahan applications. He said the national e-challan system, introduced in 2015, is now operational in 33 states, with Nagaland becoming the 34th to adopt it.

Aier explained that the system, developed by the National Informatics Centre under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, operates through an Android-based mobile application and a web interface. It is aligned with the Central Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, and the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989, and enables enforcement officers to issue electronically generated fine slips to traffic violators.

Officials said the launch marks an important step towards modernising traffic enforcement in Nagaland, stressing the need for sustained cooperation among stakeholders to ensure effective implementation and long-term success of the initiative.

NEHU campus bodies seek Pro VC's resignation amid administrative crisis

SHILLONG

Four major stakeholders of North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU) have jointly demanded the resignation of the Pro Vice Chancellor of the Shillong campus, alleging "complete administrative paralysis" and failure to implement assurances meant to restore normalcy at the institution.

In a joint statement issued late on Monday night, the NEHU Students' Union (NEHUSU), NEHU Teachers' Association (NEHUTA), NEHU Non-Teaching Staff Association (NEHUNSA) and the Khasi Students' Union (KSU) NEHU unit said Pro Vice Chancellor S. Umdor has been unable or not permitted to function in line with commitments made by representatives of the Union Ministry of Education in the presence of members of the university's Executive Council. The stakeholders



said the assurances were aimed at ensuring stability, transparency and smooth administration at NEHU, but the lack of follow-through has prolonged uncertainty and weakened confidence among students, faculty and staff.

The bodies also flagged the recent resignations of the Registrar (in-charge) and the Finance Officer (in-charge), alleging that both stepped down under pressure from Vice Chancellor Prof. P. S. Shukla, who has remained away from the Shillong campus. These developments, they said, have further aggravated the administrative crisis. According

to the statement, Prof. Shukla has been absent from the campus for over a year following protests over alleged mismanagement and irregularities, leaving the university without effective leadership. Although the Centre had deputed officials to look into the allegations against the Vice Chancellor, the signatories said no concrete action has followed, deepening institutional uncertainty. "At present, NEHU is facing total administrative paralysis, with no regular Vice Chancellor, Registrar, Finance Officer or Controller of Examinations. This has resulted in institutional disability

and severely disrupted academic and administrative functioning," the statement said. The crisis has also reached the national stage, with Shillong MP Ricky Syngkon recently raising the prolonged leadership vacuum at NEHU in Parliament and seeking the Centre's intervention.

Holding the Pro Vice Chancellor's office responsible for ensuring compliance with the assurances and restoring governance, the four bodies said continuation in the post under the current circumstances was no longer in the university's interest. They urged Pro VC Umdor, who assumed office in June this year, to resign to enable an alternative arrangement in keeping with institutional norms.

The appeal, they added, was made in the interest of restoring trust, administrative stability and democratic functioning at NEHU.

Tripura-Mizoram gas pipeline set for 2027 completion, Aizawl to get piped supply



AIZAWL

Mizoram is set to receive piped natural gas for the first time with the Tripura-Mizoram gas pipeline project targeted for completion by 2027, officials said on Monday.

More than 20 per cent of the 119.5-km pipeline has already been laid, indicating steady progress on a project expected to significantly enhance energy access in the state, particularly in the capital Aizawl.

A delegation from Indradhanush Gas Grid Limited (IGGL),

which is implementing the project, recently met Chief Minister Lalduhoma in Aizawl to brief him on the status of the work and the challenges involved. The Chief Minister reviewed the progress and discussed issues related to difficult terrain, logistics and inter-agency coordination.

According to IGGL officials, the pipeline will originate at the Panisagar Receiving Terminal in Tripura and pass through Kanhmun, Zawnuam, Kawrthah, Tudiam and Darlak before reaching near Mamit in Mizoram. It will then extend through Lengte and terminate at the proposed Sihmui Receiving Terminal, located about 21 km from Aizawl.

Once the pipeline becomes operational, domestic piped natural gas connections in Aizawl will be provided by Tripura Natural Gas Corporation Limited, officials said.

