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PERSPECTIVE

Messi waited 17 years. Ronaldo waited 13 years. Mr. Beast waited 12 years. Elon Musk waited 26 years. Nelson Mandela waited 27 years. If you're in a season of waiting, you're in good company. Keep trusting the process.

IDPs, COCOMI to March to Raj Bhavan on January 12 Over Delay in Manipur Resettlement

IMPHAL

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Manipur, along with the Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), have announced a peaceful march to Raj Bhavan on January 12, 2026, citing continued silence by the state authorities on the resettlement of families displaced by the ongoing conflict.

In a statement issued on December 30, the groups said that multiple memoranda and reminders submitted to the state government, including to the Governor of Manipur, have gone unanswered. They alleged that deadlines earlier communicated by the authorities for initiating resettlement have lapsed, with no written assurance, progress report or concrete implementation plan made public. According to the statement, thousands of displaced families remain confined to relief camps, living under prolonged uncertainty and hardship. The IDPs and COCOMI described the lack of response from Raj Bhavan and the state administration as a denial of their constitutional rights, particularly the rights to rehabilitation, safety and dignity.

Announcing the proposed march to Lok Bhavan, the groups said the objective of the protest is to seek a direct, transparent and accountable response from the Governor on the status, progress and timeline of the resettlement process, based on the representations submitted so far.

They said the decision to organise the march was taken after what they termed prolonged administrative silence, failure to honour public assurances and continued inaction on the rehabilitation of displaced citizens.

WHO SAID WHAT



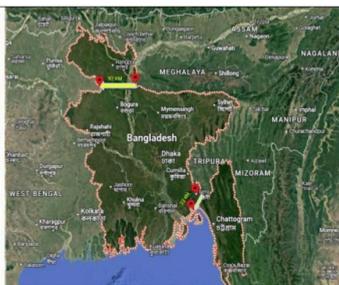
Entire East India is now grappling with the problem of illegal infiltration. Assam, West Bengal and Jharkhand are the top three affected states. - Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, Assam CM

Himanta Flags Demographic Risks in Chicken's Neck Region

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has raised fresh concerns over demographic change, illegal infiltration and their potential implications for national security and governance in eastern India, particularly in areas surrounding the strategically sensitive Chicken's Neck corridor. In a recent interview, Sarma said that parts of the narrow Siliguri Corridor - which connects the Northeast to the rest of India - and adjoining regions are inhabited by communities with deep cultural, linguistic and familial ties to neighbouring Bangladesh. While stressing that these residents are Indian citizens, the Chief Minister suggested that cross-border linkages could influence regional dynamics in times of political or strategic stress.

"At the right moment, some may align with Bangladesh," Sarma said, pointing to shared language, education systems, music and media consumption as factors sustaining close connections across the border. His remarks underscore longstanding security sensitivities associated with the corridor, which is often described as India's



most vulnerable geographic link. Sarma also focused on what he described as a steadily changing demographic profile in Assam, attributing it largely to decades of illegal infiltration. Referring to observations made by the Supreme Court during hearings related to the state, he noted that demographic changes in Assam have been recorded since the 1940s, with a sharper acceleration after 1961. Citing Census data, the Chief Minister said that the Muslim

population in Assam stood at around 34 per cent in 2011. Based on past trends, he claimed that the figure would have risen significantly had the decennial Census been conducted in 2021. "By 2021, it would have been around 38 per cent. If the same trend continues, it could touch 40 per cent by 2025," Sarma said, adding that even a reduction in infiltration over the past decade would make only a marginal difference to the overall numbers. According to Sarma,

crossing what he termed a "critical threshold" could have far-reaching consequences for the functioning of the state. He warned that demographic shifts could begin to influence state institutions, including the bureaucracy and the police.

"I can only defer this situation for about 10 years. I do not have a permanent solution," he said, indicating the limits of administrative and political interventions in addressing the issue.

The Chief Minister emphasised that the challenge of illegal infiltration is not confined to Assam alone. He said several states in eastern India, including West Bengal and Jharkhand, are also facing similar pressures, making it a broader regional concern rather than a state-specific one. Sarma's comments come at a time when issues of border management, citizenship, and demographic change continue to dominate political discourse in Assam and the Northeast. The region has a long history of movements centred on identity and migration, most notably the Assam Agitation of the late 1970s and early 1980s, which eventually led to the signing of the Assam Accord

in 1985.

In recent years, the BJP-led government in Assam has repeatedly highlighted illegal infiltration as a key governance and security challenge, linking it to land pressure, social tensions and electoral politics. Measures such as eviction drives, tighter border surveillance and coordination with central agencies have been projected as steps to address the issue.

Critics, however, have argued that demographic projections and political rhetoric around infiltration risk deepening social polarisation and targeting specific communities.

They have also called for greater reliance on verified data, inclusive policy responses and long-term development strategies to address the underlying causes of migration and demographic change. Sarma's latest remarks are likely to add momentum to ongoing debates over national security, border control and demographic trends in eastern India, even as questions persist over how these challenges can be addressed without undermining social cohesion and constitutional principles.

Assam Freezes Boundaries to Gear Up for First Digital Census

GUWAHATI

The Assam government will freeze the boundaries of all administrative units from January 1 as part of preparations for the 2026 Census, which will be conducted digitally for the first time, official sources said on Tuesday.

With the boundary freeze coming into effect at the start of the new year, any proposal for the creation, bifurcation or alteration of districts, sub-divisions, revenue circles, towns or villages must be completed by December 31. The move is aimed at ensuring administrative stability ahead of the massive census exercise.

Officials told The Assam Tribune that the Directorate of Census Operations had initially proposed to carry out the crucial house-listing phase between April and September 2026. However, the State Chief Secretary has suggested that the exercise be undertaken after August 15, citing the monsoon season and the upcoming Assam Assembly elections as potential challenges to field operations.

Preparations for the census are already underway, with officials noting that Assam's administrative landscape has undergone significant changes since the last census. Several villages have grown into towns, while some urban areas have been upgraded to municipal bodies. These transitions will need to be formally accounted for before enumeration begins, making the boundary freeze a critical prerequisite.

The census will be conducted in two main stages. The first stage will involve house listing and housing census, which will provide an updated inventory of residential structures and households. This will be followed by the creation of enu-

meration blocks-basic units for population counting.

According to census norms, each enumeration block will generally comprise around 800 households. However, officials said the number would be substantially lower in hilly, forested and remote regions of the State to account for difficult terrain and accessibility constraints.

As in previous census exercises, a large proportion of enumerators are expected to be drawn from the teaching community, particularly school teachers, who will be trained to carry out the data collection process.

A major departure from past practice will be the complete digitisation of the census operation. For the first time, enumerators will collect and record data using a mobile application, with information being uploaded directly to the central census database. Officials said this shift is expected to significantly speed up the process and reduce delays associated with manual data handling.

In earlier censuses, enumerators recorded details on paper schedules, which were then transported to district headquarters and higher offices for data entry and processing-a system that often took months to complete. The digital platform is expected to streamline these steps and improve data accuracy.

Ahead of the rollout, trial runs of the digital census system were conducted in three locations-Dibrugarh, Hailakandi and Donkhamokam in Karbi Anglong district. Sources said the pilot exercises yielded encouraging results, demonstrating the feasibility of app-based enumeration in both urban and semi-rural settings.

Scindia Pushes 'One Sport, One State' Plan for Northeast

IMPHAL

Union Minister for Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) Jyotiraditya M. Scindia on Tuesday called for a more focused and result-oriented strategy to build sporting excellence in the Northeast, advocating the 'One Sport, One State' model as a framework for long-term growth.

Co-chairing the fourth high-level task force meeting on promotion of sports in the North Eastern region via video conferencing with Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla, Scindia underscored the need to align investment, coaching, and talent development around discipline-specific strengths of individual States.

Emphasising that quality coaching and early talent identification are critical to success, the DoNER Minister stressed the importance of structured grassroots competitions, ranging from village and district levels to State championships. He also proposed the preparation of sport-wise case studies for each State to guide targeted planning, funding, and infrastructure development.

