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**PERSPECTIVE**

**A wise person knows that there is something to be learned from everyone.**

**Bomb Explodes at Fuel Station in Manipur's Bishnupur, No Casualties**

IMPHAL



Panic briefly gripped parts of Manipur's Bishnupur district on Thursday evening after an explosive device was hurled at a fuel station, triggering a loud blast and heightening security concerns in the area.

According to preliminary reports, unidentified miscreants riding a two-wheeler allegedly threw a bomb at Ms Elidas Fuel Station located at Moirang Thana Leikai at around 8.10 pm. The explosion caused momentary chaos in the vicinity, prompting residents and commuters to flee the area.

No injuries or casualties were reported in the incident, officials confirmed.

Security forces were immediately alerted following the blast and launched a search operation in and around the area to trace those involved. The site was secured, and investigations are underway to determine the nature of the explosive and the motive behind the attack.

Further details are awaited as authorities continue to probe the incident.

**WHO SAID WHAT**

**This is not the first time that I have faced a life threat. I recall touring Murshidabad last year when someone handed over a live country-made bomb. My ABC immediately took it away and placed it in a tub of water. It was a close shave**

**CV Ananda Bose**  
West Bengal Governor

## Bangladesh-Linked Jihadi Network Radicalised Assam Youth via Social Media

GUWAHATI

The arrest of 11 suspected jihadi operatives in Assam has exposed an organised cross-border radicalisation network with links to Bangladesh and West Bengal, Assam Police said, revealing how social media platforms were used to indoctrinate local youth into extremist ideology.

Investigations have found that the arrested individuals were associated with Imam Mahamuder Kafil (IMK), a radical outfit believed to be an offshoot of the banned Bangladesh-based Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). The group allegedly aimed to foment jihad and carry out terror activities in Assam and Tripura, with some recruits even travelling to Bangladesh for training.

According to police sources, the radicalisation process began in late 2024 when Nasim Uddin alias Tamim, a resident of Nichuka in Barpeta Road, came across a YouTube channel preaching about the concept of "Muzaddid"—a messianic religious figure believed, in certain



Islamic traditions, to appear every 100 years to protect the faith. The channel claimed that the Muzaddid had already arrived in the form of "Imam Mahmud".

When questioned by investiga-

The Telegram account contained religious texts and messages in PDF format, purportedly justifying extremist interpretations of Islamic teachings.

Police said Khalid acted on instructions from Bangladesh-based handlers Umar, Sujan Bin Sultan and Shamim Barah, along with Mir Rahman of West Bengal and Jagir Miah of Agartala. The group allegedly propagated selective Hadith references to claim that the arrival of Imam Mahmud signalled the time for violent jihad.

Khalid later created a Telegram group named "Purva Akash", initially serving as its administrator before handing over control to Tamim. Several individuals were added to the group, where messages promoting "Ghazwatul Hind"—an extremist concept calling for war against India—were circulated under the guidance of handlers based in Bangladesh, West Bengal and Tripura.

Investigators said Khalid and other handlers cited religious books to claim that the time had

come to wage war against "Hindustan". However, police found that the texts referenced were fabricated or distorted to suit the group's radical narrative.

"IMK was systematically using social media platforms like YouTube and Telegram to radicalise vulnerable youth, spread false religious propaganda and promote the idea of establishing Muslim rule in India through violence," a senior police official said.

The probe has also revealed that IMK is part of a wider transnational extremist network seeking to exploit digital platforms to bypass traditional surveillance mechanisms. Further investigations are underway to identify additional recruits, financial channels and operational links across borders.

Assam Police said the arrests have helped avert a potential security threat, but warned that online radicalisation remains a serious challenge requiring constant monitoring and coordinated action with central agencies.

## Manipur MP Bimol Akoijam Files RTI Seeking Clarity on Buffer Zones in State



GUWAHATI

Member of Parliament Angomcha Bimol Akoijam has filed a Right to Information (RTI) application with the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA),

seeking official clarification on the existence, legal validity and statutory basis of any buffer zones in Manipur.

In his RTI petition, the MP has sought to ascertain whether any buffer zones have been formally declared in the state that restrict or regulate the free movement of Zo and Hmar communities vis-à-vis Meitei citizens, or vice versa. He has also requested copies of any official notifications, if such zones exist, that authorise or enforce these restrictions.

