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PERSPECTIVE

Cheaters think everyone cheats. Liars think everyone lies.

Short circuits emerge as leading cause of fires in Dimapur in 2025; losses near Rs. 6.9 crore
DIMAPUR

Nagaland's commercial hub Dimapur recorded 59 fire incidents between January and December 2025, with short circuits emerging as the single largest cause, according to data compiled from the Central and West Fire Stations.

Official records show that the fires resulted in an estimated property loss of around ₹6.88 crore and affected more than 500 families during the year. No fatalities were reported in any of the incidents.

Fire officials said electrical faults accounted for more than half of the cases, with short circuits alone responsible for 26 fires. These incidents affected residential colonies, commercial establishments and public institutions, highlighting persistent concerns over electrical safety and wiring standards in the city.

Data further indicated that non-Naga residents suffered the maximum damage, with a majority of the fires reported in kaccha houses. April witnessed the highest number of incidents, with nine cases, followed by October with seven. Authorities recorded only one fire incident in May, while no cases were reported in June.

Besides short circuits, other causes included open flames, burning of waste, gas leakage and incidents of unknown origin. A significant number of cases between January and October were categorised under "unknown causes," reflecting gaps in determining the exact triggers of several fires.

WHO SAID WHAT



K. Chokhone Krichena from Senapati district in Manipur has done exceptional work in floriculture and has also transformed the lives of many farmers.
#MannKiBaat ~ Narendra Modi, PM

IMPHAL

Members of the Northeast India Rally (NEIR) have strongly condemned the killing of Angel Chakma in Dehradun, calling the incident brutal, inhumane, and a matter of deep national concern. The organisation has demanded immediate justice and strict punishment for all those involved, urging the Uttarakhhand government to act without delay. Expressing grief, NEIR members said they pray for the eternal peace of Angel Chakma's soul and for strength and solace for his family, especially his parents and siblings. They also appealed to people across the country to put an end to abuse, violence, and discriminatory behaviour against individuals from the Northeast.

"We are Indians and proud to be Indian. No one should be made to feel like an outsider in their own country," NEIR members said, adding that such incidents strike at the core of national unity and integrity. The organisation announced that the inauguration of the NEIR programme on January 4, 2026, will begin with a condolence message and prayers in memory of Angel Chakma. An organising committee member from Imphal said the incident reflects a wider pattern of discrimination faced by people from the Northeast. He said the NEIR platform exists to remind the nation that India's strength lies in its diversity and that the people of the Northeast are an inseparable part of the country's identity. "No one should ever be forced to justify their Indianness," he added. The committee member further

said NEIR strongly condemns the racist attack on the young student and remains committed to promoting unity, dignity, and mutual respect among all communities. A.L. Hek, BJP MLA from Meghalaya and Patron of NEIR, also condemned the incident, describing it as a racist attack that must not be tolerated. He said India is enriched by its many ethnic communities and called on citizens to stand together against hatred. "We must fight for justice and stop sowing the seeds of division. Only then can we make our country a better place to live in for you, for me, and for everyone," he said. NEIR reiterated its appeal to peace-loving citizens across the country to unite in the spirit of brotherhood and work collectively toward a just, inclusive, and respectful India.



NEIR Condemns Killing of Angel Chakma in Dehradun, Demands Justice and End to Racism

BISWADEEP GUPTA

Assam CM issues warning to encroachers, calls for collective resolve to protect land and forests



GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on December 29 issued a stern warning to illegal encroachers, asking them to vacate unlawfully occupied land and forest areas immediately, failing which the state government would take strict action.

show zero tolerance towards illegal encroachment and would not spare anyone found occupying land in violation of the law. "I warn all intruders to immediately vacate the illegal occupation of our land and forests. Otherwise, you are well aware of the strict action taken by our government," he said.

Reiterating his government's commitment to protecting Assam's land and natural resources, the Chief Minister stressed that eviction and enforcement drives would continue without compromise. He said such actions were necessary to safeguard the state's ecological balance and the rights of its people.

Sarma also appealed to local communities to take collective responsibility in protecting their land, identity and long-term interests. Referring to the teachings and legacy of Srimanta Sankardev and Madhavdev, he said unity and conscious decision-making could transform society.

"We must take a collective resolution - do not sell land to unknown people, do not give jobs to unknown people, and do not provide cultural or social spaces to unknown people. If we follow this path, after a decade our community will transform into a great power," the Chief Minister said.

His remarks come amid ongoing government drives against illegal encroachment on government land and forest areas across Assam, initiatives that have frequently triggered political debate and public discussion across the state.

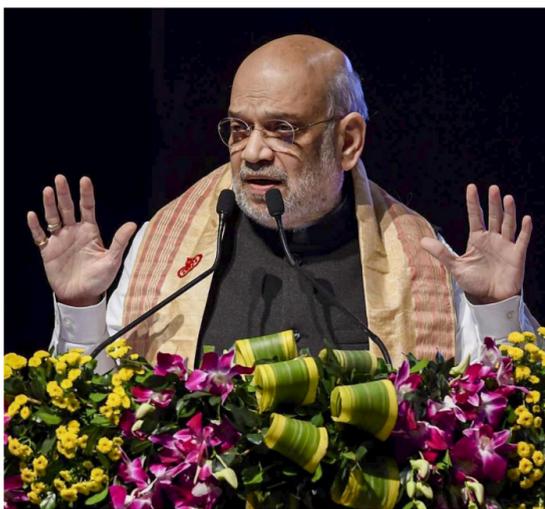
Ahead of Assam polls, Amit Shah seeks BJP mandate for crackdown on infiltration, faster development

GUWAHATI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on December 29 urged the people of Assam to elect a government in the upcoming Assembly elections that would take a firm stand against infiltration while accelerating the state's development, calling the polls crucial for Assam's future.

Addressing a public gathering after inaugurating the 5,000-seat Jyoti-Bishnu Antarjatik Kala Mandir auditorium, Shah said the Assembly elections scheduled for March-April next year would determine the direction of the state over the coming years. He appealed to voters to return the BJP to power, asserting that the party would act decisively against illegal infiltration.

"In the elections next year, elect a government that does not allow infiltration and works for the progress of Assam," Shah said, urging voters to "bless the BJP with another five years." He claimed that a re-elected BJP government would ensure that "every infiltrator is identified and sent back." The Union Home Minister said Assam had witnessed significant development over the past decade under BJP governments at both the state and central levels. Referring to 10 years of BJP rule in Assam and 11 years of the Narendra Modi-led government at the Centre, Shah said sustained efforts had been made to strengthen infrastructure, improve gov-



ernance and promote economic growth in the state. Taking aim at the Congress, Shah alleged that the infiltration issue in Assam was the outcome of past policies driven by vote-bank politics. "For the sake of votes, the Congress encouraged infiltration, which has today threatened the identity of Assam," he claimed, adding that the BJP was committed to safeguarding the state's demographic and cultural interests.

Shah also spoke of what he described as a "cultural and econom-

AGARTALA

Former rebel leader R.K. Meghen on Monday claimed that the over two-year-long crisis in Manipur was not merely the outcome of armed aggression by any one group, but part of a larger, well-orchestrated plot by "powerful forces" aimed at disintegrating the state. Addressing a gathering at Berimura in Tripura during the unveiling of a statue of freedom fighter Bir Tikendrajit, Meghen alleged that Manipur was facing an organised attempt to weaken and destabilise it, with the Meitei community being deliberately targeted. The programme was held to mark the 169th birth anniversary of Bir Tikendrajit and to commemorate Chahi Taret Khuntakpa.

Rejecting the narrative that the crisis was solely the result of armed Kuki aggression, Meghen said the developments in Manipur must be viewed in a broader political and strategic context. He alleged that forces with vested interests were working systematically to fragment

Manipur crisis part of larger conspiracy to break state, says RK Meghen

AGARTALA

the state and erode its social and cultural foundations. Calling for unity, Meghen urged the Meitei community to stand together and draw inspiration from the courage and sacrifices of their forefathers. He said confronting what he described as a "formidable threat" would require collective resolve and a renewed sense of solidarity among the community. Meghen also expressed concern over what he termed the steady erosion of democratic values, alleging that the existing system was deliberately undermining the culture, traditions and collective strength of the Meitei people. He claimed that electoral politics had increasingly become a tool to divide society along party lines, weakening the community's ability to respond to larger challenges. Emphasising the need for unity beyond geographical boundaries, Meghen said safeguarding Manipur and securing the future of the Meitei community would require cohesion among Meiteis living both within the state and outside it.