"The focus must be practical and outcome-driven," Scindia noted, reiterating that structured tournaments and sustained coaching environments were essential to transforming raw talent into competitive excellence.

The meeting was attended by the Mizoram Sports Minister, the Secretary to the Union Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, the Manipur Chief Secretary, and senior officials from DoNER, State sports



departments, and North Eastern State governments.

Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla, according to a statement issued by the Raj Bhavan, highlighted that focused training programmes, systematic talent development, and the promotion of local leagues would significantly expand opportunities for young athletes across the region. He said such an approach would not only widen participation but also strengthen the Northeast's contribution to national and international sports.

Later, the Manipur Lok Bhavan shared details of the deliberations on social media, stating that

discussions centred on strengthening sports infrastructure, improving coaching and talent identification mechanisms, promoting grassroots-level competitions, and ensuring inclusive opportunities for aspiring athletes. The emphasis, it said, was on nurturing sporting excellence in a sustainable and region-specific manner.

Notably, Scindia had raised the 'One Sport Discipline-One State' strategy during the previous task force meeting last month as well, describing it as a key driver for structured investment and sharper institutional focus in sports development across the Northeast.

After Tripura Student's Death, Supreme Court Urged to Recognise Racial Slurs as Hate Crimes

NEWDELHI

The death of a 24-year-old MBA student from Tripura following an alleged racially motivated assault in Dehradun has prompted a public interest litigation in the Supreme Court, seeking formal legal recognition of racial slurs and racially targeted violence as hate crimes in India.

The petition was filed after Anjel Chakma succumbed to his injuries on December 26, more than two weeks after he was stabbed during an altercation in the Selaqui area of Uttarakhand's capital on December 9. Chakma, who belonged to India's north-eastern region, had been undergoing treatment for severe neck and spinal injuries and remained unconscious throughout his hospitalisation.

Filed under Article 32 of the Constitution by petitioner Anoop Prakash Awasthi, the plea alleges a systemic failure by the state to prevent, recognise and effectively prosecute racial violence against citizens from the North-East. It urges the apex court to intervene in what it describes as a recurring pattern of discrimination, assault and impunity faced by people

from the region in several parts of the country.

According to accounts cited in the petition, Chakma and his younger brother were shopping when a group of men allegedly subjected them to racial abuse based on their physical appearance. The confrontation escalated into violence, during which both brothers were beaten and stabbed. While the younger brother survived, Anjel Chakma sustained critical injuries that ultimately proved fatal.

The petition argues that India's criminal justice framework does not currently recognise racial bias as an aggravating or defining element of an offence at the stage of investigation. As a result, crimes motivated by racial prejudice are registered and prosecuted as routine offences, stripping them of their constitutional and social gravity, the plea contends.

"This absence of legal recognition leads to diluted accountability and fosters a culture of impunity," the petition states, adding that victims from the North-East are left without adequate institutional protection or acknowledgement of the specific nature of the harm inflicted upon them.

Drawing attention to earlier incidents, including the 2014 killing of Arunachal Pradesh student Nido Taniam in Delhi and multiple reported attacks on north-eastern students and workers in metropolitan cities, the plea notes that the Union government has repeatedly acknowledged the issue in responses to Parliament. Despite this, it argues, no comprehensive legislative or institutional framework has been put in place to address racially motivated violence.

The petition also highlights gaps in the recently enacted Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 and the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, pointing out that neither statute contains provisions recognising hate crimes or racial offences as distinct legal categories. Police officers are not mandated to record bias motivation while registering first information reports (FIRs), nor are there specialised investigative protocols or victim-support mechanisms for such cases. According to the petitioner, this legislative vacuum violates fundamental rights guaranteed under Articles 14, 15, 19 and 21 of the Constitution and undermines the constitutional principle of fraternity en-

shrined in the Preamble.

The plea seeks a range of directions from the Supreme Court, including the formulation of interim guidelines to be followed until Parliament enacts specific legislation on hate crimes. Among its key demands are the recognition of racial slurs as a distinct category of hate crime with prescribed punishments, and the establishment of nodal agencies at both Central and state levels to register, monitor and respond to racially motivated offences.

It also calls for the creation of specialised police units in every district and major metropolitan area to investigate such crimes, as well as structured victim-protection and witness-support mechanisms. In addition, the petition urges the court to direct educational institutions to organise workshops, seminars and public debates to promote awareness, social harmony and respect for India's ethnic and cultural diversity. The Supreme Court is expected to consider whether to admit the plea in the coming days, amid growing calls for stronger legal safeguards for people from the North-East living and working across the country.



BISHNU DEBNATH



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HISTORY DOES NOT MOVE IN STRAIGHT LINES

We have just completed a quarter of a new century. Twenty-five years that feel less like a milestone, more like a quick look at the clock while in the midst of a long march through exhaustion—war-torn, punctured by instability, marked by an unrelenting sense of uncertainty. All around is a landscape of rubble and unrest: Bangladesh dangerously combustible, Gaza flattened, Ukraine bleeding, Afghanistan erased from the global conscience, Sri Lanka economically battered, Pakistan politically paralysed, Myanmar crushed under military boots. Some societies lie in devastation, others struggling merely to crawl out of it. The world itself appears directionless. It lurches between technological euphoria and existential dread—between dreams of space colonisation and the looming reality of ecological collapse, pandemics and war. We are no longer sure where humanity is headed: utopia or catastrophe. Either could be of its own making.

The disorientation runs deeper. Even language, once a stable anchor of identity, has become unsettled. Only artificial intelligence has no identity crisis. At least it admits it is still learning! Human societies, by contrast, often pretend certainty while hollowing out meaning.

Words that once bound civilisations—moral, ethical, constitutional—sound increasingly archaic. Old ideas are dismissed as inconvenient or elitist. In their place stand shock and silence. Children are killed in conflicts with numbing regularity—in Gaza, in Ukraine, in Sudan—and the world debates semantics rather than accountability. Both words and bullets open fire on unarmed civilians, mow down holiday crowds or worshippers. Things like that barely disrupt the news cycle. Fear exists but selectively, or fleetingly.

There is nothing politically incorrect anymore. Human trafficking has not disappeared: it has simply moved into darker, more sophisticated corridors of power. Girls are still trafficked, now repackaged as networking tools in elite circuits. Robots, it turns out, do not suffice everywhere. All forms of flesh and blood labour cannot be replaced. From Silicon Valley barons to online marketing tsars, from presidents to academics to royalty—no sphere of power is morally insulated. The comforting belief that some institutions are inherently civilising has collapsed.

Against this bleak global backdrop, it is telling that organisations rooted firmly in last-century ideas have reached defining moments. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has completed 100 years. It is a moment of celebration for its adherents. The RSS has not merely survived; it has moved in from the periphery to entrench itself at the centre of Indian political power. Meanwhile, what it considers its ideological opposite, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), struggles to retain control even in its last remaining stronghold, Kerala.

History's ironies deepen. Russia—once the ideological patron and financial supporter of Indian communism, over whose loyalty the Indian Left split in 1964—is today among the BJP government's closest international partners. President Vladimir Putin did not even meet the Opposition during his India visits. Moscow's diplomatic attention is firmly focused on Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Strategic pragmatism has replaced ideological fraternity, and no one pretends otherwise.

The RSS has flourished partly because it operates with an advantage: it draws its power not from reason but emotion. Identity speaks its own primal language; it is largely impervious to the realm of tarka or argumentation. National assertion, civilisational grievance, cultural revival, ideas like these can be turned over to an instrumentalist use for political mobilisation in an unproblematic way; they seem non-negotiable. So while it plays its long, patient game, political parties appear as if they keep recalibrating around their core principles.

The Indian National Congress presents a contrasting story. It began as a petitioning organisation seeking incremental rights from colonial rulers. It transformed into a mass movement demanding Purna Swaraj under Mahatma Gandhi. Post-independence, it reimagined itself as a socialist republican party, and later as an economic reformist democracy under P V Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh. Its foreign policy pivoted from Soviet alignment to an Indo-US strategic partnership, eventually embracing open relations with Israel—once unthinkable.