The project is part of the North East Natural Gas Pipeline Grid, a major initiative aimed at expanding clean energy infrastructure across the region. The Panisagar-Sihmui section falls under Phase II of the grid, which involves laying a total of 723 km of pipeline from Guwahati to Aizawl via Agartala.

Lieutenant Md Zakariyyah commissioned into Indian Army, inspires Manipur's Meitei Pangal youth

IMPHAL

In a moment of pride for Manipur and the Meitei Pangal community, 23-year-old Md Zakariyyah from Yairipok in Imphal East district has been commissioned as a Lieutenant in the Indian Army after completing his training at the National Defence Academy (NDA) and the Indian Military Academy (IMA).

Lt Zakariyyah was among the 491 cadets commissioned into the Army during the Passing Out Parade at the IMA on Saturday, December 14, marking the culmination of years of rigorous military training.

The youngest of five brothers, Lt Zakariyyah is the son of Alhaj Md Ashraf Ali, a retired Block Development Officer, and Mumtaz Begum. The family hails from Tuhilal Mayai Leikai on Heirong Road. His commissioning has been widely hailed as a proud milestone for his family, village and the wider Meitei Pangal community.

Calling the occasion the fulfilment of a



lifelong dream, Lt Zakariyyah said joining the Indian Army was both an honour and a responsibility. He credited the NDA with shaping his discipline, leadership and character, and the IMA with preparing

him to lead troops in challenging operational conditions.

"The training tested me physically, mentally and emotionally, but it has shaped me into a confident and responsi-

ble officer," he said.

Commissioned into the Artillery Regiment, Lt Zakariyyah expressed pride in joining a corps known for its legacy of valour and sacrifice. He said his immediate focus would be to learn from senior officers, understand his troops and lead by example.

"Building trust and taking care of my men will always be my foremost responsibility," he said.

His father described the commissioning as a moment of pride not just for the family but for the entire community. He recalled that his son's interest in military service began during his schooling at Sainik School. Lt Zakariyyah later cleared the NDA examination conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) in September 2021.

"Today, he is the pride of our village. For the younger generation of the Meitei Pangal community, he will be a powerful source of inspiration to serve the nation," Alhaj Md Ashraf Ali said.

Lt Zakariyyah's commissioning is being seen as a testament to determination, discipline and education, reinforcing the belief that youth from Manipur can rise to serve the country with distinction.

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Indian Youth Congress holds protest at Jantar Mantar against “vote chori”



NEW DELHI

The India Youth Congress on Monday held a protest at Jantar Mantar against the central government over alleged “vote chori.”

The party workers and leaders, carrying placards and flags, raised slogans. In the images, some party workers are seen standing atop police barricades. The protest witnessed a strong police presence at Jantar Mantar, with security personnel deployed to maintain law and order.

Speaking to the reporters, Indian Youth Congress National President Uday Bhanu Chib said that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has presented the facts that Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister by doing “vote chori.”

“Rahul Ji has presented with facts the facts that Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister by doing ‘vote chori’...A law has been formed which provides immunity to the Election Commissioner... All the demands made by Lok Sabha LoP and

Congress MP Rahul Gandhi will bring transparency in the elections...” Chib said.

Meanwhile, Congress General Secretary KC Venugopal on Monday strongly rejected Union Minister JP Nadda’s demand for an apology from senior Congress leader Sonia Gandhi over alleged derogatory slogans against Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the mega rally organised by the Congress against alleged ‘Vote Chori’ in Delhi, dismissing the controversy as “baseless drama” orchestrated by the BJP to divert attention from the opposition’s successful protest at Ramlila Maidan. Speaking to reporters, the Congress General Secretary said, “This is baseless drama they have created today because we conducted a successful rally in Delhi yesterday. I asked Kiren Rijju ji: Did any Congress leader say anything? They said some people in the rally had said it. This is baseless. It is not our custom to use unacceptable language against any political leader, even if they are our political

rivals. On the other side, we can see the language Amit Shah ji used in Parliament last week. No leader, be it from the state level or the district level, would do any such thing.”