Akoijam has further asked the MHA to specify the exact legal provisions, statutory laws, executive orders or administrative directives under which such buffer zones may have been notified or implemented.

Stating that such measures carry serious implications for civil liberties, freedom of movement and social cohesion, the MP said the RTI was aimed at ensuring transparency and accountability from the concerned authorities.

The move comes amid continuing debates over administrative controls and security arrangements in Manipur, where buffer zones have been widely discussed in the context of maintaining law and order. Akoijam has emphasised the need for lawful governance and clear communication from the Centre on policies that affect the state's diverse communities, particularly in a prolonged conflict situation.

## No Voter List Published Yet, So How Can There Be 'Vote Chori': Himanta Biswa Sarma



GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday rejected the Congress party's

allegation of "vote chori" against the ruling BJP, asserting that the charge was baseless as the electoral roll has not yet been published. Responding to the Opposition's claims, Sarma said there was no scope for voter theft at this stage of the process. "When no voter list has been published so far, then how can there be 'vote chori'?" he asked, dismissing the allegations as politically motivated.

The Chief Minister clarified that the state BJP president's instructions to booth-level agents (BLAs) were limited to ensuring accuracy in the electoral rolls by flagging ineligible names for deletion and facilitating the inclusion of eligible voters. Such measures, he said, are part of the routine and lawful process prescribed under electoral laws.

Maintaining a clean and accurate voter list is essential for the conduct of free and fair elections, Sarma said, adding that the issue should not be politicised. He emphasised that the Election Commission of India follows a transparent and well-defined procedure for revising electoral rolls, and that political parties have only a facilitative role through their BLAs.

The Assam Congress had earlier accused the BJP of attempting to manipulate voter lists ahead of the elections, a charge Sarma described as misleading and aimed at creating unnecessary confusion in the run-up to the electoral process.

## IIT Guwahati Researchers Develop Sunlight-Driven Technology to Convert CO2 into Methanol

GUWAHATI

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Guwahati have developed a novel sunlight-driven photocatalytic material capable of converting carbon dioxide into methanol, a clean and usable fuel-marking a significant step towards addressing climate change and sustainable energy generation.

The study, led by Prof Mahuya De of the Department of Chemical Engineering along with research scholar Nayan Moni Baishya, has been published in the Journal of Materials Science. The researchers said the innovation addresses the dual challenge of rising global energy demand and the need to curb carbon emissions.

Prof De noted that continued dependence on petroleum-based fuels remains a major source of carbon dioxide emissions, contributing to environmental degradation and global warming. "To counter this, scientists worldwide are exploring photocatalytic technologies that can convert carbon dioxide into clean fuels using solar energy," she said.



The research builds on graphitic carbon nitride, a low-cost, non-toxic and metal-free material widely studied for such applications. However, its practical use has so far been limited due to rapid energy loss and low fuel generation efficiency.

To overcome these limitations, the IIT Guwahati team combined graphitic carbon nitride with few-layer graphene—an ultra-thin carbon material known for excellent electrical conductivity and energy transfer properties. The addition of graphene significantly reduced energy loss within the catalyst and enhanced its performance under visible light and direct sunlight.

The study demonstrated that the composite material retained photo-

tocatalytic energy for longer durations, improved light absorption and enhanced charge generation, leading to more efficient conversion of carbon dioxide into methanol. Among the various composites tested, the catalyst containing 15 weight percent graphene showed the highest efficiency and exhibited strong stability—an essential factor for real-world applications.

"The present work is expected to contribute towards mitigating environmental problems while simultaneously supporting green energy production," Prof De said. "Converting carbon dioxide into cleaner fuel using solar energy is a promising technology for a sustainable future."

The researchers said the technology holds potential for deployment in carbon-intensive industries such as thermal power plants, cement manufacturing units, steel plants and petrochemical refineries. Its application could help advance a circular carbon economy by recycling carbon emissions into valuable fuel, supporting India's broader transition towards cleaner and more sustainable energy systems.

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## Can Ban on Social Media work ?