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HIGHS AND LOWS OF 2025

In one of the largest democracies of the world-India- evaluating a year gone-by is as complex as the multi-religion complexities and the Hindu caste system. When the state or the ruling dispensation takes upon itself to base political fortunes on these complexities through the nerve of emotions and sentiments, the evaluation becomes both complex and easier. Yes, it sounds dichotomous but it is a reality which has to be taken into account as one looks at the nation's travel through 2025.

Easier because the conflicts become visible on the streets to the utter discomfiture of the nation. Complex because it is difficult to evaluate its long term affects in easier terms.

What is the marker for such an evaluation in a bubbling democracy, but facing the ignominious onslaught on its basic fundamentals?

Primarily and more importantly it has to be the state of the social and political fabric on which hinge the parameters of economic and other successes. The societal pell-mell primarily fomented by the politics of conflicts- a mechanism being overtly and overbearingly pursued by the ruling dispensation in Delhi, and to some extent by regional satraps of different hues- to further their political fortunes, has naturally clouded success graph of the Narendra Modi government which though has many achievements to its credit.

The year 2025, as evaluated or reviewed in this backdrop, has certainly left a bad taste in the mouth. Despite the BJP failing to garner even simple majority in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and being heavily dependent on allies to run the Union Government, it has not made any difference to Mr Modi's standing. Conflicts, controversies and confusions apart-both in the political landscape between ruling BJP and the Congress-headed opposition, and the society- he has remained to be the dominant figure though further contributing to the abysmally diminishing public discourse. Perhaps, it suited his politics well but certainly not the nation.

Unfortunately, the year saw the constitutional institutions finding themselves further entrapped in controversies which are inimical to the national or public interest. And were definitely avoidable. There has always been a question mark on the autonomous functioning of these institutions with tendency of the successive Central governments to interfere and dominate their working. It was more pronounced in 2025 with Election Commission of India (ECI) taking the centre-stage.

After the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the state elections remained the battlegrounds. The BJP won Delhi, Haryana, Maharashtra and Bihar assembly- as the year was about to fold- elections contrary to what political pundits, psephologists and independent observers had projected. This naturally drew sharper battlelines between Narendra Modi government (read BJP) and the opposition particularly the Congress. Ever since, the charges have been flying thick and high alleging manipulation by the ruling BJP-led dispensation and ECI, in the absence of any plausible rebuttal from Nirvachan Sadan, the ECI was trapped in the crossfire.

The hurried manner in which the Special Intensive Revision, popularly called SIR, of electoral rolls in Bihar to remove names of the voters, lock, stock and barrel followed by other states to remove what the BJP leaders have described as the "illegal immigrants or voters" from the voter lists, resulted in the political atmosphere getting more vitiated. It was more disturbing, not seen happening before so glaringly, to find authorities in some of these institutions openly taking a political stance. Rather than convincingly address the opposition allegations of voters-lists being "manipulated" to help the ruling party at the Centre, the poll panel demurred.

If Mr Modi emerged stronger after the 2014 poll setback, the year 2025 saw further decimation of the opposition unity. Not that it was on a stronger footing at the start of this year, but the conflicts and contradictions and leaders inflated egos and ambitions further weakened the I.N.D.I.A bloc with total debacle in Bihar sounding the death knell.

From the opposition point of view, it continued to be a solo show or fight by Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, Mr Rahul Gandhi. Neither could he achieve the opposition unity nor the cohesiveness within his own party structure. As a result, 2026 will start for him and the opposition on a very challenging note.

There was total absence, for reasons best known to them, of regional leaders and I.N.D.I.A partners such as Trinamool Congress chief, Ms Mamta Banerjee, Nationalist Congress Party (SCP-faction) supreme, Mr Sharad Pawar, DMK chief, Mr Stalin and other parties' leaders from the opposition unity graph. A fractured opposition was what was left at the end of the year.

This was despite the fact that the Congress's "Vote Chor, Gadi Shor" nationwide campaign led by Mr Gandhi which culminated in a successful rally at Delhi's Ramlila Maidan, did manage to corner Mr Modi and his team. It certainly saw the government and the BJP distressfully defending their poll victories in the states. This could become a good take-off point for the Congress and more so Mr Gandhi in 2016 provided remedial measures are taken primarily to strengthen the organization to match the well-oiled BJP network which will be more combative in the months to come, as the indications are.

A highlight of the year 2025 was Operation Sindoor carried out by the Armed Forces against Pakistan in retaliation to Pak-backed terrorist attack in Pahalgam which left scores of innocent tourists dead. The Operation turned out to be unconventional in the sense that it, for the first time, saw a sample of technological warfare coming into use rather than the past artillery and infantry dominated combats backed by air and sea warfare.

It had its fair share of controversies attached to the real outcome. Some quarters, nationally and internationally, raised questions about its outcome. There is no doubt that many questions pertaining to 'Operation Sindoor' still remain unanswered which the people would have liked to know. May be such doubts are addressed by the powers that be in the New Year. Yet another controversy involving the high Constitutional office of the Vice President was witnessed during the year. It was on account of unceremonious stepping down of the incumbent Mr Jagdeep Dhankar, who no doubt had courted controversies due to his conduct as Rajya Sabha Chairman and in some cases his public conduct which many alleged was political and partisan.

It was a bad and black chapter written in the democratic history of India in 2025. His sudden resignation from the high-post on "health reasons" combined with total silence of the Government till date, and going into oblivion from the public gaze, to suddenly appear briefly before the year ended, made the issue look more mysterious.

Mr Dhankar was combative in Rajya Sabha which saw him frequently being pitted against the Opposition thereby ceding no ground to them. It led to the first-ever no-confidence motion having been brought against a Vice President. Expectedly the Opposition opposed him, the Government and the treasury benches unexpectedly left him in lurch. At the end it created an embarrassing situation for the nation resulting due to the high-handedness of the ruling dispensation.

With the spectre of no-confidence looming large and the government in no mood to defend him, it resulted in his resignation in a huff. Mr C P Radhakrishnan was elected his successor in September, with ruling National Democratic Alliance's (NDA's) numerical strength ensuring a smooth transition. While the resignation did not trigger institutional instability, it strongly reflected the growing friction between the executive, legislature, and Opposition within Parliament.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"A mistake repeated more than once is a decision." - Paulo Coelho

Japan's New PM Rise to Power & Strategy



DR. HAB. BEATA BOCHORODYCZ

Sanae Takaichi became Japan's first female Prime Minister. Known for her conservative views, she belongs to the Liberal Democratic Party, which has ruled the country for most of its history since the 1950s. The stability of Takaichi's new cabinet will largely depend on the skillful balancing of political forces within her own party, relations with her coalition partner, the implementation of economic promises and public support.

The 61-year-old Takaichi is a remarkable figure. On the one hand, she is portrayed as an ultra-conservative and nationalist who regularly visits the controversial Yasukuni Shrine, and as a Japanese Margaret Thatcher who longs for a strong and prosperous Japan. On the other hand, her youthful passions for heavy metal music, drumming, a love of motorcycles and fast cars, and a workaholic who sleeps only two to four hours a night are cited. However, it wasn't her personal qualities that won her the award.

For decades, the next prime minister of Japan has been determined by two main factors: factional infighting within the Liberal Democratic Party (PLD), which has governed, with brief interruptions, since 1955, and public support for the cabinet. Since the late 1990s, a third element has been added: the coalition partner.