Venugopal’s remarks came after Union Minister and BJP national president JP Nadda demanded an apology from Sonia Gandhi, holding her responsible as the senior-most leader of the Congress party.

Earlier in November, Rajasthan Youth Congress workers staged a protest outside the Chief Minister’s residence in Jaipur against alleged “vote chori,” farmer issues, and unemployment. Police used water cannons on the workers. During the protest, National President of the Indian Youth Congress, Uday Bhanu Chib, said that the organisation will not allow the country’s democracy to be “destroyed,” asserting that its members are not afraid and will continue efforts to safeguard democratic values. Kast will take office in March.

Indo-China barter trade via Shipki La to resume from June after six-year gap following MEA clearance

CHANDIGARH

As the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has given political clearance to the Himachal Pradesh government, Indo-China border trade through the Shipki La strategic pass in Kinnaur district will resume from June next year after a gap of six years.

The barter-based trade will operate via the Land Customs Station (LCS) at Namgia-Shipki La near the Line of Actual Control (LAC). A trade mart is also likely to be set up near the pass to facilitate traders and tourists.

Imports and exports from this border point will be restricted to items notified by the Union government. Currently, 20 items are permitted for import, including wool, pashmina, sheep skin, yak tails, yak hair, salt, shoes, blankets, quilts, carpets and herbal medicines.

A total of 36 items are allowed for export, including coffee, tea, barley, rice, wheat, flour, dry fruits, tobacco, cigarettes, canned food, spices, watches, shoes, utensils, and handloom and handicraft items.

Sources said trader registration will be carried out by the Pooh tehsildar-cum-trade officer. Applicants will need to submit identity proof, residential certificate, past trade records (if any), and passport-size photographs.

Locals from 14 border villages, including Namgia, Chuppan, Nako, Pooh and Chango, are economically dependent on this cross-border barter trade conducted through Shipki La. Trade passes are issued by the Union Ministry of Commerce to facilitate the activity.

Kinnaur Indo-China Trade Association president Hishey Negi told the TNIE that the association has sought a minimum of 150 trade passes. “We have requested renewal of import



and export codes issued by the Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) and demanded a single-window system for security clearances. We have also urged the district administration to organise skill-building workshops so traders can understand market potential, demand and supply, and how to sell items like borax, szaibelyite and china clay imported from China,” he said.

Negi added that reopening the trade route would benefit Kinnaur youth by providing alternative income opportunities. He also stressed the need to make the existing 7-8 km trade track motorable. “Currently, goods are transported on mules and horses, taking two to three hours. With proper road connectivity, trade volumes will increase,” he said, adding that the administration has been urged to help set up kiosks at Shipki La.

Sources said a review meeting of concerned departments and stakeholders was held on Monday by Kinnaur Deputy Commissioner Amit Sharma to assess logistical preparedness. Issues discussed included road connectivity

in the Shipki La-Namgia area, trader registration, security arrangements to be jointly handled by the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and Himachal Pradesh Police, setting up a customs office, medical and emergency services, and inter-departmental coordination.

A senior officer said political clearance has been received from the MEA and efforts are underway to set up a trade mart near the pass by April. “Tourism in the region has increased manifold, and tourists will be able to purchase items from the mart,” he said, adding that trade is carried out annually between June and November 30.

Supporting the demand for a trade mart, Negi said, “There is a trade mart at the Nathu La border point, and we have been urging authorities to set up a similar facility here so tourists can buy imported items and trade gets a boost.” In 2019, total imports through this border point were valued at Rs 1.71 crore, while exports stood at Rs 1.34 crore. Trade peaked in 2015,

with exports worth Rs 5.01 crore and imports Rs 4.36 crore. In 2016, exports were Rs 4.03 crore and imports Rs 4.55 crore. Trade declined sharply in 2017 to Rs 22.45 lakh in exports and Rs 36.82 lakh in imports, before improving in 2018 with exports of Rs 1.14 crore and imports of Rs 1.38 crore. When trade began in 1994, export value was Rs 11.09 lakh and import value Rs 14.93 lakh.