But in reinventing itself repeatedly, the Congress lost sight of a fundamental democratic truth: governance is not a political position. Power is not purpose. Organisation, cadre-building and continuous engagement with people matter as much as policy positions. The Congress grew accustomed to being in office and mistook administration for ideology. When power slipped away, there was emptiness.

The RSS, by contrast, invested relentlessly in cadre discipline and a sense of undimmed 'brotherhood'. Proximity to power accelerated its reach, but the groundwork was laid across decades. Atal Bihari Vajpayee once famously sent VHP leaders Ashok Singhal and Giriraj Kishore to Sathya Sai Baba, hoping spiritual counsel might temper the Ayodhya mobilisation. The godman reportedly advised softness of tone around matters of devotion. It changed little. Godhra followed, and Indian politics was permanently altered.

One consequence of ideological clarity—however contentious—is loyalty. BJP leaders rarely defect. The same is largely true of the Left. Jyoti Basu may have sulked when his party denied him the prime ministership in 1996, but he never abandoned the CPI(M). Congress leaders, by contrast, drift across parties with ease, having confused power with political belief. The seeds sown in 2025—political, economic, ecological—will bloom or wither in 2026 and beyond. What is beyond doubt is that neither India nor the world will return to familiar certainties. As political elites obsess over electoral arithmetic, ordinary citizens struggle for breathable air, potable water, affordable healthcare and dignified livelihoods. Even economics mirrors this moral drift. Gold, silver, copper and rare earths have become speculative chips rather than civilisational resources. Markets celebrate growth while lives remain precarious. Reform is invoked endlessly, but justice rarely features in the conversation.

A new year, however, demands more than despair. If the past 25 years have shown how power can operate without shame, the next must ask whether politics can rediscover responsibility. Democracies do not collapse overnight. The erosion happens incrementally, through fatigue, silence and surrender. The antidote lies not in nostalgia, but in rebuilding political engagement beyond elections. Institutional power can only come later.

The year ahead will test whether citizens remain spectators or choose participation. History, as this quarter-century reminds us, does not move in straight lines. It turns when societies decide they have had enough of shock—and begin, once again, to speak.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

“Prejudices. It is well known they are most difficult to eradicate from the heart whose soil has never been loosened or fertilized by education.” - Charlotte Brontë

2025: The Year India Turned Momentum into Power



DR SHENAZ GANAI

Kuch baat hai ke hasti mit-ti nahin hamari,

Sadiyon raha hai dushman daur-e-zaman hamara.”

Some years pass quietly into memory; others set the course of a nation's destiny. For India, 2025 was such a moment, a year when an ancient civilisation, shaped by centuries of challenge and renewal, moved forward with quiet confidence and clear purpose. Drawing strength from a past marked by endurance, adaptation and reinvention, India revealed in 2025 a rare harmony, firmly rooted in its civilisational ethos yet open to change, tradition walking alongside transformation. As long held aspirations took concrete shape through policy, performance and institutional strength, the country turned vision into action, signalling to its people and the world that India's rise is neither sudden nor accidental, but deliberate, sustained and deeply anchored in history.

Against a turbulent global backdrop marked by geopolitical conflicts, economic slowdowns and climate uncertainty, India under Modi's leadership projected calm confidence. What unfolded over the year was a consolidation of India's rise across diplomacy, welfare, infrastructure, economic management and crucially, national security.

Foreign Policy: From Diplomatic Presence to Strategic Influence

India's foreign policy in 2025 was not performative; it was productive. The advancement of high-impact Free Trade Agreements, including with the United Kingdom and key Indo-Pacific economies, reflected India's readiness to integrate more deeply into global value chains while safeguarding domestic interests. These agreements are expected to significantly enhance exports in textiles, pharmaceuticals, electronics, engineering goods and IT services, sectors that together employ tens of millions of Indians. Preferential trade access now extends to markets accounting for more

than a quarter of global GDP, strengthening India's export resilience.

On multilateral platforms, India emerged as a persuasive voice of the Global South, articulating demands for climate justice, equitable finance and inclusive growth. Strategic partnerships with the United States, Europe, West Asia, Africa and ASEAN matured, reinforcing India's image as a dependable democratic partner at a time when trust is in short supply globally.

Defence & National Security: Strength with Restraint, Power with Purpose

If diplomacy showcased India's influence, defence readiness demonstrated its resolve. The year 2025 marked a decisive strengthening of India's military posture, underpinned by sustained investments in modernisation and indigenous capability. Defence acquisition approvals running into tens of thousands of crore rupees enhanced the operational readiness of the Army, Navy and Air Force, while significantly expanding domestic defence manufacturing under the Atmanirbhar Bharat framework.

This strategic preparedness found its most compelling expression in the successful execution of Operation Sindoor, a precisely calibrated military operation that underscored India's ability to protect its sovereignty, deter aggression and act decisively when provoked. Conducted with speed, accuracy and professionalism, the operation achieved its objectives while minimising collateral impact, reflecting the evolving doctrine of the Indian armed forces: firm yet responsible, powerful yet measured.

Operation Sindoor sent a clear message, not of escalation, but of capability. It reaffirmed that India's commitment to peace is anchored in strength, and that its armed forces possess the technological sophistication, intelligence integration and tactical clarity required in modern warfare. In 2025, India's defence posture was not about display, it was about credibility.

Welfare with Purpose: From Coverage to Capability
On the domestic front, gov-

ernance continued its transition from intent to impact. The Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system anchored in the Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile architecture, further reduced leakages and improved targeting. Government estimates suggest cumulative savings from welfare reforms now exceed ₹3.5-4 lakh crore, resources redirected toward infrastructure, health and human capital.

Expanded rural employment and livelihood initiatives strengthened income security, particularly in agrarian regions. Social security coverage for unorganised workers widened substantially, extending pension, insurance and accident cover at a scale rarely attempted globally, earning India international recognition for social protection innovation. The welfare narrative of 2025 moved decisively beyond dependency. Skills, entrepreneurship, women led development and access to formal credit aligned welfare policy with productivity and dignity.

Infrastructure: Laying the Foundations of the Next Generation

Infrastructure remained the most visible expression of India's long term confidence. India added over 40 gigawatts of renewable energy capacity in a single year, pushing non fossil capacity beyond 260 GW. This placed India among the world's fastest growing clean energy economies, balancing developmental imperatives with climate responsibility. Simultaneously, large scale investments in expressways, rail corridors, port modernisation and logistics hubs reduced freight costs, integrated regional markets and unlocked economic potential across states. Infrastructure in 2025 was not episodic, it was transformational, reshaping how India moves, trades and grows.

Economy: Stability Amid Global Volatility

Despite global headwinds, India's economy in 2025 remained one of the world's fastest growing, with growth estimates in the 7-8% range. Inflation stayed broadly manageable, fiscal consolidation continued, and public invest-

ment anchored growth. The Union Budget for 2025 balanced fiscal prudence with ambition, prioritising capital expenditure, manufacturing, employment generation and innovation. Exports diversified, services retained global leadership, and domestic

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Vande Bharat Sleeper tested today by Commissioner Railway Safety. It ran at 180 kmph between Kota Nagda section. And our own water test demonstrated the technological features of this new generation train. ~ Ashwani Vaishnav, Minister of Railways



consumption remained resilient. Investor confidence told its own story as India was increasingly viewed as a structural growth engine, not a cyclical bet.

A Quiet Turning Point
Beyond policies and numbers, 2025 reaffirmed India's sense of direction. In a restless world, the nation chose steadiness over haste and substance over spectacle. Economic strength, social inclusion, strategic influence and national security moved forward in step, reflecting growing institutional confidence.

What set 2025 apart was not the speed of change, but its certainty. Momentum was shaped into capability, ambition into action. It was not a year of arrival, but of assurance that India's rise is deliberate, enduring and guided as much by history as by hope.

“Safar lamba hai, magar hausla purana hai,

Manipur Government Begins Phased Resettlement of IDPs, Over 10,000 Already Rehabilitated

OUR CORRESPONDENT

MANIPUR: The Manipur government has reaffirmed its commitment to the safe and dignified resettlement of Internally Displaced Persons, saying sustained efforts are underway to help families return home after months of displacement caused by law and order disturbances in parts of the state.