Faction Fights
The influence of intra-party factions began to wane following the 1993 electoral reform and political financing reform. However, the party and ministerial staffing in the new government demonstrates their continued influence. Takaichi had strong ties to former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. In the party leadership election, she was supported by Abe's close ally, Aso Taro, which was reflected in the appointment of key party positions. The cabinet, in which Takaichi's rivals filled key ministries, ensured a balanced balance of power between the factions—it included fewer women than expected, but the average age of the ministers is lower than in the previous one (59 versus 63).
The role of surveys

Public support is a key factor in determining the duration of a government. A drop below 20% usually signals an imminent end to the government. Takaichi began her term with very high approval ratings, exceeding 70% in polls. The stock market also reacted positively. A few days after her election as party leader, the Nikkei 225 index reached a record high, earning it the nickname "Takaichi Trade." However, history shows that after the "honeymoon period," a government's popularity quickly declines, and factional infighting often shortens prime ministers' terms.

Coalition partners
Another key factor in the fate of Japanese cabinets is the ability to attract and retain a coalition partner. Since 1994, the PLD has governed through cooperation with other parties, the most important of which, since 1999, has been the small party with Buddhist roots, Komeito. Immediately after Takaichi's election as party leader, Komeito unexpectedly ended the alliance, citing platform differences and an attempt to dissociate itself from the PLD's image, which has been plagued by corruption scandals. The PLD formed a new alliance with the conservative Nippon Ishin no Kai (Ishin for short), or Japan Renewal Association, paving the way for Takaichi to become prime minister. The PLD-Ishin coalition does not have a majority in parliament. Although the Takaichi cabinet's position is unstable, programmatic convergence with conservative opposition parties, particularly the People's Democratic Party, offers a chance to remain in power for a longer period.

Economy & Finance
The new PM has presented the basic assumptions of the new government's policy, taking into account the content of the coalition agreement signed a few days earlier. Learning from the experiences of her mentor, Prime Minister Abe, Takaichi's Exposé focused primarily on economic and financial issues, particularly addressing the rising cost of living. Among the other proposals were a reduction in the consumption tax, the abolition of temporary tax rates on gasoline and heating

oil, and subsidies for electricity and gas bills during the winter months. Public support for the government will depend on the effectiveness and speed of these reforms, and the resulting rapid and visible economic recovery and improvement in citizens' lives.

Security
Her second major focus was foreign and security policy. She announced the continuation of the reforms initiated by Abe as part of Free and Open Pacific (FOIP) strategy, which experts refer to as "Abe Cabinet 3.0." The Japan-US alliance remains the foundation, but Japan is also developing a network of partnerships (e.g., the Quad). In addition to accelerating defence spending growth to 2% of GDP, a revision of key security policy documents and the establishment of a central intelligence agency are planned. The aim is to strengthen Japan's military capabilities and its international standing in a rapidly changing security environment.

Japan and China
Prime Minister Takaichi, like Abe, is known for her pro-Taiwan views. She considers China, alongside North Korea and Russia, a major threat to Japan's security. At the same time, she recognizes that China is Japan's largest trading partner, making economic relations with its powerful neighbor crucial. Takaichi's exposé and first meeting with Xi Jinping point to a continuation of the "cold political, hot economic" model, or in diplomatic terms, a "mutually beneficial relationship based on shared strategic interests." Diplomatic crises will undoubtedly arise, such as the one sparked by the Prime Minister's statement on November 7th that a potential Chinese attack on Taiwan could be interpreted as a "situation threatening Japan's survival," which would imply the deployment of the Self-Defence Forces.

Japan and South Korea
The meeting between Prime Minister Takaichi and President Lee Jae Myung during the APEC Summit took place in a more positive atmosphere than expected. Despite the many challenges stemming from historical experiences, both sides recognize the need for cooperation, especially

as US allies and democracies facing threats from North Korea and China's growing assertiveness. Therefore, we can expect a continuation of "shuttle diplomacy." Further positive developments in relations will depend on the South Korean president's ability to deal with the radical left, and the Japanese prime minister's ability to deal with the ultra-right, each in its own domestic sphere.

Japan and ASEAN
Takaichi made her diplomatic debut two days after assuming the premiership at the ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur. There, she reaffirmed the key role of regional countries in implementing Japan's Free and Open Pacific Strat-

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Assam that was once known for blockades and insurgency is now earning global recognition through its remarkable engineering marvels. A living example of this progress is the sacred Batadrava Than in Nagaon, which has now been dedicated to the people. Congratulations to CM Shri @himantabiswa ji and the entire govt for beautifully blending development with tradition. ~ Amit Shah, Union Home Minister



egy (FOIP). Japan, highly trusted in the region, is positioned as a positive alternative to the US-China rivalry.

Japan and USA
Immediately after returning from Malaysia, Takaichi hosted US President Donald Trump in Tokyo. She built a positive relationship, capitalizing on Trump's fondness for the late Prime Minister Abe, but also through declarations to expand defense capabilities and accelerate the increase in GDP spent on military expenditures to 2%. She announced the easing of arms export regulations and cooperation with the US in expanding the shipbuilding industry. Thanks to its experience and technologies, Japan can support the US in its competition with China, including by providing modern warships. Prime Minister Takaichi's expressive demeanor during the meeting stood out against the traditional reserve of Japanese politicians and was widely commented on in the media as a "charm offensive" and "rock star-like." How it pans out will be worth a watch

Dehradun SSP dismisses racial motive in Tripura student Anjel Chakma's death; five held, probe continues

AGARTALA

Police in Dehradun on Monday ruled out a racial motive in the killing of Anjel Chakma, a 24-year-old student from Tripura pursuing an MBA in Uttarakhand, even as student organisations and political leaders continued to describe the incident as a hate crime targeting people from the Northeast.

Dehradun Senior Superintendent of Police Ajay Singh, who is supervising the investigation, said the assault was not triggered by racial slurs or identity-based hatred. "Our investigation so far indicates that both the victim and one of the accused belong to Northeast India. Therefore, the question of a racial slur does not arise," Singh said, adding that the incident stemmed from a "misunderstanding" during a group interaction.

According to police, the accused have claimed that Anjel Chakma and

his brother Michael misinterpreted remarks made within the group, leading to an altercation that later turned violent. However, investigators said they were continuing to examine all aspects of the case, including statements from witnesses and forensic evidence.

Three accused have been arrested so far: Avinash Negi (25) of Sahaspur in Dehradun, Suraj Khawas (18) from Manipur who was residing in Patel Nagar, and Sumit (25) of Tilwari in Dehradun. Two minors allegedly involved in the assault have been sent to a juvenile correction facility. Another accused, Yagya Raj Awasthi (22), a resident of Kanchanpur in Nepal, is currently absconding. Police have announced a reward of Rs 25,000 for information leading to his arrest, with teams deployed in Haridwar and across the India-Nepal border.

The assault took place on December 9, when Anjel was allegedly attacked and left critically injured. He was admitted



to Graphic Era Hospital in Dehradun, where he remained under treatment for over two weeks before succumbing to his injuries on December 26.

The case has triggered widespread outrage, particularly among student bodies and civil society groups from the Northeast, many of whom have de-

scribed the killing as a racially motivated attack and demanded stronger legal safeguards for people from the region studying or working outside their home states.

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami condemned the incident, stating that such crimes would not be tolerated in the state. On December 29, the Chief Minister spoke with Anjel's father, Tarun Prasad Chakma, assuring him of a fair and transparent investigation. The Chief Minister's Office also announced immediate financial assistance of Rs 4,12,500 to the family under provisions of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, and the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955.

Family members said Anjel had recently secured a job placement with sportswear brand Decathlon and was preparing to begin work in either Kolkata or Assam. His maternal uncle, Momin

Chakma, said the young man was deeply focused on supporting his family. "After completing his studies, Anjel wanted to take responsibility for the entire family. His primary wish was to ensure voluntary retirement for his father, who serves in the Border Security Force," he said.

The political fallout from the case has continued, with Union minister Kiren Rijju earlier calling for stronger protection of people from the Northeast across the country. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi also weighed in on Monday, describing the killing as a "horrific hate crime" and criticising the BJP-led Uttarakhand government, even as police maintained that the investigation had not found evidence of a racial angle so far.

Authorities said the probe remains ongoing and assured that all those responsible would be brought to justice, regardless of the motive established at the conclusion of the investigation.