Traders, mostly from Nako, Chuppan, Chango and Namgia, typically travel to China in September and October. In 2015, 71 Indian traders went to China via this route, followed by 75 in 2016, 34 in 2017, 37 in 2018 and 45 in 2019. The highest number was recorded in 1994, when 90 traders crossed through this border point.

The border trade between India and China through Shipki La in Himachal Pradesh, Nathu La in Sikkim and Lipulekh Pass in Uttarakhand came to a halt in 2020 after the Chinese army violated bilateral protocols in eastern Ladakh.

INTERNATIONAL

‘Not interested, but will go to vote’: On the campaign trail in a tug-of-war Myanmar town

NAWNGHKIO

The election billboards are shining new in Myanmar’s northern town of Nawngkhio, but the homes are still shattered by combat.

Myanmar’s military clawed back the town in a pre-election offensive this summer, but political campaigning is coloured by the pall of destruction rather than the promise of democratic renewal.

“We are still living in fear,” said one resident, speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity for security reasons.

“We have no idea when fighting could happen,” she added.

Nawngkhio is perched on a portion of misty plateau in Shan state, once most famed for plantations yielding a cornucopia of oranges, vibrant flowers and coffee with hair-raising caffeine content.

More recently, it became a turning-point town in Myanmar’s civil war -- captured by a rebel alliance last year, then retaken by the military in July after an 11-month battle.

Nawngkhio candidates were shadowed by plain-clothes security last week, apparently for their own safety, and one would-be MP complained his campaign trail around outlying villages was littered with landmines.

The town is bounded by military and police checkpoints, where security forces photograph suspect vehicles and inspect civilian ID cards.

The military snatched power in a 2021 coup, toppling the democratic government, jailing its leaders and sparking a war that has riven Myanmar.

The junta has promised a phased election -- which begins on December 28 in around a third of the country’s townships, including Nawngkhio -- will save the conflict and return the country to civilian rule.

Critics say the parties running are vetted by the military and that the poll is a charade to rebrand mar-



tial rule.

For the Nawngkhio resident whose ballot is being courted, the vote seems less like an opportunity for hard-won democracy than an obligation to appease the military overseeing the vote “We are not interested, but we will go to vote,” she said. “We just want to live peacefully here.”

“We do not want to flee again. We do not know much about politics.” Nawngkhio was once the apex of a rebel advance that seemed to threaten the junta’s grip on power.

Myanmar has a history of guerrilla uprisings, but the coup triggered a full-blown civil war as long-active ethnic minority armies were joined on the battlefield by pro-democracy partisans.

The disordered opposition initially struggled to make gains, before a joint offensive starting in late 2023 made nationwide advances and caught the military on the back foot.

In Shan state, the Ta’ang National Liberation Army and pro-democracy People’s Defence Force surged out of the country’s fringes and down the main trade route with China -- reaching as far as Nawngkhio.

Aik Tun fled that fighting, but is now back home on his farm, and politically engaged as the candidates make their case. Perhaps, the 58-year-old reasons, the vote will help his ailing homeland. “We need development for our village, our town, our states and regions,” he said.

“Only when we are united can

we be successful with happiness and peace in the future.”

Just an hour’s drive south is Pysin Oo Lwin, housing the military officer training academy. Myanmar’s second city of Mandalay, an ancient seat of royalty, is just a further hour’s drive in the same direction.

A watershed battle at Nawngkhio managed to turn the tide on this front of the civil war ahead of the phased vote, which is due to deliver results around late January and install a nominally civilian government.

The National League for Democracy, which won 2020 elections in a landslide, has been dissolved, while the military government has introduced decade-long sentences for election critics and protesters.

US offers ‘NATO-like’ security guarantees to Ukraine, expects Russia to accept

WASHINGTON

The United States said Monday it offered strong, NATO-like security guarantees to Ukraine and voiced confidence that Russia would accept, in what Washington said would be a breakthrough in ending the war.