As Ciggi companies managed to get by economical truth and did not expose to the public or users that its smoking has terrible dangers and health hazards , in the same manner, the social media companies, Facebook, YouTube, Tik Tok, Instagram, X, Twitter, Reddite etc. did not disclose the negative impacts of it to the users. As the social media has started its draco and parlous designs, the world has come out to protect itself from its virulent onslaught especially upon the youth. Denmark has announced plans to ban social media for under-15s, whileas Norway is considering a similar proposal. A French parliamentary enquiry has also recommended banning under-15s from social media, and a social media curfew for 15- to 18-year-olds. The Spanish government has drafted a law which would require legal guardians to authorise access for under-16s. In the UK, new safety rules introduced in July 2025 mean online companies face large fines or even the jailing of their executives if they fail to implement measures to protect young people from seeing illegal and harmful content. Meanwhile, an attempt in the US state of Utah to ban under-18s from social media without parental consent was blocked by a federal judge in 2024.

Now Australia is the other country which has announced a strict ban for children who are under 16 to use major social media platforms like, Tiktok, X, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Snap chat, Reddite and Threads. They cannot set up new accounts and existing profiles are being deactivated. The ban is the first of its kind and is being watched closely by other countries whether it would succeed or not. The government says it will reduce the negative impact of social media's design features that encourage young people to spend more time on screens, while also serving up content that can harm their health and happiness.

A study it commissioned earlier in 2025 found that 96% of children aged 10-15 used social media, and that seven out of 10 of them had been exposed to harmful content. This included misogynistic and violent material as well as content promoting eating disorders and suicide. One in seven also reported experiencing grooming-type behaviour from adults or older children, and more than half said they had been the victim of cyber bullying.

The Social Media in the panorama of digital era, stands as an enchanting needpoint that weaves connections, information, and expressions together. It has indubitably, transformed our mode of communing and interacting with people nowadays. It has looped and reef knotted people and connected with each other in conduct and demeanour unimaginably. It is emerging fairly trendy and popular because of its user-friendly features, like Facebook, Instagram, X, Twitter, YouTube which connect people in spite of distances. The youth is particularly, an aficionado of it, and makes much use of it. It's unlimited use makes us to speculate that something so influential and prevailing cannot be always dainty and elegant. There are two faces of every entity, the same applies to social media.

The Social media is a boulevard to express, connect, learn, and share. It is not utterly appalling, but there are jeopardizes . The task social media is doing now was accomplished in earlier ages and times by disruptive elements such as race, colonialism, religion and political hullabaloo. The only divergence is that social media's attain is extensive and its real-time dissemination of information creates instantaneous reaction and comments. Its impact is so much now, and if we feel of antidote to restrict its ruinous brunt on the society, we have to deem ourselves in a catch-22 situation. Its muscle is its candidness and autonomous style where the King/prince and the impecunious have the same privileges to craft content and that too without any associated care to impose control.

Moreover, the people are unfriendly now with newspapers and books. They have assumed dependence on social media news circulation. We are always updated on the latest happenings of the world through it. Besides, it fortifies bonds with your loved ones. Distance is not a barrier anymore because of social media. One can easily communicate with friends and relatives overseas. Most importantly, it also provides a great platform for young budding artists to showcase their talent for free. You can get great opportunities for employment through social media too. Another lead definitely benefits companies who wish to promote their brands. Social media has become a device for advertising and offers you great opportunities for connecting with the customer.

When we look at the positive aspect of social media, we find numerous advantages. The most important being a tool for imparting education. All the information one requires is just a click away.

Students can educate themselves on various topics using social media. Moreover, live lectures and coaching for exams like UPSC, JKAS, NEET, JEE, JRF, NET etc, are now possible because of social media. One can attend a lecture delivered in Delhi while being in Jammu and Kashmir. Albeit of possessing exclusive reimburse, social media is considered to be one of the most detrimental facet of society. If the use of social media is not controlled, it can lead to atrocious consequences. It is hurtful because it invades your privacy like never before. The over sharing on social media makes children victims of vice. The Social media has both upbeat and downbeat impacts on society, including all important spheres of life. Though it can increase access to information, political participation, and civic engagement, transparency and accountability in government and politics. However, it can also be used to spread fake news and misinformation, which can distort facts and manipulate public opinion. It can provide access to information, educational resources, and networking opportunities. It can also be a platform for self-expression and activism. However, social media can also be a source of cyber bullying and distraction from studies and create mental disturbance and heath riddles.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

"We can draw lessons from the past, but we cannot live in it." - Lyndon Johnson

# WHY OIL'S NOT WELL IN VENEZUELA



RANJAN TANDON

On the third night of the new year, the Caracas skyline was dotted with explosions. US military helicopters whisked the first couple of Venezuela from their comforts for a midnight ride to New York—in an operation eerily similar to a sequence from the 2001 movie *Spy Game*, in which Brad Pitt and Catherine McCormack's characters are flown out of a Chinese prison. The intent and outcome differed in real life. It was about oil altering world dynamics—again.