KAAC to issue phase-wise eviction notices in PGR, VGR areas from December 30

KARBI ANGLONG

The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) will begin issuing eviction notices in a phased manner in Professional Grazing Reserve (PGR) and Village Grazing Reserve (VGR) areas from December 30, following a High-Powered Committee meeting held in Diphu to address the ongoing land dispute in the hill district.

The development was shared by youth leader and activist Lit-song Rongphar, who represents protesting Karbi organisations, while briefing the media on the outcomes of recent tripartite talks involving the Assam government and the KAAC.

According to Rongphar, the government has agreed to cancel trading licences issued to non-tribals operating on reserved lands, initiate eviction drives in encroached tribal and departmental areas, and fence vacant VGR and PGR land to prevent further encroachment.

"We will consult our community to assess whether these steps adequately address our demands for the protection of indigenous land rights," Rongphar said. He added that although the situation remains sensitive, the decisions taken offer some hope for a resolution to the long-standing dispute.

Elaborating on the timeline, Rongphar said eviction notices would be served again in PGR and VGR areas in a phased manner starting December 30, with eviction operations expected to be carried out after a 15-day notice period.

Officials said further discussions between the stakeholders have been scheduled for mid-January to continue efforts towards resolving the dispute through dialogue and administrative measures.

The issue of alleged encroachment on grazing reserves and tribal land has been a major flashpoint in Karbi Anglong, prompting protests and demands for stricter enforcement to safeguard indigenous land and customary rights.

Meira Paibis mark 45 years, renew demand for AFSPA repeal amid Manipur unrest

IMPHAL

The Meira Paibis, widely known as the "Guardians of Civil Society" in Manipur, on Monday marked their 45th Foundation Day across the state, reaffirming their opposition to the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) and calling for unity to restore peace amid continuing unrest.

The main Foundation Day programme was held at the All Phulou Community Hall in Imphal and was organised by the All Manipur Women Social Reformation and Development Samaj (Nupi Samaj). Similar observances were reported from several districts, reflecting the movement's statewide presence and influence.

Addressing the gathering, Nupi Samaj president Raman Leima urged all Meira Paibi groups to cooperate and remain united against what she described as external forces destabilising the volatile border state. She said the Meira Paibis were striving to engage constructively with the

Indian government, even as attempts were being made to divide women's groups along communal lines since the outbreak of violence in May 2023.

Highlighting the movement's long history of activism, Leima said the Meira Paibis have consistently opposed the imposition of AFSPA in Manipur, leading mass protests, torchlight rallies and symbolic demonstrations against alleged human rights violations. She recalled landmark protests such as the 2004 nude demonstration following the killing of Thangjam Manorama, which played a crucial role in the partial withdrawal of AFSPA from Imphal and surrounding areas that year.

Leima said the Meira Paibis have once again intensified protests following the reimposition of AFSPA in parts of the state amid ongoing ethnic violence. She added that rallies and public campaigns demanding the repeal of the law would continue until lasting peace and justice are ensured.

35 acres of illicit poppy cultivation razed in joint anti-narcotics operation in Manipur's Kangpokpi

IMPHAL

Security forces on December 29 destroyed around 35 acres of illicit poppy plantations in the hill ranges of Langkhong (Saisijang) in Manipur's Kangpokpi district, dealing a major blow to illegal drug cultivation in the region.

The operation was carried out by a joint task force comprising personnel from the Manipur Police, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the Forest Department and the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB). Officials said the site was among the largest poppy cultivation areas detected in Kangpokpi district so far this year.

During the operation, the joint team dismantled and destroyed 12 makeshift huts allegedly used by cultivators to stay at the site and support the illegal farming activity. Large quantities of materials used for poppy cultivation were also



seized and destroyed on the spot to prevent their reuse.

According to officials, security personnel confiscated and

burnt 13 bags of fertilisers, 19 bottles of Roundup herbicide and 16 bags of salt. Equipment critical to the cultivation pro-

cess, including spray pumps, irrigation pipes and additional herbicides, was also seized and destroyed.

Authorities said the destruction of the plantations marked a significant step in the ongoing crackdown on the illegal opium trade, which has been a persistent challenge in parts of Manipur and continues to fuel drug trafficking networks across the Northeast.

No arrests were made during the operation as the cultivators had reportedly abandoned the site before the security forces arrived. Officials said investigations were underway to identify those involved in the plantation and to trace the larger networks behind the illegal activity. Security agencies have intensified surveillance in and around the area to prevent the re-establishment of poppy cultivation and reiterated their commitment to sustained, co-ordinated action against illicit drug farming in the state.

Meghalaya pro-ILP groups seek national anti-racism law, fast-track justice

SHILLONG

Pro-Inner Line Permit (ILP) organisations in Meghalaya on Monday demanded the enactment of a national anti-racism law and speedy justice in the case of a Tripura student who was killed in Dehradun, describing the incident as part of a disturbing and recurring pattern of racial violence against people from the Northeast.

The demand was raised during a protest in Shillong organised by the Confederation of Meghalaya Social Organisations (CoMSO), whose members expressed deep anguish over the death of 24-year-old MBA student Anjel Chakma. Chakma succumbed to his injuries on December 26, days after being assaulted in Uttarakhand earlier this month.

Addressing the protest, CoMSO leader Roykupar Synrem said the killing could not be seen as an isolat-



ed incident. He argued that it reflected entrenched prejudice and systemic discrimination faced by Northeastern students and professionals in several Indian cities, including Bengaluru, Delhi and Dehradun.

Referring to Chakma's reported last words - "We are not Chinese, we are Indians" - Synrem said the statement was a chilling reminder of the racial profiling and social exclusion routinely experienced by people from the region outside the Northeast. "Such incidents expose the deep-rooted racism that con-

tinues to exist in society," he said.

Standing in solidarity with the people of Tripura and the wider Northeast, the pro-ILP groups urged the Uttarakhand government and the Union Ministry of Home Affairs to ensure a fast-track trial in the case. While acknowledging that five suspects had reportedly been apprehended, the protesters demanded the immediate arrest of the prime accused, warning that any delay could embolden perpetrators of similar crimes.

The organisations also called on the

Centre to issue directions to all states to establish dedicated 24x7 North East Helplines and specialised police cells in major cities to address distress calls from students and working professionals from the region. They further stressed that educational institutions and local administrations must be held accountable for failing to provide a safe, inclusive and non-discriminatory environment.

Earlier, Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma had condemned the killing, describing acts of racial violence as an assault on the constitutional values of equality and unity. Sangma, who is also the national president of the National People's Party (NPP), said people from the Northeast are Indians like any other citizen and asserted that racism must never be normalised. He called for strict punishment for those responsible for such crimes.

HITO urges Himanta Biswa Sarma to spearhead ILP expansion to Assam, Meghalaya amid security concerns

SHILLONG

The Hynniewtrep Integrated Territorial Organization (HITO) has called upon Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, in his capacity as chairman of the North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA), to take the lead in pushing for the extension of the Inner Line Permit (ILP) regime across the entire Northeast, including Assam and Meghalaya, citing growing security, demographic and sovereignty-related concerns.

In a memorandum submitted to the Chief Minister, the organisation expressed serious reservations over recent remarks attributed to Bangladesh's interim head, Muhammad Yunus, during a visit to China. According to HITO, Yunus reportedly described Bangladesh as the "only guardian of the ocean" for India's landlocked Northeastern states and repeatedly referred to the strategically sensitive Siliguri Corridor, commonly known as the "Chicken Neck."

HITO described the remarks as misleading, objectionable and inimical to India's national interest, particularly with respect to the Northeast. It argued that such statements, when viewed against the backdrop of political uncertainty in Bangladesh and the frequent detection of illegal Bangladeshi nationals in several Northeastern states, raise serious

concerns about the region's security and demographic stability.

The organisation said it concurred with the strong response earlier issued by Chief Minister Sarma, noting that his remarks had resonated widely with public sentiment in the Northeast. It also pointed out that Bangladesh itself has two narrow and strategically vulnerable corridors, making such commentary, in its view, both imprudent and misplaced.

Reiterating its long-standing demand, HITO urged the extension of the Inner Line Permit system under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873, to the entire Northeastern region. At present, the ILP regime is in force in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur, while Sikkim follows a similar mechanism in the form of a Protected Area Permit.