US officials described hours of talks in Berlin with President Volodymyr Zelensky as positive and said President Donald Trump would call both the Ukrainian leader and Europeans later Monday to push forward the deal.

The US officials warned Ukraine must also accept the deal, which they said would provide security guarantees in line with NATO’s Article Five -- which calls an attack on one ally an attack on all.

“The basis of that agreement is basically to have really, really strong guarantees -- Article Five like -- also a very, very strong deterrence” in the size of Ukraine’s military, a US official said on condition of anonymity.

“Those guarantees will not be on the table forever. Those guarantees are on the table right now if there’s a conclusion that’s reached in a good way,” he said.

Trump has previously ruled out a formal entry of Ukraine into NATO and sided with Russia in calling Kyiv’s aspirations to the alliance a reason for the 2022 invasion by Moscow.

But another US official voiced confidence that Russia would back the deal.

US President Donald Trump welcomes Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at the White House.

“I think the Ukrainians would tell you, as would the Europeans, that this is the most robust set of security pro-



tools they have ever seen. It is a very, very strong package,” the second official said.

“I think hopefully the Russians are going to look at it and say to themselves, ‘That’s OK because we have no intention -- we’re going to take them at their word -- we have no intention of violating,’” he said.

“But violations are going to be addressed with the securities package.”

The first official acknowledged that there was no agreement on territory. Trump has called it inevitable that Ukraine would need to surrender territory to Russia, an outcome anathema to Zelensky

after his country’s defense of nearly four years.

The first US official said that the United States discussed with Zelensky the idea of an “economic free zone” in the area now contested by militaries.

“We spent a lot of time trying to define what that would mean, how it operates. And then ultimately, if we can get that defined, then it will really be up to the parties to work out the final issues of sovereignty,” the official said.

The talks in Berlin were led by Steve Witkoff, Trump’s business friend and roving global negotiator, and Jared Kushner, Trump’s son-in-law.

“1971: THE WAR THAT WAS REQUIRED” A Soldier’s Reflections on the Birth of Bangladesh



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

The night of 3 December 1971 remains etched in my memory not just as a date in history, but as a turning point that shaped my understanding of duty, sacrifice, and the price of freedom. I was only 13 years old, a school-going boy who had just been moved with my family to Jalandhar, considered a “safe place.” Yet nothing felt safe that night. A storm was rising, and India was being pushed into a war that was not only inevitable, but necessary.

My father, a seasoned soldier who had witnessed the 1965 War in Leh - Ladakh and later in Ferozepur, was deployed right on the edge of the border that very night. While we took shelter away from danger, he stood exactly where the nation needed him calm, steady, and ready.

Even as a child, I understood one thing, some men stand between the country and chaos.

Over the years, as life unfolded, that boy grew into a man in uniform. I would go on to spend 37 years serving the nation, fight as part of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka, participate in Kargil (Op Parakram), rise as an officer, and see war with my own eyes far closer than I ever imagined as a child in 1971. Today, both my sons also serve the nation.

This journey has taught me something simple yet profound, war is war never a slogan, never entertainment, never a political tool. It is blood, sacrifice, and the last test of human endurance.

When Innocence Was Under Siege. In East Pakistan now Bangladesh millions of unarmed Bengali civilians were being slaughtered, women rights were violated, families uprooted, entire villages erased by the Pakistani military. The genocide forced nearly 10 million refugees into India.

India did not jump into battle; India was pulled into a humanitarian tragedy. This was not a war for conquest, it was a war for conscience, justice, and humanity.

Leadership That Redefined Military History.

At the helm of India’s Eastern Command was Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora. Alongside him, the brilliant strategist Major General Subeg Singh trained thousands of Bengali youths into the fearsome guerrilla force the Mukti Bahini.

Facing them was Pakistan’s Eastern Commander, Lieutenant General A. A. K. Niazi.

With Gen Aurora’s bold, precise, multi-directional strategy, Indian forces encircled the Pakistani Army from all sides.

Meanwhile, Gen Subeg Singh’s well-trained Mukti Bahini struck deep behind enemy lines, collapsing Pakistan’s internal control.