Officials said a noticeable decline in violence since November 2024 has created conditions for a phased resettlement process, being carried out in coordination with security agencies and the displaced families themselves.

With support from the Ministry of Home Affairs, the state government continues to provide essential services in relief camps, including food rations and drinking water. From November 1, 2025, assistance to IDPs living in camps has shifted to Direct

Benefit Transfer, giving beneficiaries greater flexibility in meeting daily needs. Support is also being extended through healthcare services, education facilities, employment under rural job guarantee schemes, and Self Help Group initiatives.

Resettlement is being carried out under a Rs 523 crore Rehabilitation and Resettlement Package announced in the Manipur Budget 2025-26 by the Government of India. The plan is structured in three phases. The first phase focuses on families whose houses suffered partial damage. The second phase covers families allotted houses under the PMAY-G special package within their home districts. The third phase involves inter-district relocation between valley and hill areas for families who cannot return to their original locations.

Funds have already been released to district administrations and direct-



ly to beneficiaries to ensure reconstruction work begins without delay. The state government has released Rs 35.46 crore for construction of new houses and an additional Rs 9.26 crore for repairing partially damaged homes, paving the way for early resettlement. To oversee implementation, a state-level committee chaired by the Chief Secretary, with the Director General of Police and senior officials from the Home and Rural Development departments, has been constituted. Similar committees operate at the district level under the leadership of Deputy Commissioners. According to official figures, around 10,000 IDPs from over 2,200 households have already been resettled, while nearly 4,000 houses are at different stages of construction. The government said regular meetings are being held with IDP representatives at both state and district levels to address concerns re-

lated to resettlement and rehabilitation. Alongside financial assistance, security and confidence-building measures are being strengthened. Security posts are being set up in villages by the state police, central armed police forces, and Assam Rifles and Army units to ensure the safe return of families. Officials stressed that resettlement will not be rushed without adequate security and effective people-to-people communication, which is seen as essential for rebuilding trust. Reiterating its position, the Manipur government said rehabilitation is a phased and security-sensitive process that must balance humanitarian urgency with long-term peace and stability. Working closely with the Government of India, the state has pledged to ensure that every displaced family is able to return home safely and rebuild their lives with dignity.

NPF Flags Attacks on Religious Freedom, Highlights Political Gains in Year-End Statement

KOHIMA

As 2025 draws to a close, the Naga People's Front (NPF) has expressed concern over what it described as growing challenges to religious freedom in parts of the country, while also reflecting on key political developments and milestones achieved during the year.

In a year-end press communiqué issued from its central headquarters in Kohima, the party said it remained encouraged by steady progress despite various challenges and reaffirmed its commitment to safeguarding the welfare and interests of the Naga people.

Among the major highlights of the year, the NPF pointed to its merger with the Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP), describing the development as a significant step towards strengthening regional politics and ensuring unity and stability in governance. The party thanked the Naga public, church leaders, civil society organisations and supporters for their continued prayers, guidance and support. At the same time, the NPF voiced disappointment over what it said was lingering discontent among Nagas following the denial of a visa to US-based evangelist Rev. Franklin Graham for a proposed visit to Nagaland. The party also referred to recent reports of disruptions to church services and vandalism of Christmas decorations in several states, incidents it said had caused anxiety within the Christian community.

Describing such developments as sensitive and contrary to the constitutional spirit of secularism, mutual respect and freedom of faith, the NPF called on the concerned authorities to take swift and appropriate action to protect religious rights and maintain communal harmony. The party said it stood in firm solidarity with the Christian community and reiterated its commitment to preserving culture, tradition and faith.

Manipur Police Arrest Home Dept Havildar, Seize Bulletproof Scorpio During Check in Imphal East

IMPHAL

Manipur Police on Tuesday arrested a serving havildar of the state Home Department and seized a black bulletproof Scorpio S11 during a routine vehicle check at a strategic location in Imphal East district, officials said on Wednesday.

The arrest was made by a special joint team comprising Imphal East district police commands, personnel of the Police Control Room (PCR), and traffic police. Acting on specific intelligence inputs, the team set up a checkpoint at Andro Parking in the Wangkhei area under Porompat Police Station.

According to officials, at around 6 pm, the police intercepted a black Scorpio S11 approaching from the Wangkhei side. The vehicle did not display a registration number and had tinted windows, prompting the team to signal it to stop.

"The driver appeared nervous and gave evasive responses when questioned about the tinted win-

dows," an official said. When instructed to open the doors, police found that the vehicle was fitted with bulletproof glass, further raising suspicion.

A detailed search of the vehicle led to the recovery of certain illegal items from the dashboard. However, police declined to disclose details of the seized materials at this stage, citing the ongoing investigation.

The accused has been identified as Thounaojam Nilkamal Singh (30), a resident of Malom Tuliyaama Awang Leikai in Imphal West district. Police confirmed that Singh is a havildar serving in the Manipur Police under the Home Department.

He was taken into custody, and the bulletproof vehicle was seized. A case has been registered under relevant sections of law, and further investigation is underway to ascertain the purpose of the bulletproof vehicle and whether others were involved.

Assam Voter Roll Grows 1.35% After Special Revision Ahead of 2026 Assembly Polls

GUWAHATI

Assam has recorded a 1.35 per cent increase in its electorate following a Special Revision of electoral rolls conducted ahead of the 2026 Assembly elections, the state's Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) said. According to the integrated draft electoral rolls published on December 27, the total number of electors in the state now stands at 2,52,01,624, up from the final roll released in January 2025. The revision exercise included an extensive House-to-House (H2H) verification carried out between November 22 and December 20.

During the period from January 6 to December 27, the rolls saw 7,86,841 new additions and 4,47,196 deletions, reflecting both enrolment of new voters and removal of ineligible or duplicate entries.

The draft roll comprises 1,25,72,583 male voters and 1,26,28,662 female voters, resulting in a gender ratio of 1,004 females per 1,000 males. In addition, 379 voters have been registered under

the third-gender category. The elector population ratio for the state stands at 643.

A total of 31,486 polling stations have been identified across Assam. Mankachar Assembly constituency has the highest number of polling stations at 402, while Dotma has the lowest with 146. In terms of electorate size, Dalgaoon Assembly constituency has the highest number of voters at 3,18,326, while Arim has the lowest at 1,00,319.

The draft roll also includes 63,314 service electors and 2,02,433 persons with disabilities (PwD). Young voters in the 18-19 age group number 2,45,084, while senior citizens aged 85 years and above account for 1,36,546 electors.

The CEO said booth-level officers achieved 100 per cent coverage during the pre-revision phase, visiting 61,03,103 households across the state. The H2H verification process identified 4,78,992 proposed deletions, 5,23,680 electors who had shifted residences, and 53,619 cases of multiple or du-



PLICATE ENTRIES.

However, officials clarified that names identified during verification will not be deleted automatically. Such entries will be processed only after formal applications are submitted during the claims and objections period.

Citizens can file claims and objections from December 27, 2025, to January 22, 2026. Special campaign days have been scheduled for January 3-4 and January 10-11 to facilitate public participation.

Weekly lists of claims and objections will be shared with recognised political parties.

Any decision taken by an electoral registration officer can be appealed before the district magistrate within 15 days, with a second appeal lying with the Chief Electoral Officer within 30 days.

The final electoral roll for Assam is scheduled to be published on February 10, 2026, ahead of the Assembly elections due later in the year.

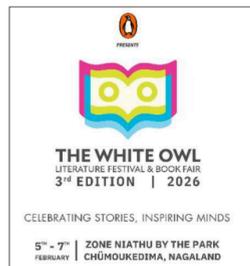
White Owl Literature Festival 2026 in Nagaland to Celebrate Northeast's Storytelling Traditions

KOHIMA

The third edition of The White Owl Literature Festival & Book Fair will be held in Nagaland from February 5 to 7, 2026, placing the spotlight on the Northeast's rich and diverse storytelling traditions, organisers announced on Tuesday.