Given the prevailing circumstances, HITO said it had become imperative to bring Meghalaya and Assam under the ILP framework and to strengthen its implementation across the region. The organisation argued that while ILP may not be a comprehensive solution to infiltration and illegal immigration, it would serve as a crucial regulatory mechanism to monitor and restrict the movement of illegal foreigners, while safeguarding indigenous land, identity and cultural heritage.

Centre plans GI tags for 150 Northeast products in two years; agarwood exports surge as region dominates production

NEW DELHI

The Centre has identified at least 150 distinctive products from the Northeast for Geographical Indication (GI) tagging over the next two years, a move aimed at preserving regional identities while expanding market access for traditional goods, the government said on Monday.

The initiative is being spearheaded by the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER), which is focusing on GI tagging of unique products from the agriculture, horticulture, handloom and handicraft sectors across the eight northeastern states. Officials said the effort is intended to protect indigenous knowledge systems, boost value addition and improve incomes for local producers and artisans.

Alongside the GI push, the ministry has sanctioned the establishment of the North East Science and Technology (NEST) Cluster at IIT Guwahati at a cost of 22.98 crore. The proposed cluster will promote research, innovation and skill development in



the region, with a strong focus on emerging and future technologies.

According to officials, the NEST Cluster will house an innovation hub for grassroots technologies, a technology hub for semiconductors and artificial intelligence, a centre of excellence for bamboo-based technologies and biodegradable, eco-friendly plastics,

and facilities to strengthen entrepreneurship, skilling and innovation ecosystems in the Northeast.

A major thrust area highlighted by the ministry is agarwood, for which the Northeast accounts for nearly 96 per cent of India's total production. With rising global demand, India's annual export quota for

agarwood has been increased six-fold, reflecting the sector's growing economic potential. An integrated proposal to develop agarwood clusters in Golaghat district of Assam and Kadamtala in Tripura is currently under active consideration.

The ministry is also working to strengthen traditional bamboo artisan clusters, with plans to integrate over 4,000 artisans into formal markets, improve digital linkages and upgrade 15 common facility centres (CFCs). Procurement units have already been supported in Karbi Anglong (Assam) and Mokokchung (Nagaland) to facilitate the production of value-added, engineered bamboo products.

Officials said these interventions align with the broader national vision of building a 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047, with the Northeast positioned as a key growth engine. The momentum was further reflected at the Rising North East Investors Summit, held in New Delhi in May, which attracted participation from major corporate groups, foreign investors and public sector undertakings. The summit generated investment interest worth 4.48 lakh crore, underlining growing confidence in the region's economic potential, particularly in sectors such as agri-based industries, sustainable materials, technology, and indigenous crafts.

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PM Modi to meet top economists, experts ahead of Budget 2026-27

NEW DELHI

Ahead of the Union Budget 2026-27, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to meet top economists and experts on Tuesday to seek their views.

The meeting is being held as part of the government's ongoing consultations ahead of key economic decisions in the next Union Budget. Besides economists and sectoral experts, Niti Aayog Vice Chairman Suman Bery, NITI Aayog CEO BVR Subrahmanyam and other members were also likely to attend the meeting, according to officials.

The meeting with PM Modi is set to serve as a platform for economists and experts to share

their views and assessments on the country's current economic situation. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is likely to present the Budget on February 1, amid geopolitical uncertainties and US tariffs.

She has held several consultations with economists, representatives of trade unions and labour organisations as part of the groundwork in the run-up to the Union Budget 2026-27.

The meetings were part of the ministry's annual stakeholder engagement process. Similar pre-budget discussions have been held with representatives of other sectors as well in recent days, such as banking, hospitality, IT and startups. Intensive discussions have also

been held on pushing growth and creating more jobs and incomes in the agriculture, MSME and manufacturing sectors. Meanwhile, apex business chamber CII has proposed a four-pronged fiscal strategy ahead of the Union Budget 2026-27 that includes debt stability, fiscal transparency, revenue mobilisation and expenditure efficiency. According to a CII statement, at the core of the roadmap is adherence to the government's debt glide path targeting 50 per cent (plus or minus 1 per cent) of GDP by FY31. Maintaining Central debt at roughly 54.5 per cent of GDP and the fiscal deficit at 4.2 per cent of GDP in FY27 will preserve macro credibility while supporting growth.



NEW DELHI

Policy continuity and institutional clarity by the government and an expanding public-private partnership framework led to the growth of India's private space sector in 2025, said Lt. Gen. AK Bhatt (Retd.), Director General, Indian Space Association (ISpA) on Tuesday.

Bhatt noted that 2025 was marked as a decisive year for India's space sector as policy reforms translated into tangible execution across launch, including satellite manufacturing, Earth observation, space data, and satellite communications.

"Growth during 2025 was driven largely by the private industry. The year saw contracts awarded, production lines

established, satellites deployed, launch vehicles move closer to operational readiness, and data-driven services scale across civilian, commercial, and strategic domains," the expert said.

India's space economy, currently valued at approximately \$9 billion, is now on a clear trajectory towards \$44 billion in the coming decade.

Public-private partnerships emerged as a central operating model across the space value chain in 2025. India's share of the global space economy, currently estimated at around 2 per cent, is projected to increase to nearly 8 per cent by 2033, driven primarily by private industry.

"Policy instruments, including the New Space Policy 2023, liberalised

FDI Policy 2024, and implementation of the Indian Telecommunications Act 2023, provided predictability for long-term private investment," Bhatt said.

Liberalised FDI norms and IN-SPACe's single-window authorisation framework supported increased participation by both domestic and international players.

"India's space ecosystem crossed an important scale milestone in 2025, with over 300 active space startups now operating across launch vehicles, satellite platforms, Earth observation, satellite communications, propulsion, electronics, space situational awareness, and downstream analytics," Bhatt said.

Further, India's private space companies advanced from demonstration to deployment in 2025. Skyroot Aerospace and Agnikul Cosmos continued to progress private orbital and semi-cryogenic launch systems, contributing to the development of a competitive domestic launch market.

PM Modi recently unveiled Skyroot's Vikram-I launch vehicle and the Infinity Campus.

Pixxel launched India's first private satellite constellation, the Firefly series, using SpaceX Falcon 9 rockets in early and mid-2025, deploying a total of six hyperspectral satellites for high-resolution Earth imaging.

Digantara expanded its space situational awareness infrastructure by successfully launching its first commercial space surveillance satellite, SCOT, while companies including Bellatrix Aerospace, ThrustWrks, OmSpace, Xovian, and GalaxEye demonstrated operational capabilities across propulsion, launch subsystems, and imaging platforms.

Meanwhile, policy support was reinforced in the Union Budget 2025-26 through initiatives such as the National Geospatial Mission, a Fund of Funds for startups, enhanced credit guarantee mechanisms, expansion of Atal Tinkering Labs, and a dedicated DeepTech Fund of Funds, Bhatt said.

Private space startups in India raised nearly \$150 million during FY 2025, taking the total funding to over \$617 million to date.

The operationalisation of the Rs 1,000 crore IN-SPACe Venture Capital Fund and approval of the Rs 1 lakh crore Research, Development and Innovation Scheme added long-term depth to the funding ecosystem for space and deep-tech innovation.

IN-SPACe's Technology Adoption Fund for Rs 500 crore, launched this year, will also boost private sector space innovation by funding startups/MSMEs (up to 60 per cent cost) to develop commercially viable, early-stage space technologies, Bhatt said.



INTERNATIONAL

Khaleida Zia, Bangladesh's first female PM and archrival of Hasina, dies at 80

DHAKA

Former Bangladeshi prime minister Khaleida Zia, a towering political figure whose archrivalry with former premier Sheikh Hasina shaped the country's politics for decades, has died aged 80, her Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) said on Tuesday.

As the country's first woman prime minister, she played a pivotal role in restoring democracy after years of military rule and remained a dominant force in national life despite prolonged illness. "My mother is no more," Zia's elder son and BNP acting Chairman Trique Rahman said.

Her personal physician, Dr AZM Zahid Hossain said she breathed her last early on Tuesday while receiving treatment at Evercare Hospital in Dhaka, while her party confirmed that she had passed away at 6:00 am local time, "just after Fajr prayer."