I had the privilege of meeting Major (Later Inspector General of Police) U. C. Chhabra of the Mahar Regiment, a daring and brilliant young officer who operated deep inside enemy territory in civilian clothes alongside the Mukti Bahini. When he narrated his experiences from Bangladesh especially the mission in which he helped save the family of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, it sent shivers down my spine. Listening to him, one could feel the weight of history in every word he spoke.

I also had the honour of serving as ADC (Aid-de - Camp) under the legendary Maj Gen R. K. Suri, VrC the saviour of Fazilka and a hero revered by the masses. He had commanded a unit in the Western Sector during the war and was grievously wounded, yet he continued to fight with unmatched grit and leadership. Hearing the stories of 1971 directly from him from the horse’s mouth was like touching history with my own hands. His courage, resilience, and clarity of purpose remain a guiding light for every soldier who served under him, including me.

India’s Air Force destroyed Pakistani air capabilities, and the Navy blocked Pakistan’s sea routes.

Within less than two weeks, Indian soldiers were marching into Dhaka. 16 December 1971 - The Moment the World Watched in Awe.

At the Ramna Race Course, Dhaka, Gen A. A. K. Niazi surrendered before Gen Aurora.

With that single act: 93,000 Pakistani soldiers laid down their arms, marking the largest surrender since World War II.

And giving birth to the sovereign nation of Bangladesh.

That historic ground was later renamed Suhrawardy Udyan, a symbol of freedom and courage.

My Journey as a Soldier - And the Harsh Truth.

Having worn the uniform for decades, having fought in IPKF, having lived through ambush, uncertainty, fear, and duty, I can say with conviction:

only a soldier truly understands what war means.

For politicians, war is often a game of power.

For followers, it becomes a step towards a political ticket or influence.

But for a soldier, war is duty beyond duty, a commitment to protect the nation’s boundaries, even at the cost of one’s own life.

And yet, the saddest part remains, those who fight are often not looked after by the very politicians and bureaucrats who depend on them.

Why does this happen? I still do not know.

I leave this uncomfortable question to the readers.

Because visiting a forward post, waving to soldiers, taking photographs means nothing if a soldier’s rights are not protected, if his family is left unattended, if his future remains uncertain.

Only those who stand guard at night know the true cost of freedom.

A War That Had to Be Fought.

India does not fight for territory. India fights for truth. The birth of Bangladesh stands as one of the greatest victories of moral conviction in modern history.

Looking back, from son of a soldier, 13-year-old child to battle-hardened soldier to father of two serving sons, I can say with clarity:

1971 was not India’s war, 1971 was humanity’s war. And India fought it with honour.

Author’s Note (By Ashk Machhanvi)

As a soldier’s son, a soldier myself, a veteran of 37 years of service, and a father of two serving sons, I write this not to glorify war but to remind readers of its terrible price.

We celebrate victories, but we must also honour the men and families who carry the burden long after the guns fall silent.

The nation must rise above politics, remember its defenders, and ensure their dignity and rights are never compromised.

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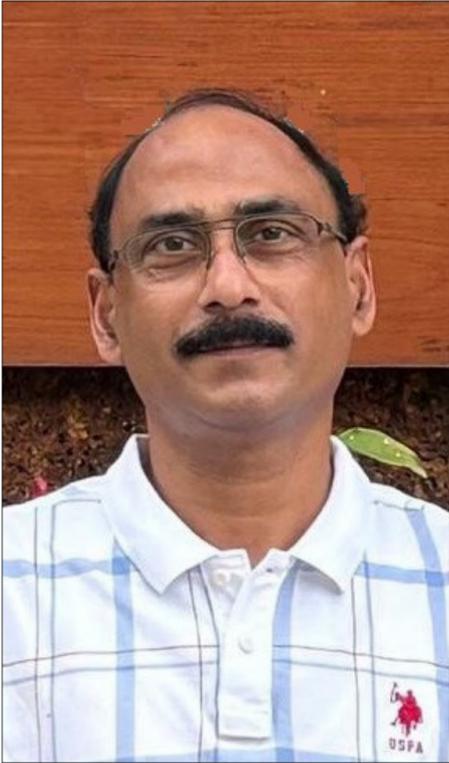
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THE CHANGING CLIMATE OF BARAK VALLEY: FROM COMFORT TO CRISIS