Venezuela has figured for long on the US presidential radar. A growing Chinese and Russian influence in the South American country's oil industry triggered a conflict of egos.

During a 2010 visit to the Venezuelan capital, Vladimir Putin, then the Russian prime minister, was gifted a symbolic 'Key to Caracas' as Hugo Chávez strengthened ties with Russia. A 20-year cooperation plan between Iran and Venezuela signed in 2022 included recovery of the latter's oil industry. Despite sanctions, China continued as the largest customer of the state oil company *Petróleos de Venezuela* (PDVSA).

As oil was the common denominator, the strategic capture of Venezuela strikes at the base of this growing nexus. Moreover, to stymie West Asia's dominance in oil, the 303 billion barrels of Venezuelan reserves remain a *pièce de résistance*. With US and Canadian participation, a formidable competitor to Opec seems to be on the anvil.

This column had earlier mentioned the capability and inclination of the US's Gulf Coast refineries to process *Meruy*, a popular Venezuelan blend favoured by Chinese teapot refineries, and heavy crude from the Orinoco belt preferred by select Asian refiners.

In 2001, a report by the Baker Institute and the Council on Foreign Relations—later presented to US Vice President Dick Cheney and titled *National Energy Policy 2001*—mentioned the "fear of energy vulnerability" caused by an erratic Saddam Hussein keen on catapulting his pan-Arab image as a power centre and emerge as a key "swing producer" of oil. This presented a growing danger to the world's capitalist economy and a "possibility that Hussein may remove Iraqi oil from the market for an extended period".

What ensued was 'Saddam's weapons of mass destruction' narrative. No weapons were ever discovered. Big Oil reaped significant gains, securing access to large reserves, as did major oil services subcontractor Halliburton, of

which Cheney was the CEO before assuming the V-P's office.

This brings to mind Libya in the early 1980s during Muammar Gaddafi's regime, and how its pristine Mediterranean coastline and Italianate façades were forever altered by US intervention.

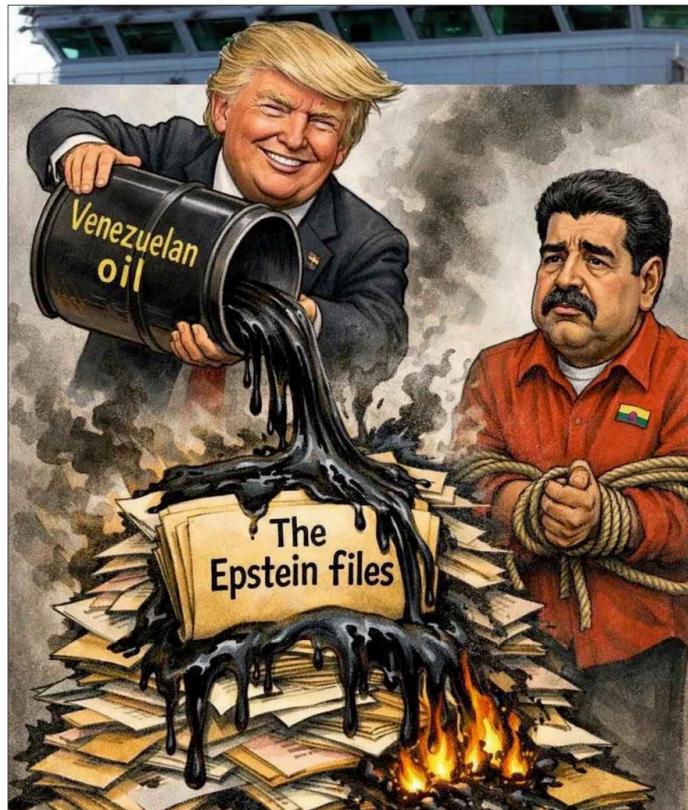
Libya's suspected involvement in the 1986 bombing at a West Berlin discotheque frequented by Americans led the US to retaliate by bombing Tripoli and Benghazi. The December 1988 Pan Am flight 103's explosion over Lockerbie in Scotland was another defining crisis.