BNP officials said the former premier's funeral prayer was expected to be held on Wednesday at Dhaka Manik Mia Avenue in front of the parliament complex.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi mourned Zia's death, saying as the first woman premier of Bangladesh, her important contributions towards the development of the country, as well as India-Bangladesh relations, will always be remembered.

Modi also recalled his "warm" 2015 meeting with her in Dhaka. "We hope that her vision and legacy will continue to guide our partnership," he said.

In his condolence message, Bangladesh interim government's Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus said he was "deeply saddened and grief-stricken" by the passing of Zia, noting that the nation had lost not just a political leader but a towering stateswoman who represented an important chapter in the country's history.

Pakistan and China also



expressed deep sorrow over the death of Zia and paid tribute to her political legacy and role in shaping the country's democratic journey.

Zia was admitted to Evercare Hospital on November 23 for routine tests, during which doctors detected a chest infection and decided to keep her under observation. Her condition worsened on November 27, prompting her transfer to the hospital's Coronary Care Unit (CCU).

Zia had been suffering from multiple complex and chronic health conditions, including liver and kidney complications, heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, arthritis and infection-related problems. She last appeared in public on November 21 when she joined the Armed Forces Day reception at Dhaka Cantonment.

Earlier this year she was treated at a London hospital.

Former Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleida Zia waves to supporters after she was arrested in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on Sept. 3, 2007.

"A profound loss for Bangladesh's political life," Hasina pays tribute to archrival Zia — a three-time prime minister and the chairperson of BNP — had faced corruption cases she said were politically motivated.

And in January 2025, the Supreme Court acquitted Zia in the last case against her, which would have let her run in February's general election.

The BNP said that after she was released from prison due to illness in 2020, her family requested the administration of her archrival, former Prime Minister

Sheikh Hasina, at least 18 times to allow her to be treated abroad, but the requests were rejected.

Following Hasina's ouster in 2024, an interim government headed by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus finally allowed her to go. She went to London in January and returned to Bangladesh in May.

Bangladesh's early years of independence, gained in a bloody 1971 war against Pakistan, were marked by assassinations, coups and countercoups as military figures and secular and Islamic leaders jockeyed for power.

Zia's husband, President Ziaur Rahman, had grabbed power as a military chief in 1977 and a year later formed the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. He was credited with opening democracy in the country, but he was killed in a 1981 military coup. Zia's uncompromising stance against the military dictatorship helped build a mass movement against it, culminating with the ousting of dictator and former army chief H.M. Ershad in 1990.

Zia's opponent when she won her first term in 1991 and in several elections after that was Hasina, the daughter of independence leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was assassinated in a 1975 coup. Zia was criticized over an early 1996 election in which her party won 278 of the 300 parliamentary seats during a wide boycott by other leading parties including Hasina's Awami League, which demanded an election-time caretaker government.

Zia's government lasted only 12 days before a nonpartisan caretaker government was installed and the new election was held that June.

Zia returned to power in 2001 in a government shared with the country's main Islamist party, Jamaat-e-Islami, which had a dark past involving Bangladesh's independence war.

BEIJING

China's foreign minister on Tuesday slammed a record US arms sale to Taiwan as Beijing conducted the second day of military drills around the island it has long claimed as its own.

Wang Yi, the most senior Chinese official to comment on the sales so far, also blasted the "pro-independence forces in Taiwan" and Japan's leaders during an end-of-the-year diplomatic event in Beijing.

"In response to the continuous provocations by pro-independence forces in Taiwan and the large-scale US arms sales to Taiwan, we must resolutely oppose and strongly counter them," Wang said while reviewing a year of diplomacy by Asia's largest and most influential nation.

He reiterated China's aim for a "complete reunification" with Taiwan, a self-ruled island that split from China during a civil war in 1949 and evolved into a multiparty democracy.

Taiwan's government argues the island was never part of China in its current form under the Communist Party and Beijing's sovereignty claims are illegitimate.

The package valued at more than \$11 billion that was announced earlier this month by the US State Department amounts to the largest US arms sale to Taiwan. It includes missiles, drones, artillery systems and military software.

The US is obligated by its own laws to provide Taiwan with the means to defend itself. President Donald Trump has ramped up pressure on the self-ruled island to buy more US military equipment, even suggesting Taiwan should spend up to 10% of its GDP on defense.

China responded to the sale by launching two days of military drills around Taiwan on Monday. The exercises also are largely seen as a rebuke

China's top diplomat blasts US arms sale to Taiwan as military drills around the island unfold



to Sanae Takaichi, the new Japanese prime minister, who inflamed Beijing last month by implying Japan could militarily intervene over Taiwan.

"Japan, which launched the war of aggression against China, not only fails to deeply reflect on the numerous crimes it committed, but its current leaders also openly challenge China's territorial sovereignty, the historical conclusions of World War II and the postwar international order," Wang said, adding that China "must be highly vigilant against the resurgence of Japanese militarism."

In his speech reviewing China's diplomatic highlights for the year, Wang also mentioned Israel's war in Gaza, welcoming international efforts to facilitate a ceasefire but insisting that more needs to be done.

"The world still owes Palestine justice," Wang said. "The Palestinian question cannot be marginalized again, and the Palestinian people's cause for democratic and legitimate rights cannot end in vain."

China maintains strong

relations with Israel and the Palestinian Authority and backs the two-state solution, under which Israel and Palestine would exist as independent states.

Wang also emphasized China's aim to facilitate a peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine. Beijing says it is impartial in the war but in practice signals support for Moscow through frequent state visits and joint military drills.

Wang mediated talks between top diplomats from Thailand and Cambodia earlier this week, which the leaders said helped consolidate a ceasefire between the two neighbors after months of fighting.

The meetings represented China's latest efforts to strengthen its role as an international mediator and particularly its influence in Asian regional crises. As China grows into an economic and political force globally, Beijing has spent the past decade and more working in various ways to increase its voice as a third party in diplomatic matters.

Bangladesh at a Crossroads: Political Unrest, Media Attacks, and the Looming Election Crisis



As Bangladesh approaches a critical election scheduled for February 12, the nation finds itself mired in a crisis that shows little sign of abating. Political unrest, rising violence, and a deteriorating law-and-order situation have cast a long shadow over the country's democratic processes. Recent developments suggest that the road to a free, inclusive, and credible election is fraught with obstacles, raising questions not only about the immediate political future but also about the broader trajectory of Bangladesh's democracy.

The country's military leadership—chiefs of the army, navy, and air force—recently met with the Chief Election Commissioner and his colleagues in Dhaka. Ostensibly, the discussions were about election preparedness. Yet, in the absence of detailed disclosures about the meeting, citizens are left to speculate. Did the military urge measures to restore law and order? Did they insist on a genuinely inclusive electoral process? These questions remain unanswered. The opacity of such high-level interactions leaves the public uneasy about whether the country's armed forces view the election as a genuine democratic exercise or merely a procedural formality.

At the heart of the debate is the issue of inclusivity. Political analysts, civil society, and the international community have repeatedly emphasized that any election that excludes major political players—specifically, the Awami League—cannot claim legitimacy. The Yunus administration, which came to power in August 2024, and the Election Commission it installed, appear confident that the electorate will turn out as scheduled. But confidence without credibility may not suffice. An election that marginalizes key parties undermines the political pluralism necessary for governance and threatens the long-term stability of the country.

International voices have joined the chorus calling for an inclusive electoral process. Three U.S. lawmakers from the House Foreign Affairs Committee have warned that any vote lacking broad participation will carry little legitimacy. Similarly, four British Members of Parliament have underscored the need for a free and fair election that genuinely reflects the will of the Bangladeshi people. Their statements emphasize that an unfettered electoral choice is not merely a procedural concern—it is a benchmark for democracy itself.

Despite these warnings, questions persist. Will the elections proceed as planned, or will ongoing political violence and unrest disrupt the political calendar? The recent spate of attacks on young political activists has heightened public anxiety. Incidents of murder and assault reveal that the Yunus administration may be ill-equipped to ensure a safe campaign environment. The rapid escalation of mob violence further compounds these fears, as demonstrated by attacks on two of the country's leading newspapers, the Daily Star and Prothom Alo.