The three-day festival, themed "Celebrating Stories, Inspiring Minds", is being organised by Penguin Random House India in collaboration with literary institute The White Owl. The event will be hosted at Zone Niathu by The Park in Chümoukedima, and is expected to draw writers, artists, readers and cultural practitioners from across the region and beyond.

Organisers said the festival seeks to foreground the Northeast's contribution to India's literary and cultural landscape, tracing narratives from ancient oral traditions to contemporary fiction, non-fiction and emerging digital forms of storytelling.



This year's programme features a wide-ranging line-up of authors, artists and performers, including writer Darilha Lyndem, Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar awardee Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, actor Merenla Insong known for her role in Paatal Lok Season 2 and popular Naga musician Alogo Naga. Festival Director Viketuno Rio said

the White Owl Literature Festival has steadily evolved into a platform that is firmly rooted in the Northeast while remaining open to national and global perspectives. "This edition, with its strong mix of regional voices and wider viewpoints, represents the most authentic reflection yet of who we are and what we stand for," he said.

The festival's sessions will span a broad range of themes, including children's reading cultures, fiction and non-fiction writing, translation, cultural identity, mental health, podcasting, social media economies, media literacy and misinformation, entrepreneurship, artificial intelligence, and legacy building. Organisers said the programme has been designed to appeal to both serious readers and younger audiences navigating new forms of expression.

A key highlight of the festival will be Penguin Random House India's flagship writing mentorship initiative, The Perfect

Pitch. The programme invites unpublished writers from across the country to submit original fiction inspired by the Northeast, with entries open until January 10, 2026.

Programme Director Deepthi Talwar, who also serves as Executive Editor at Penguin Random House India, said the festival brings together a wide spectrum of storytellers and creative professionals. "From writers and translators to podcasters, academics, illustrators and entrepreneurs, the festival has grown into one of the most thoughtfully curated literary gatherings in the region," she said.

Tickets for the White Owl Literature Festival 2026 are available online. Organisers added that school and college students will be granted free entry on the production of valid identification, in keeping with the festival's aim of encouraging young readers and writers to engage with literature and ideas.

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

SHILLONG

The Hynniewtrep Integrated Territorial Organisation (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.

Batadrava Project will be blueprint of Assamese vision for future: Assam BJP

GUWAHATI

BJP spokesperson Kalyan Gogoi on Tuesday remarked that under the leadership of Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the state has been moving towards development. He noted several initiatives by the leaders, including the Batadrava Project.

"The BJP government in Assam under the leadership of CM Himanta Biswa Sarma has been working relentlessly for the holistic development of Assam and the Assamese people. Under the visionary guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the architect of New Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma, has successfully steered the state towards becoming a prosperous and progressive province," stated State BJP spokesperson Kalyan Gogoi.

According to a release, the spokesperson addressed the media on Tuesday at the party's central headquarters and said that in recent times Assam has been endowed with several landmark assets: the successful organisation of Advantage Assam 2.0; the world's first bamboo-based bio ethanol project at Numaligarh; the Sati Radhika



Peace Park under the Brahmaputra Riverfront project; the state-of-the-art Gateway of Guwahati ferry terminal at Panbazar; the fourth unit of the Namrup Fertiliser Plant with a production capacity of 12 lakh metric tonnes, backed by an investment of Rs. 10,000 crores; and the globally acclaimed second terminal of the newly developed Gopinath Bordoloi Airport.

He added that the Batadrava Project stands as a living symbol of Assamese cultural heritage and self-respect, reflecting Gurujana's ideals. "In its truest sense, the Batadrava Project will serve as the blue-

print of the Assamese vision for the future. A matter of profound significance is that, after freeing encroached land, the Avirbhav Kshetra has been constructed by integrating 162 bighas of land adjoining the Batadrava Than. This will immensely benefit Assam in the days to come and stands as a powerful reflection of the BJP government's commitment to safeguarding jati, mati, bheti (identity, land, and roots)," he said.

According to the release, as part of this initiative, a modern Guwahati City Police Commissionerate office, equipped with advanced infrastructure, was inaugurated. Notably, this office is regarded as one of the most advanced police establishments in the country.

"Over the last five years, Assam's conviction rate has risen sharply from 3% to 25%, clearly demonstrating that under the leadership of the Chief Minister and Home Minister of the state, Himanta Biswa Sarma, the Assam Police has become far more effective. As a result, the crime rate per lakh population has dropped significantly, from 385 to 127, making the law-and-order situation far more robust. The year-end projects dedicated to the people have filled citizens with pride and enthusiasm, for which the State BJP has expressed its special gratitude to the Assam Government," the release stated.

The spokesperson stated that the Union Home Minister Amit Shah dedicated to the people of Assam the Batadrava Cultural

Project at Bordowa, the ultra-modern 5,000-seat 'Jyoti-Bishnu Auditorium' in Guwahati, and the Commissionerate of Police office. Kalyan Gogoi said that Gurujana Srimanta Sankardeva had established the Assamese nation in a complete and holistic manner through his immense contributions.

The spokesperson added that the newly inaugurated Jyoti-Bishnu Auditorium is the largest in eastern India. Equipped with world-class facilities and a seating capacity of 5,000, it has elevated Assam's cultural landscape to new heights. "By naming the auditorium after two towering cultural icons, Jyoti Prasad Agarwala and Bishnu Prasad Rabha, the pioneers have been immortalised for generations to come. After assuming office as Union Home Minister, Amit Shah has taken decisive measures to strengthen law and order in Assam," Gogoi said. Kalyan Gogoi further claimed that the Congress, despite ruling the state for decades, indulged only in plunder and allowed Assam's land to turn into grazing grounds for illegal Bangladeshi infiltrators. In contrast, the BJP government has taken firm corrective measures. "Freeing satra lands from illegal encroachers across Assam and constructing the Batadrava Cultural Project at Rs. 222 crore adjacent to the birthplace of Gurujana Srimanta Sankardeva stand as shining examples of this resolve. While Congress kept Assam's problems alive for decades, the BJP has undertaken decisive, honest, and result-oriented steps to deliver lasting solutions," he said.

Quest!

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Delivery apps brace for mega strike on New Year's Eve as unions mobilise 1.5 lakh workers across India



NEW DELHI

The tug of war between delivery workers' unions and e-commerce and food delivery apps escalated on Tuesday, a day ahead of the planned mega strike announced by the unions. Firms have reportedly deployed bouncers, while Bollywood actors are enticing workers with promises of lump-sum earnings or even a vehicle for working just two days. The unions have chosen New Year's Eve to maximise impact, as deliveries and home food orders peak during the festive period.

Delivery workers from Zomato, Swiggy, Instamart, Urban Company, Blinkit, Zepto, Flipkart, and Amazon are expected to participate in the protest, union leaders say. Their key demands include higher wages per delivery and social security benefits.

Zomato launched a flurry of social media ads featuring top actress Tamannaah Bhatia, telling delivery partners they could earn up to

Rs 6,000 by working on 31 December and 1 January. A communication from Zomato management urged delivery partners to continue work as usual despite strike pressures. "If you face any hindrance in your work, the Quick Response Team of Zomato and Team Leaders are on standby to assist. You can call the police on 112 or press the SOS button on the delivery app," the letter stated.

Meanwhile, Swiggy has enlisted superstar Amitabh Bachchan in its campaign, offering a free electric vehicle (EV) to workers who complete deliveries during this period. The ad emphasises an emotional appeal, suggesting the vehicle could be used to take their mother around. Many delivery workers currently hire EVs on a daily basis for deliveries.

Shaik Salauddin, National General Secretary of the Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers, told TNIE, "Based on responses across the country, at least

1.5 lakh delivery agents will take part. Employees are going all out to counter it. I visited Saidabad in Hyderabad on Tuesday night and saw bouncers moving around vehicles on behalf of Zomato to warn workers against joining the protest. Employees are also threatening to block IDs so that workers could never work for the app again."