PARTHANKAR CHOUDHURY



In the past few decades, the Barak Valley, particularly Silchar has undergone a transformation that is both physical and environmental. One of the most visible indicators of this change is the widespread installation of air conditioners in homes. Today, air conditioners are no longer a luxury reserved for the wealthy or specific institutions such as high-end hotels and hospitals, rather they have become a necessity for comfortable living. This marks a stark contrast from just thirty years ago, when their presence was rare, even in urban households.

Back then, the architectural landscape of the valley was vastly different. Most residential buildings were single storied or, at most, one-and-a-half storied traditional Assam-type houses with tin or thatched roofs. Those homes, designed in harmony with the nature, remained surprisingly comfortable during warm weather. The heat during that summer were bearable, and air conditioning was considered luxury. Today, however, the summer season brings almost oppressive heat, making modern concrete buildings unbearable without artificial cooling. The air that once soothed, now suffocates, and this shift is a direct consequence of a global crisis that is being increasingly felt at all places.

There is no denying the fact that in the last two decades of the 20th century and the first quarter of the 21st century, planet earth has experienced an alarming rise in average temperatures. This global phenomenon has made mankind acquainted with the buzz words like 'Climate change', 'Global warming',

'Ice cap melting', 'Greenhouse gases', 'CFCs' and the likes. While these terms are often used in global discussions and reports, their real impact begins at the micro level, right in our towns, villages, and ambient ecosystems.

During those days, mere a hundred or so four-wheelers traversed the valley's roads. Industrial activity was limited mostly to tea garden factory units, and large-scale deforestation then had yet to begin. Heavy earth-moving machinery like JCBs were not common sights, and nature could still retain its pristine form. The hills and forests looked untouched, and the air remained clean. Wildlife, too, thrived in this relatively undisturbed environment.

For a historical perspective, one can refer to W.W. Hunter's A Statistical Account of Assam (Volume II, published in 1879). The book provides a detailed record of the fauna once prevalent in undivided Cachar. Hunter lists at least twelve large mammals regularly found in the region, including the 'Mithun', two types of wild 'Bangur', the wild buffaloes, Sambar deer, Barking deer, Barasingha, Tigers, Leopards, Rhinoceroses, Wild hogs, Black bears, and even the flying foxes. Tragically, many of these species have disappeared. Today, only two types of deer (sambar and barking deer) are found in the wild here, and even their numbers are alarmingly low. Vultures, which once dotted the skies of the valley and played a crucial role in maintaining ecological balance, have virtually vanished, primarily due to poisoning from veterinary drugs.

The plight of elephants in the region is equally disturbing. In the Katakhal Reserve Forest, just three elephants, (a male, a female, and a juvenile female)

are struggling to survive in isolation. Four decades ago, a herd of forty to forty-five wild elephants came down from the foothills of the Barail Hills, but no one knows exactly which route they took. From there, they moved through the tea gardens behind the airport and reached Dewan tea garden in the eastern part of the district. After that, no one knows where this massive herd disappeared! A decade ago, a herd of seven female elephants roamed the Patharia Reserve Forest along the Indo-Bangladesh border. Today, there are only two. If proactive conservation measures are not taken immediately, local extinction is inevitable for these megaherbivores.

Northeast India is home to nine species of primates, and the Barak Valley hosts eight of them all except the golden langur. But habitat destruction, human encroachment, and lack of conservation efforts are rapidly pushing these primates toward extinction. The Ganges River Dolphin, was the mascot of 'Namami Barak', organized by the Government of Assam in 2019. These dolphins were once abundant in the Barak River and its tributaries, is now a rare sight due to habitat deterioration, unregulated fishing practices, and poaching. This grim pattern continues across other species as well. Bengal monitor lizards, numerous snake species, turtles, and tortoises are all witnessing sharp declines. The region's avian diversity is also under threat, with many bird species either migrating away permanently or disappearing entirely. Despite the existence of wildlife protection laws, their enforcement remains dismal.