As Gaddafi acceded to a billion dollars in compensation to the victims, a gradual rapprochement led Libya to officially abandon its own weapons of mass destruction programme, including the surrender of its nuclear missile development in December 2003 and shipping of nuclear materials to the US in March 2004 under the watchful eyes of US and UK officials. This was followed by a 2008 meeting between Condoleezza Rice and Gaddafi in Tripoli, the first with a US secretary of state in 50 years. But within three years, the Libyan strongman

was assassinated in an uprising, leaving Africa's top oil-rich nation fractured.

In Venezuela, an infrastructure run down in the absence of investments and maintenance has led production to plummet and a sanctioned oil industry, once responsible for 96 percent of government revenues, in a state of decay. The 13,000-sq-km Lake Maracaibo, situated in a region that holds 15 percent of the Venezuelan reserves, is a nightmare of spills and contamination. With thousands of kilometres of eroded pipelines lying at its bottom, leaks and logistical failures are common.

Though Chevron remains active in Venezuela on an extended reprieve, it would be a long haul for oil majors to commit large capital expenditures in the prevailing political situation. This recalls another moment in history—the 1981 Algiers Accord that provided for compensations after the 1979 nationalisation of Iran's oil industry. With the release of hostages and frozen assets, the US had pledged non-interference in Iran's internal matters. Similar guarantee mechanisms would be a prerequisite for



the billions of dollars needed to resurrect the ailing PDVSA.

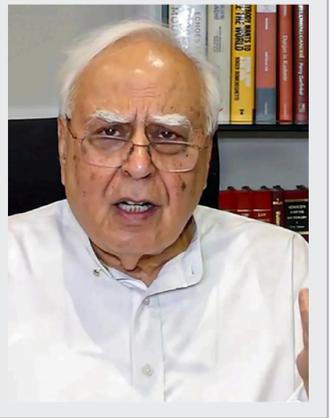
As the global media showcases a blindfolded Maduro, the message insinuated by Trump is that he

### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

**"Only Supreme Court can rein in ED. Every opposition state, every significant opposition leader is targeted. What is happening in West Bengal is truly disturbing! That too in the midst of an impending election."**

**"Federalism is at ED's mercy!"**

Kapil Sibal



means 'business'. Moscow is watchful, though any reaction would be calibrated against the Ukraine war. China is refraining from overt defiance, with Taiwan in its backyard. However, with huge outstanding oil-linked loans to Caracas, a mute Beijing is hard to ignore.

The failed nuclear talks with Tehran stand out in sharp contrast. While the situation differs vastly, a cue is conveyed nevertheless. Iran and its oil could bolster a sagging US hold in West Asia as much as Venezuela and its resources could in Latin America. Though Tehran stood isolated in the Israel conflict last year, by virtue of its oil wealth, Beijing's patronage and Moscow's proximity remain its bargaining chips. The Islamic state enjoys a good 'working relationship' with other Opec members. More adventurism in West Asia could be counter-productive.

Learning from history, a pragmatic US should refrain from interfering in Caracas's internal politics or from seeking more geopolitical realignments. On the other hand, a collaborative provision for infrastructure and technological support would encourage Iran and North Korea to begin trusting America.

# Congress Alleges 'Dangerous Conspiracy' to Manipulate Assam Voter Rolls, Targets BJP and Election Commission

GUWAHATI

The Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) on Thursday, January 8, launched a sharp attack on the BJP-led state government and the Election Commission of India, alleging a "dangerous and deliberate conspiracy" to manipulate electoral rolls in Assam through widespread irregularities in the ongoing Special Summary Revision (SSR) exercise. Speaking at a press conference at Rajiv Bhavan, Dhuri Lok Sabha MP Rakibul Hussain and former Rajya Sabha MP Ripun Bora claimed Assam is witnessing a pattern of voter list manipulation similar to allegations previously raised by the Congress in Maharashtra, Haryana, and Karnataka.