Inayath Ali, president of the Karnataka App-based Workers Union, said, "In Karnataka, at least 20,000 workers will participate, particularly in Bengaluru and Mysuru. There will be no physical protest or gathering; delivery partners will simply log out of the app during the strike period." Ali added that employers are threatening to block worker IDs if they do not work 16-hour shifts during the period. The union is organising sports activities in Jayanagar to keep workers engaged while logged off. "A good number of Urban Company employees are women, and they are also taking part," he noted.

Dense fog, poor air and cold wave grip large parts of north and east India

NEW DELHI

Severe winter conditions continued to affect large parts of north and east India on Wednesday, with dense fog, plummeting temperatures and poor air quality disrupting daily life across several states.

Delhi-NCR: The national capital woke up to dense fog and hazardous air quality, with visibility dropping to just 50 metres at Palam and Safdarjung early morning.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) issued an orange alert for dense fog between 8.30 am and 10 am.

Delhi's 24-hour average Air Quality Index (AQI) stood at 384, placing it in the very poor category. Sixteen monitoring stations recorded severe air quality, with Anand Vihar registering the worst AQI at 452. Officials attributed the pollution to low wind speeds and poor ventilation conditions.

The AQI is expected to worsen to the severe category on January 1 before marginal improvement. Minimum temperatures dipped to 6.4°C, slightly below normal, and light rain is forecast on New Year's Day.

Vehicles ply a road amid dense fog on a cold winter morning, in New Delhi, Wednesday, Dec. 31, 2025. Dense fog disrupts air traffic at Delhi airport; 148 flights cancelled.

West Bengal: Cold conditions intensified across the state, with Kolkata recording its season's lowest minimum temperature of 11°C, nearly three degrees below normal. Darjeeling was the coldest location at 3.4°C.

The IMD said the chill will persist in sub-Himalayan districts for the next week, with chances of light rain or snow



in higher reaches of Darjeeling. Dense to moderate fog is also likely across the state in the coming days.

Rajasthan: Karauli emerged as the coldest place in the state, recording a minimum temperature of 4.6°C. Several districts including Alwar, Dausa and Churu reported temperatures below 10°C.

The IMD has forecast light rain in parts of Bikaner, Jaipur and Bharatpur divisions, along with dense to very dense fog from January 1 to 3.

Assam: Severe cold prompted authorities to shut all government and provincialised schools in Kamrup Metropolitan district, including Guwahati, for a week starting December 31. Day temperatures in the state capital dropped sharply, remaining over six degrees below normal.

The IMD has predicted cloudy skies with light rain or drizzle and foggy conditions. People were seen lighting roadside fires to keep warm, while demand for woollens surged.

Punjab and Haryana:

Cold weather persisted across both states, though minimum temperatures remained slightly above normal in many areas. Amritsar recorded a low of 6.1°C, while Rohtak and Narnaul in Haryana were among the colder spots with temperatures around 4-5°C. Chandigarh recorded a minimum of 8.4°C.

Overall, meteorological agencies warned that winter conditions, including fog, cold nights and poor air quality, are likely to persist across several regions in the coming days.

INTERNATIONAL

Zohran Mamdani is set to be sworn in as mayor as NYC rings in the New Year



NEW YORK

Zohran Mamdani will become mayor of New York City as the clock ticks over into 2026 — but the celebrations are set to last through New Year's Day.

The Democrat's team is planning two separate swearing-in ceremonies Thursday — a small, private one with his family in an old subway station around midnight, followed by a large event in the afternoon that will include a public block party outside City Hall.

As a new mayor's term begins

immediately with the new year, it has been customary for the city's incoming leaders to hold two events. Outgoing mayor Eric Adams held his initial swearing-in at Times Square shortly after the famous ball drop, while Adams' predecessor, Bill de Blasio, took his first oath at home in Brooklyn.

New York Attorney General

Letitia James, a political ally and notable foe of US President Donald Trump, will administer the oath of office.

The old City Hall stop was designed as the flagship station of the city's first subway line, but was decommissioned in 1945. These days, outside of occasional guided historical tours, locals can usually only catch a glimpse of it by staying on the 6 train after its last stop downtown when it turns around to head north.

In a statement, Mamdani's office said the choice to be sworn in at the station reflected his

"commitment to the working people who keep our city running every day."

"When Old City Hall Station first opened in 1904 — one of New York's 28 original subway stations — it was a physical monument to a city that dared to be both beautiful and build great things that would transform working peoples' lives," Mamdani said.

"That ambition need not be a memory confined only to our past, nor must it be isolated only to the tunnels beneath City Hall: it will be the purpose of the administration fortunate enough to serve New Yorkers from the building above," he said.

On Thursday afternoon, Mamdani will be sworn in again, this time by US Sen. Bernie Sanders, one of his political heroes, on the steps of City Hall in a ceremony scheduled to kick off at 1 p.m. US Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, another political ally, will deliver opening remarks.

Mamdani's transition formed an inaugural committee that includes actor John Turturro, playwright Cole Escola and writer Colson Whitehead, as well as advocates, small business owners and campaign workers who the incoming mayor's office says have "provided perspective, guidance, and cultural sensibility" for the ceremony.

The public swearing-in will be accompanied by a block party along a stretch of Broadway leading up to City Hall. Mamdani's office expects thousands of people to attend and says there will be performances, music and interfaith elements.

Thailand releases 18 Cambodian prisoners of war as part of ceasefire agreement



BANGKOK

Thailand on Wednesday released 18 Cambodian prisoners of war held for five months, fulfilling the terms of a ceasefire agreement the two countries signed to end bitter fighting along their border.

The release was stipulated in the ceasefire agreement signed Saturday by the defense ministers of the two countries at the same border checkpoint between Thailand's Chanthaburi province and Cambodia's Pailin province where the soldiers were released.

"The repatriation of the 18 Cambodian soldiers was undertaken as a demonstration of goodwill and confidence-building, as well as in adherence to international humanitarian principles," Thailand's Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

Cambodia's Defense Ministry said the release "creates an environment conducive to peace, stability, and the full normalization of relations for the benefit of both nations and their people in the near future."

The soldiers' release removes a major impediment toward that goal after two rounds of destructive combat over competing territorial claims.

Thailand had insisted it

was allowed to hold the men under provisions of the Geneva Conventions governing the rules of war, which said they could be detained until the end of hostilities. The prisoners were allowed visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross and other rights covered under international humanitarian law, Thai authorities said.

Their continued detention was used effectively by Cambodia's government to rally nationalist sentiment in the conflict against Thailand.

Wednesday's statement from Cambodia's defense ministry said the government "has remained steadfast in the promise made to the families of the 18 soldiers and the Cambodian people: that no soldier would be left behind."

The ceasefire agreement said the soldiers would be freed if the end of combat was sustained for 72 hours after it came into effect at noon on Saturday. The 72 hours passed on Tuesday, but Thai authorities said they needed to evaluate the situation, claiming that 250 Cambodian drones had been active along the border.

The two countries had given differing accounts of the circumstances of the men's capture, which took place on the same

day the initial ceasefire came into effect at the end of July.

Cambodian officials say their soldiers approached the Thai position with friendly intentions to offer post-fighting greetings, while Thai officials said the Cambodians appeared to have hostile intent and entered what Thailand considers its territory and subsequently were taken prisoner.

There were originally 20 Cambodia soldiers taken captive, but two were repatriated within days for what were said to be medical reasons.

The original July ceasefire was brokered by Malaysia and pushed through by pressure from US President Donald Trump, who threatened to withhold trade privileges unless Thailand and Cambodia agreed. It was formalized in more detail in October at a regional meeting in Malaysia that Trump attended.

Despite those deals, the countries carried on a bitter propaganda war and minor cross-border violence continued, escalating in early December to widespread heavy fighting.

Thailand lost 26 soldiers and one civilian as a direct result of the combat since Dec. 7, according to officials.

No highs, only lows for Congress in 2025 as party suffers poll routs, infighting

The gains of the 2024 Lok Sabha election now appear to be a distant dream for Congress after they failed to capitalise on Maharashtra and Haryana Assembly elections in the latter part of that year, and witnessed a complete collapse in Delhi and Bihar Assembly elections in 2025.