The consequences of this biodiversity loss are severe. Not only does it threaten the survival of individual species, but

it also disrupts the delicate ecological balance necessary for human survival. A healthy ecosystem regulates climate, purifies air and water, pollinates crops, and controls disease vectors. The disappearance of certain species leads to cascading effects that increase our vulnerability to diseases, food shortages, and natural disasters.

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in its Living Planet Report (LPR) 2022 has mentioned that, during the present era, mankind is facing a dual crisis; 'Climate change' and 'Biodiversity loss', the two sides of the same coin. The report reveals that global wildlife populations have declined by an average of 69% since 1970, with nearly one million plant and animal species now at risk of extinction. These figures are not merely statistics; they are stark warnings that we are on the brink of irreversible ecological collapse. However, the same report emphasizes that concerted conservation and restoration efforts can turn the tide. Case specific and habitat specific actions such as creating wildlife corridors, banning harmful pesticides, restoring degraded forests, curbing illegal hunting and the likes can protect species and rejuvenate ecosystems. Community-based conservation has shown promising results in other parts of India and must be implemented here as well.

We ought to recognize that environment and biodiversity protection is not just the responsibility of governments, NGOs, or scientists; rather, it is a shared duty. Each of us, through small actions and greater awareness, can contribute to the preservation of biodiversity and the mitigation of climate change. Whether it is planting native trees, reducing plastic usage, advocating for green policies, or simply educating others about these issues, every effort counts.

Therefore, this is not just a plea, but a heartfelt appeal to everyone. Please take responsibility for the environment around you. Be conscious of your carbon footprint. Inspire your family, friends, and neighbors to become stewards of the Earth. Encourage children to connect with nature. Support local and global conservation efforts. Demand stronger commitments for the cause of the environment and involve policy makers to go with the green. Together, we can ensure that the Barak Valley and the planet at large remain a thriving, biodiverse haven for generations to come. Remember the native American proverb, 'We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children'. Let us also not forget, 'We have only one living planet, only one Earth'.

(Prof. PARTHANKAR CHOUDHURY is the former Head and Dean, Department of Ecology and Environmental Science under E. P. Odum School of Environmental Sciences, Assam University, Silchar)

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BARAK FESTIVAL

JANUARY 10-12, 2025

ACTIVITY PROGRAM



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



11 JAN
Adventure Sports
 Trekking & Canoe, Obstacle Navigations, Sport Climbing, Disaster Management Technique, Water Sports.



11 JAN
Barak Valley Conclave
 Potential, Issues and Challenges of Barak Valley by different youth organizations. Includes NGOs, and Government organizations for social, political, economic, sports, environment, and awareness campaigns. Participation through invitation only. Different rewards are provided.



10 JAN
Barak Festival 2025
 KRC Foundation Book Club

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.

11 JAN
Media Conclave
 All can participate online and send a video clip on Poems, Songs, and Dance Performances, Bengali, English, Hindi & Manipuri. Last Date: 31st December 2024.

12 JAN
River-Climate Conclave
 Climate Change will collaborate on Climate Change, pollution and river cleaning. The Conclave will focus on the importance, technical and protection of River Barak. Training & Geography competitive and certification. River Barak, Climate Change.

10 JAN
Media Conclave
 Media Conclave (Media Awards, Workshops, and the Film, Talks and Conferences are part of the 'Barak Festival 2025'. Theme: 'One for All, All for One'. Welcome your news anchors, journalists, media & corporate PR, sponsors, guides, speakers, members.

11 JAN
5E For Success Conclave
 The 5E For Success Conclave is going to deliberate on the theme: 'From School to Campus to Corporate'. Schools, Educational Institutions and corporate houses can join the Conclave as sponsors.

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'.

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

10-12 JAN
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 Full-Blown Demos | CASH PRIZES | Trophy.

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