The arson attacks on media outlets were particularly alarming because both newspapers have historically maintained a degree of sympathy toward Yunus. Yet, even this alignment did not protect them from mob fury. The destruction of these offices signals a deeper malaise: a growing incapacity of the government to control political violence or protect institutions. Over the past sixteen months, mobs, emboldened by political developments, have disrupted public life, intimidated journalists, and interfered with media operations, leaving citizens questioning the state's ability to uphold law and order.

The situation is further complicated by the regime's growing authoritarian tendencies. Beyond mob violence, the Yunus administration has pursued repressive measures against independent media. Journalists critical of the government face harassment, detention, and imprisonment. Anis Alamgir, a veteran journalist, recently found himself on a five-day remand for speaking truth to power, highlighting the precarious state of press freedom. The regime increasingly interprets any dissent or critique as tacit support for the Awami League, reinforcing a culture of fear and censorship.

The crisis extends beyond domestic politics to Bangladesh's diplomatic relations, particularly with India. Rising communal tensions have led to violent incidents against Indian missions in Dhaka, prompting reciprocal protests in New Delhi. Visa services have been suspended, and diplomatic exchanges have grown tense. The killing and subsequent desecration of a Hindu man's body in Bangladesh has intensified these strains, illustrating how internal unrest is spilling over into international relations.

Amid this turbulence, the acting chairperson of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), returning from a seventeen-year exile in Britain, has re-entered the political

arena. His return adds a new dimension to Bangladesh's political landscape. Whether he can galvanize the party, advocate for an inclusive election, and unify liberal, pro-liberation forces against rising communal influences remains to be seen. His ability to launch a mature, credible campaign may determine whether Bangladesh's democracy can recover from its current crisis.

Bangladesh's current challenges are symptomatic of a deeper structural and political malaise. The Yunus administration, despite early optimism, appears to have lost momentum. Popular enthusiasm that marked the regime's rise in 2024 has waned, with many supporters becoming disillusioned by increasing violence, restricted freedoms, and ineffective governance. The country's political polarization, exacerbated by mob interventions and the suppression of dissent, has created an environment where fear, rather than choice, dominates public life.

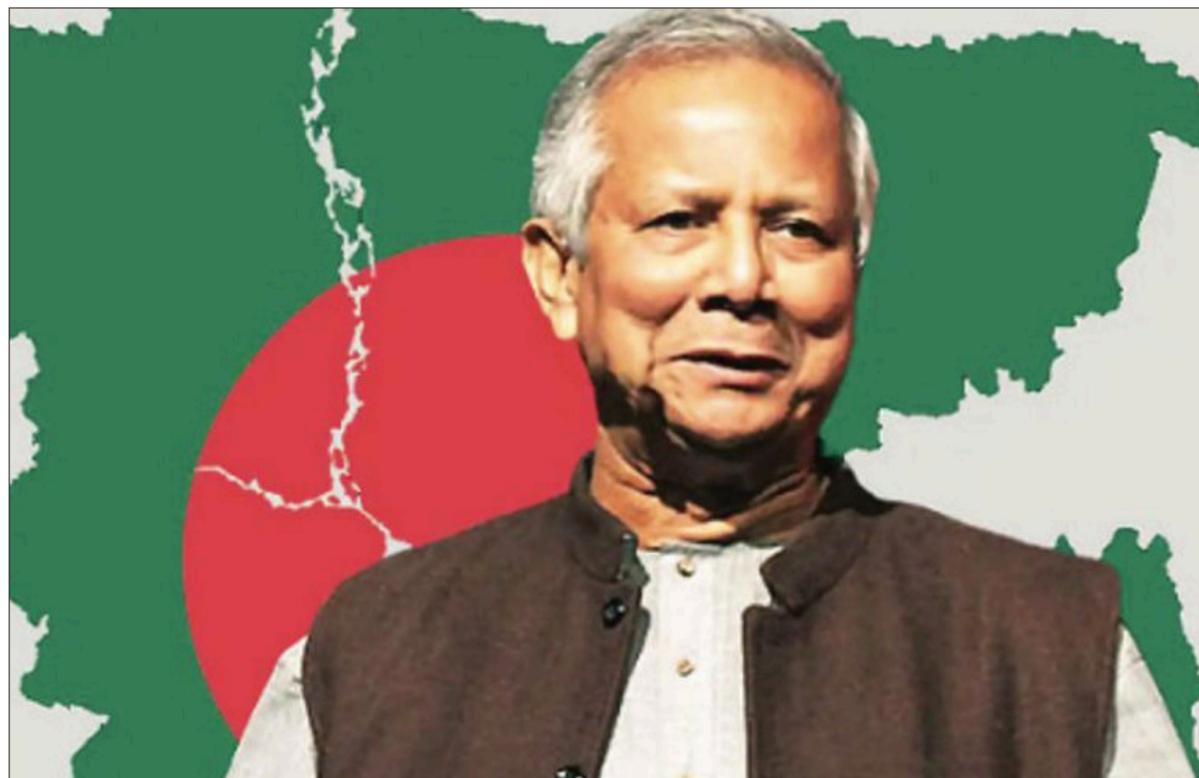
Yet, the path forward is not without hope. A secular, democratic leadership, willing to engage constructively across political divides, is essential for restoring constitutional governance. Political parties committed to inclusivity, fairness, and the rule of law must take the lead in organizing campaigns that reflect the nation's democratic aspirations. Civil society and the media also have pivotal roles in monitoring electoral fairness, safeguarding press freedom, and holding both government and political actors accountable.

The coming months will be crucial. Bangladesh's democracy faces a test not just of electoral mechanics but of its very soul. The February election, if conducted inclusively and peacefully, could provide an opportunity to recalibrate the nation's political compass. Conversely, a flawed, exclusionary vote risks deepening societal fractures, undermining international credibility, and perpetuating a cycle of violence and repression.

The lessons of Bangladesh's War of Liberation, fought fifty-four years ago, remain relevant. That struggle was built on principles of freedom, secularism, and political pluralism. Today, these principles are threatened by a volatile political environment that has combined authoritarian tendencies, mob violence, and political exclusion. Reclaiming them requires courage, strategic leadership, and the collective will of a society committed to democratic norms.

In conclusion, Bangladesh is at a crossroads. The immediate crisis encompasses electoral uncertainty, rising political violence, and strained international relations. But the broader challenge lies in restoring democratic governance, safeguarding civil liberties, and ensuring that all citizens, regardless of political affiliation, can exercise their right to participate in shaping the nation's future. The coming months will reveal whether Bangladesh can rise above the current turbulence and reaffirm the values upon which the nation was founded, or whether the cycle of unrest, repression, and political exclusion will continue to define its trajectory.

The stakes are high, and the world is watching. The choices made today will determine whether Bangladesh can reclaim its democratic promise or drift further into political instability and social unrest.



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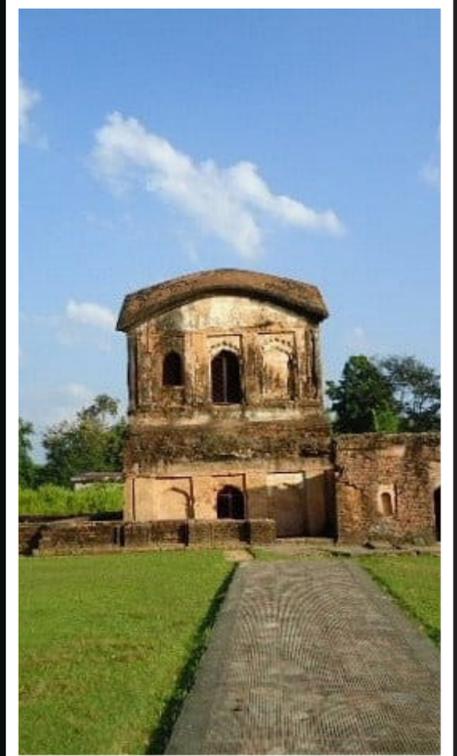
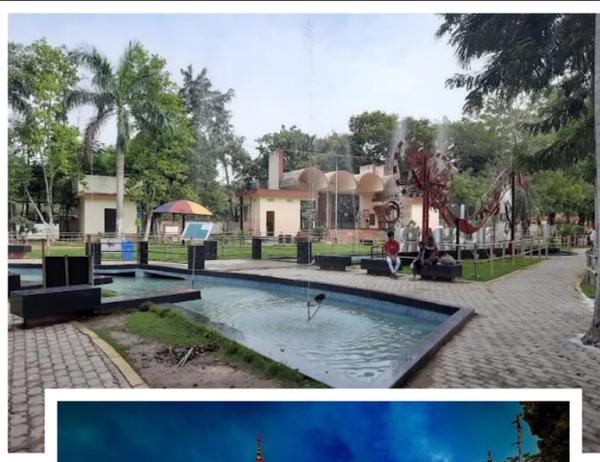
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The smartest man in the room knows when to play dumb.