The indomitable Bharatiya Janata Party outmanoeuvred Congress in all aspects, serving them humiliating defeats in Delhi and Bihar, prompting experts to call out the party's leadership to take up the responsibility and bring "serious people" and raise "serious issues."

Repeated electoral disappointments also exposed the strategic and ideological crisis and gave rise to voices of dissent within the party.

Yogesh Kamdar, Member of the Advisory Board of Management and former Course Head (Journalism and Mass Communication) at Xavier Institute of Communication, expressed concern, "It's a sad situation. It's the oldest party with the tremendous goodwill of the people. It has done fabulously in more than 100 years of its existence. And suddenly it is a non-entity as far as people's opinion is concerned, which is their own fault."

Devendra Pai, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Delhi University, reasoned that the party's failures stem from its inability to adapt, a lack of "charismatic" leadership, and organisational weakness.

Delhi Assembly Election

Congress entered the Delhi Assembly elections on the back of defeat in the Haryana and Maharashtra elections. However, there was still some glimmer of hope from the 2024 Lok Sabha election results, in which the party won 99 seats, nearly doubling its seats compared with 52 in 2019, officially becoming the opposition party after a decade of failure. The Party had also achieved coalition victories in Jammu and Kashmir and Jharkhand.

No one had expected Congress to win the Delhi elections, as the contest was between the ruling Aam Aadmi Party and the opposition BJP. Still, people expected an improved performance with the party fielding former Delhi CM Sheila Dikshit's son, Sandeep Dikshit.

However, it was another disaster: the party completed a perfect hatrick of failing to open its account, but made marginal gains of 2 per cent in the vote share compared with 2020.

BJP secured a comfortable majority, winning 48 seats to AAP's 22 in the 70-member assembly, again proving that the 2024 Lok Sabha election was just a blip, a result of "complacency in mid-level leadership" as described by Devendra Pai.

"It (2024 Lok Sabha Election) was not a victory of Congress but a defeat of the BJP. There was some complacency in mid-level leadership. People felt that their voices were not being heard at the top level. They suffered in the election. However, they immediately did a course correction, starting from Haryana, Maharashtra, Delhi, and then Bihar," Devendra Pai, Assistant Professor at Delhi University, said.

Additionally, Yogesh Kamdar highlighted a recurring pattern of anti-incumbency voters turning to any party "but Congress," emphasising the severe lack of leadership and strategic approach to the elections.

"This is precisely what is happening all over. People may be unhappy with the ruling party, but the alternative that they choose is not Congress. They may choose the BJP or somebody else, like in Punjab, it goes to somebody else but Congress. Now the 'but Congress' part is a real serious threat to their existence," he said.

"There lies the trouble. The perception in the mind of the ordinary voter about the party is that it's a bunch of useless people. And I do not want to waste my vote on that. So, that is what has resulted in their terrible performance," he added.

Devendra Pai added that Congress did not come across as a "viable alternative" in Delhi, unable to show its capability or willingness to offer an alternative governance.

Bihar Assembly Election

Bihar was the ultimate testing ground for Lok Sabha LoP Rahul Gandhi's politics of 'Jitni abadi utna haq'. The state known for its-caste based politics, where every analyst comes up with their own caste equation and alignments, had every element to push the party's bid to increase reservations and swing in the voters, but the BJP, like always, was two steps ahead of them.

"Congress went for it (demand of caste census) months ahead (of the Bihar election), which gave the BJP time to respond. They responded to it



on the policy level and on the ground. They agreed to do the caste census, and the issue was over." Devendra Pai said.

Following the announcement of the Caste Census, for which Rahul Gandhi patted his back, Congress tried to utilise the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar with "vote theft" allegations. The Lok Sabha Leader of Opposition launched a nationwide campaign against the Election Commission of India, holding multiple press conferences, claiming to "expose the rigging" of the Maharashtra and Haryana Assembly elections.

Rahul Gandhi also alleged that the SIR in Bihar was the BJP's another tactic to delete the votes of the marginalised community, in an attempt to consolidate his voter base.

However, Yogesh Kamdar termed it as a "flippant issue" with Congress having nothing to support their claims.

"They are taking up flippant issues, blowing them up, making them into what you call as if it's a national calamity, without any evidence. Nothing to support their claim, nothing to support their allegations. Only press conferences and statements," he said.

"It is like a crying wolf. Every day you will say that a wolf has come, and when the wolf really comes, no one will stand up. This is what has happened," he added.

Meanwhile, Devendra Pai believed that Rahul Gandhi lacked the "gravitas" to make the "vote theft" allegations stick.

"The leadership of Rahul Gandhi and the lack of it is making this look like an artificial construct. If Modi ji had been in opposition and he spoke on the same issue, then people might have believed him more. Here, people don't trust him. He is not a serious politician," he said.

Devendra Pai also added that the whole concept of "vote theft" with regard to SIR does not appeal to the people, as they do want "illegal immigrants" to be removed who are "trying to change the demography."

The Delhi University Professor further cited that the same concerns are also being raised in the US.

The outcome of the Congress's "vote theft" driven campaign in Bihar was clearly visible as the party registered a strike rate of less than 10 per cent, winning six seats out of the more than 60 seats it contested for Mahagathbandhan, just one more seat than Asaduddin Owaisi's AIMIM.

On the other hand, the NDA alliance, largely comprising BJP and Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's JD (U), on the back of the Mukhaymantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana, a robust organisational structure, and grassroots connections, secured a two-thirds majority. The NDA won 202 of the 243 assembly seats. The Mahagathbandhan secured 35 seats, with the RJD leading with 25.

Shashi Tharoor and Karnataka CM tussle

In 2025, Congress's ideological and organisational shortcomings were also put on display, as its senior leaders raised differing voices, revealing internal conflicts within the party.

The cracks appeared when the Central Government selected Congress MP Shashi Tharoor to lead an all-party delegation to the US and South American countries to present India's stance on Operation Sindoor, a military exercise conducted post Pahalgam terror attack in April of this year to neutralise Pakistan's terror infrastructure.

Congress had not suggested Tharoor's name to be included in the delegations and felt that the BJP "played game" with them.

Later, Tharoor heaved praise for PM Modi over his handling of the Operation Sindoor, which drew an indirect rebuke from Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge that while the party believes in "nation first," some leaders consider it "Modi first, country later." Weighing in on the issue, Yogesh Kamdar said Tharoor's disagreement with the party doesn't make him a "BJP agent or RSS wala" and emphasised that the Congress needs to give its leaders more freedom.

Both Congress and Tharoor later downplayed the rift, with the party showing no signs of taking action against a prominent face in Kerala, and Tharoor unwilling to make an ideological swing to the BJP.

In Karnataka, tensions also surfaced with the completion of 2.5 years of Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's five-year term, with Deputy CM DK Shivakumar reminding him of the reported pact of power exchange. However, Siddaramaiah remained adamant about serving the full term, which brought Karnataka governance to a standstill, with leaders running to Delhi to resolve the conflict.

Devendra Pai credited the top leadership for the tussle, highlighting the organisational weakness for a repetition of Rajasthan.

"The power tussle in Karnataka is continuing because of the absence of proper leadership at the top. The same thing also happened in Rajasthan. It was Sachin Pilot vs Ashok Gehlot, and the Congress could not take a proper call. And eventually they lost Rajasthan," he said.

"A good thing is that the BJP has not given a chance to their leadership to have a power tussle in the state. If in Maharashtra, the BJP thinks that our leader is Devendra Fadnavis, then the Centre comes behind his leader rather than promoting someone to balance the power," he added.

Even though Siddaramaiah and DK Shivakumar have tried to resolve the conflict over dinner talks but no definite agreement has been reached yet. As neither leader is willing to abandon their pursuit of power, we can expect this struggle to extend well into 2026.

What's ahead in 2026

2026 is an important year in terms of elections with Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Puducherry going to polls in April-May, but for a turnaround in performance, it is evidently clear that Congress need serious introspection of its strategy.

According to Devendra Pai, Congress first need to resolve its 'ideological crisis' and find a way to counter the BJP's dominance over narrative building. "BJP is clear about its ideology. They stand for Hindutva or patriotism, and the leaders who come in the BJP also follow this. This is non-compromised. So Congress has to define itself rather than living in past glory," he said.