SILCHAR, A TOWN THAT KNOWS HOW TO HOLD ITS OWN



A number of activities related to the NEIR 2026 will be conducted in Assam's Silchar (a city of poets) on the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose on January 23 (adventure sports – Barak Festival) and Republic Day celebration on January 26. The rally will be flagged-off from Jiribam on January 22. Silchar is the headquarters of Cachar district and the second-largest city in Assam, both in population and economic weight. It lies about 343 kilometres south-east of Guwahati. The town took shape in 1832 when Captain Thomas Fisher shifted the district headquarters to Janiganj, laying the foundation for what Silchar would become. Indira Gandhi once called it the Island of Peace, a name that still lingers in collective memory. The city also holds two remarkable distinctions: it hosted the world's first polo club and the first recorded competitive polo match. In 1985, an Air India flight from Kolkata to Silchar made aviation history as the world's first flight operated entirely by an all-women crew. Silchar's early identity was tied to tea, and the Cachar Club served as a gathering spot for the region's planters.

Silchar sits in a bend of the Barak River with an ease that feels almost instinctive. It doesn't chase attention. It doesn't try to fit into the image of the perfect northeastern town. It simply exists on its own terms, shaped by river, rain, migration, memory, and that unmistakable Barak Valley temperament. Spend a few days here and you'll understand why Silchar feels less like a place you pass through and more like a place you settle into.

The first thing that anchors the town is the river. The Barak moves with a slow, confident rhythm. People gather along its banks in the early morning, sipping tea from small kiosks that sprout like mushrooms after a drizzle. Boatmen ferry goods across the water in the same unhurried way they've done for decades. The river isn't just geography; it's a mood-setter. It in-

fluences how people talk, how they pause, how they live. Silchar's pace mirrors the Barak's wide loops and quiet currents.

Walk toward the heart of town and the streets tighten, fill up, and start telling their own stories. The markets here aren't polished or curated. They're alive in the truest sense, a blend of Assamese, Bengali, Marwari, Manipuri, and tribal influences—all of them speaking over one another in sharp, friendly bursts. The scent of just-fried snacks mixes with the smell of damp earth. Porters weave through the crowd with baskets balanced on their shoulders. Fruit sellers call out prices in a half-singing tone. The everyday noise doesn't feel chaotic. It feels familiar.

Silchar has always been a meeting point. The waves of people who came here over the years—traders, students, workers, artists, families looking for steadier ground—gave the town both its diversity and its stubborn sense of community. You notice it in the way shopkeepers greet long-time customers by name. You see it in the quiet patience with which strangers help each other navigate the old market lanes. Silchar has absorbed everyone who walked in and made space for them in ways big and small. The educational institutions add another layer to the town's character. Assam University, located on a hill outside the main town, opens up a different view of Silchar. The campus stretches across green slopes, often covered in mist early in the morning. Students from all corners of the Northeast, and many from outside the region, come here looking for opportunity and a little independence. Inside the town, the older institutions—Gurucharan University, Women's College, Radhamadhab College, Cachar College—carry a long academic legacy. Step inside their grounds and you can almost hear echoes of debates, union meetings, rehearsals, and late-afternoon gossip under trees that have been there far longer than most students. The prestigious National Institute of Technology is based here as well.

Silchar's love for culture is woven into

everyday life. The town reads. It debates. It attends plays, even if the theatre hall gets too warm. It supports poetry, film clubs, and small literary circles that meet in bookshops and cafés. This is a town where people still argue passionately about a line from Tagore or a scene from Ray. Even the most casual adda has a way of slipping into literature, politics, or cinema without anyone noticing the transition. The ability to turn conversation into a sport is one of Silchar's oldest talents.

The taste of the place is unmistakable. Food in Silchar doesn't try to impress with theatrics. It relies on warmth and familiarity. Long-grain rice that steams just right. Fish curries cooked with minimal fuss. Street stalls offering aloo chat, momo, singara, nimki, muri mixed with mustard oil, lemon tea, and the occasional surprise—like a vendor selling local fruit that tastes slightly different depending on the season. The town knows how to feed you without taking itself too seriously. If you step away from the busier pockets, you start noticing Silchar's quieter corners. Old ponds covered with lotus leaves. Narrow lanes where sunlight filters through overhanging trees. Houses with tiled roofs and small verandahs where people sit in the late afternoon, watching the world pass by. These spaces give the town a gentle balance. They make it possible to breathe even when the market gets noisy or the traffic grows impatient.

The town has its own set of memories tucked into its streets. Silchar remembers the language movement of 1961, the sacrifices, the protests, the grief, and the determination that followed. That memory shapes the town's identity in ways that outsiders often underestimate. It's not about sentimentality. It's about a collective understanding that voices matter. That history isn't distant. That dignity sometimes comes at a cost. You can feel this awareness in conversations with older residents, and even in the way younger people talk about language and belonging.

Move toward the outskirts and Silchar changes once more. Tea gardens spread out

in neat rows, rolling into the horizon with a quiet elegance. Workers move between the bushes with baskets strapped to their backs. The air smells different here—lighter, greener, carrying that familiar hint of rain that seems permanently stitched into the Barak Valley climate. These gardens have shaped the region's economy for generations, and they influence how the town breathes. They also remind you how closely Silchar is tied to the land around it.

What this really means is that Silchar is layered. You can't grasp it in one look. It's a blend of old and new, river and rain, softness and stubborn will. It has its frustrations, of course. The traffic tests your patience. Roads take their time to get repaired. Water-logging keeps everyone on their toes during monsoon. But the town has learned to navigate these inconveniences with a kind of collective shrug. The complaints are there, but so is the affection. People grumble, then they carry on.

The warmth of Silchar shows up when you least expect it. A rickshaw puller who insists on dropping you closer to your doorstep because the road ahead is too dark. A stranger helping you find a shop hidden in a lane even locals get confused about. A shop owner offering you tea just because you stood there long enough. The town wears its kindness casually, without announcements. By evening, the lights along the main roads switch on, and Silchar settles into a softer rhythm. Families take walks near Rangirkhari. Students gather at tea stalls discussing plans. Small eateries fill with chatter. The town winds down without losing its pulse. Silchar isn't dramatic. It doesn't demand to be admired. It grows on you in a way that feels natural, almost inevitable. It's a place built on conversation, memory, hospitality, and a quiet resilience. Give it time, walk its streets without rushing, let the Barak's slow current guide your sense of pace, and Silchar reveals its depth. It's a town that holds its own—with warmth, with grit, and with an everyday grace that stays with you long after you've left.



BARAK FESTIVAL

JANUARY 10-12, 2025

ACTIVITY PROGRAM





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



11 JAN
Adventure Sports
 Trekking & Canoe, Obstacle Navigation, Sport Climbing, Disaster Management Technique, Water Sports.
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11 JAN
Barak Valley Conclave
 Potential Issues and Challenges of Barak Valley by different stakeholders.
 Includes: NGOs, and Government officials, for better planning, awareness, awareness, awareness, and awareness through participation through involvement of different stakeholders and stakeholders.



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



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



10 JAN
Media Conclave
 Media Conclave: Media Conclave, Workshops, and the Fund, Talks and Conferences are part of the Barak Festival 2025. Theme: 'One for All, All for One'.
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FILM FESTIVAL | EXHIBITION
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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

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



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



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