"BJP is not allowing Congress to set the agenda. Congress has lost in terms of leadership, organisational strength, narrative setting, and to maintain their image in the media," he added. Devendra Pai also hinted that Congress can capitalise on the BJP's anti-incumbency if it can overhaul the leadership.

"I think it is high time that you have a natural leader. When there is an organic leader who comes from the grass-root, then things will change. Leadership change will bring an organisational change. It will become robust. For the BJP, there will be anti-incumbency of 10 years in some states and in the centre, there will be a 15-year anti-incumbency in the Lok Sabha,"

Devendra Pai added that to bring such change and contest against the BJP, Congress leadership "will have to become full-time politicians. Part-time politicians cannot do that."

Yogesh Kamdar also echoed these sentiments, advising the party to pursue the "optimum" strategy for its survival.

"Congress has many intelligent people who can steer it out of the problem, who can give it a direction. For survival, a party has to do the optimum that will increase the chance of survival and its acceptability, which they have failed to do," he said.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge at the recent Congress Working Committee (CWC) vowed to continue the party's fight against the ruling party's attempts to curb the freedom of Constitutional institutions. The party also decided to oppose the recently enacted VB-G RAM-G Act, which seeks to replace MGN-REGA.

Kharge discussed the appointments of district presidents as part of the party's attempt to strengthen the organisation, but he made no acknowledgement of leadership failures and offered no strategy for the upcoming elections. However, there were some important words there, such as "organisation, unity, and democracy."

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A salary is a drug they give you to forget your dreams

“Arunachal Pradesh: Where Mountains Pray and the Nation Keeps Watch”



ASHK MACHHANVI

Arunachal Pradesh is not merely India's easternmost frontier, it is a living confluence of nature, culture, faith, and national security. From the mist-laden valleys of Tenga to the sacred heights of Tawang, this land rises like a natural fortress guarding the nation while quietly preserving some of the richest cultural traditions and ecological wealth of the subcontinent.

Land of Rivers, Forests, and Living Traditions.

Arunachal Pradesh is shaped by water. Mighty rivers such as the Kameng (Jia Bhara-li), Subansiri, Siang, and Lohit, along with innumerable snow-fed nalas, descend from the Eastern Himalayas, carving deep valleys and sustaining life across the region. These waterways are not mere geographical features, they are cultural arteries, woven into folklore, rituals, and daily living.

The forests of Arunachal are among the most biodiverse in India home to bamboo groves, rare orchids, alpine meadows, and dense evergreen rainforests. For centuries, indigenous communities have lived in equilibrium with this environment, practising sustainable traditions that modern development would do well to learn from.

Tenga to Tawang: A Cultural and Spiritual Corridor.

The journey from Tenga Valley to Tawang is among the most evocative routes in the country. Tenga, resting along the Kameng River, reflects the quiet resilience of frontier life, where Monpa traditions coexist naturally with a strong military presence. The warmth, dignity, and simplicity of the people leave an indelible impression, reinforcing the sense that culture here is lived, not displayed.

Further north, Tawang stands as a spiritual beacon. The iconic Tawang Monastery, the largest in India and second largest in the world, is a custodian of Himalayan Buddhist heritage. Festivals such as Losar and Torgya reveal a civilisation rooted in prayer, discipline, and harmony values that have sustained life in high altitudes for generations.

Through a Soldier's Eyes: Nature, Faith, and Duty.

For a soldier posted in this region, Arunachal Pradesh reveals itself not just as terrain, but as a teacher. Long patrols through pine-lined roads, sudden clearings opening to snow-clad peaks, and rivers roaring far below instil a deep reverence for nature. Visits to monasteries across Tawang, Dirang, and Bomdila are not mere cultural excursions, they become moments of quiet introspection. In places where prayer wheels turn endlessly and chants echo against the mountains, one understands how faith sustains both the civilian and the soldier in an unforgiving landscape. These monasteries act as anchors of peace in a region otherwise defined by altitude, isolation, and duty.

Bomdila and the Human Face of the Frontier. Bomdila, with its monastery overlooking the valley, represents the human face of the frontier. It is a space where administration, military presence, and civilian life converge seamlessly. Interactions with monks, students, village elders, and traders reflect a rhythm of coexistence that is rare in border regions. For the soldier, Bomdila is not just a posting, it is a reminder that national security ultimately exists to protect people, culture, and continuity of life.

Seen from the Ground: History Written on the Heights.

Having personally travelled through Tenga, Dirang, Sela, and Tawang, the author has witnessed how these mountains are not silent backdrops but living sentinels of history. During the Second World War, this region served as a criti-



cal hinterland in the Eastern Himalayas, guarding approaches from Burma and Tibet and supporting Allied logistics under extreme conditions. The same narrow valleys, high passes, and unpredictable weather that challenged wartime movement continue to define the terrain today. Standing on these ridgelines, one understands why Arunachal was, and remains, a strategic shield, its strength derived from natural dominance rather than overt force.

Lessons from Command: Stories of War, Terrain, and Leadership. An Aide-de-Camp's Perspective.

The author's service as Aide-de-Camp (ADC) to a General Officer, who commanded a Brigade in this very sector offered rare insight into the region's deeper military history. Conversations with the General often return to recurring themes, how terrain dictates tactics, how



weather punishes complacency, and how leadership in the high Himalayas demands patience, foresight, and moral courage. Anecdotes drawn from the General's, brigade command during periods of heightened tension along the frontier revealed how every ridge, pass, and nala carried operational significance. These narratives transformed scenic landscapes into living maps of decision-making, sacrifice, and preparedness.

A Soldier's Strategic Reading of the Land.

Author has viewed through a soldier's analytical lens, Arunachal Pradesh is a masterclass in strategic geography. The alignment of valleys, the dominance of heights, and the natural choke points along river systems explain why observation, mobility, and preparedness are inseparable here. Yet what stands out most is the seamless integration between terrain and population. Un-

structure, enhanced connectivity, and forward preparedness ensure that these heights stand secure manned by soldiers operating in some of the harshest conditions on earth, supported by the trust and cooperation of local communities. History here reinforces a timeless military truth, whoever holds the heights holds the future.

Tourism Potential: Promise with Responsibility.

Arunachal Pradesh holds immense potential as a future tourism hub, provided development remains disciplined and sensitive. Adventure tourism, trekking, river rafting, high-altitude cycling, and mountaineering can flourish alongside spiritual tourism centred on monasteries and indigenous belief systems.

From a soldier's perspective, tourism here must be low-volume and high-value. The very roads once built for strategic mobility can support controlled tourism, logistics created for national security can facilitate access without excess. Eco-tourism, homestays, and cultural circuits connecting Tenga, Dirang, Bomdila, Tawang, Ziro, and Mechuka can generate livelihoods while preserving heritage.

Tourism as Quiet Nation-Building.

If developed responsibly, tourism in Arunachal Pradesh can become an instrument of national integration. Visitors who walk monastery corridors, listen to village elders, and understand the sacrifices made to guard these heights return not merely with photographs, but with perspective. From a soldier's point of view, such tourism strengthens the emotional bond between the mainland and the frontier, turning distant borders into shared heritage. In this sense, tourism here is not leisure alone, it is quiet nation-building.

To conclude,

Arunachal Pradesh is a land where nature inspires, faith steadies, and the nation is protected in silence. Its rivers carry ancient memory, its people embody dignity, and its mountains stand watch over India's future.

As development advances, the responsibility is clear, Arunachal must grow not as a spectacle, but as a model of balanced progress, where tourism, tradition, environment, and national security move forward together. To safeguard Arunachal Pradesh is to safeguard not just a border, but a living heritage and a timeless promise between land, people, and nation.

Author's Note.

The author is a former military officer and curative historian, who has served extensively in India's eastern and northeastern sectors.

His writing draws upon operational experience, service as Aide-de-Camp to a young officer in the area and visit to Arunachal sector, with a General officer and deep personal engagement with the land, people, and culture of the region by visiting, interacting and studying the cultural heritage of the land.



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