Hussain alleged that, contrary to assurances from the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) of Assam that

the SSR would follow routine procedures, Booth Level Supervisors (BLS) were kept uninformed during the preparation of draft rolls, resulting in confusion and irregularities in the claims and objections process. He also accused the Election Commission of permitting misuse of Forms 6, 7, and 8, allowing a single individual to raise objections against multiple voters-contravening established guidelines.

Targeting Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Hussain claimed that objections were being used to remove legitimate voters while facilitating the inclusion of outsiders in electoral rolls. He further criticised the Election Commission for failing to share weekly updates on claims and objections with political parties, as mandated under its own norms, calling the entire process "unconstitutional and unethical."



Ripun Bora echoed these concerns, alleging that the BJP had effectively turned the Election Commission into a "puppet." He pointed out that draft rolls published in late December and early January showed minimal changes, making it difficult for voters and parties to identify discrepancies or seek corrections. Bora also criticised the omission of critical details such as newly added voters, deletions of deceased voters, and transferred voters in the draft rolls, arguing that withholding such information defeats the purpose of the objections process.

Referring to media reports of an alleged online meeting in which the BJP's Assam president reportedly instructed party leaders to identify voters who did not support the ruling party, Bora questioned why the Election Commission had not

issued any clarification, even if the reports were inaccurate.

Further allegations included the mid-term replacement of Booth Level Officers (BLOs) in some areas for resisting political pressure, selective removal of BLOs from certain communities, and serious irregularities at polling stations in Guwahati's Dispur area, where voters were added or removed without consent. The Congress leaders announced plans to submit a detailed memorandum to the Chief Electoral Officer of Assam on January 9, highlighting these alleged irregularities, and to demand a forensic investigation into the controversial BJP video conference. A joint delegation of opposition parties is expected to meet the Chief Election Commissioner in New Delhi in the coming days to press for corrective action.

## Tripura HC Orders Regular Salary from Day One, Declares Five-Year Fixed Pay Unconstitutional

AGARTALA

The Tripura High Court on Thursday struck down the state government's long-standing policy of paying newly appointed government employees a fixed salary for the first five years of service, ruling that the practice violates constitutional principles.

A Division Bench comprising Chief Justice M.S. Ramachandra Rao and Justice Biswajit Palit held that government employees, including Teachers' Eligibility Test (TET) qualified teachers and other permanent staff, are entitled to receive the full regular pay scale from the very first day of their appointment.

Advocate Purushottam Roy Barman, appearing in the matter, said the verdict came while disposing of two writ petitions originally filed in 2001 and 2007. Under the policy introduced by the then state government, employees were placed on regular posts but were paid only a fixed salary during their initial five years of service.

"The court has categorically declared this policy unconstitutional," Barman said. "The petitioners approached the court under compulsion, and no government can deprive employees of their constitutional rights once they are appointed to regular posts."

The bench directed that both graduate and postgraduate teachers, as well as other government employees, must be paid according to the applicable regular pay scale from the date of joining. The ruling applies broadly to government employees across the state.

The court noted that the 18 petitioners who filed the writ cases would be required to pay Rs 2,000 each towards court expenses. It also made it clear that failure by the state government to implement the judgment would entitle affected employees to seek further legal remedies.

## PIB Approves Rs 26,069 Crore Kamala Hydropower Project in Arunachal Pradesh

ITANAGAR

The Public Investment Board (PIB) on January 8 cleared an expenditure of ₹26,069.50 crore for the proposed 1,720 MW Kamala hydroelectric project in Arunachal Pradesh, giving a major push to large-scale renewable energy development in the Northeast, sources said.

Once commissioned, the project is expected to generate about 6,869.92 million units of green energy annually, significantly contributing to India's long-term energy transition and the government's commitment to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2070.

The Kamala project is a storage-based hydroelectric scheme with an integrated flood moderation component. It is planned on the Kamala River, a major tributary of the Subansiri, and will span Kamle, Kra Daadi and Kurung Kumey districts of Arunachal Pradesh. The project envisages the construction of a 216-metre-high concrete gravity dam along with an underground powerhouse, with an estimated completion

timeline of eight years.

Beyond power generation, the project is expected to play a critical role in flood moderation in the Brahmaputra valley. During peak monsoon periods, the storage facility is designed to help regulate downstream flows, offering relief to flood-prone areas of Assam and adjoining regions.

The project will be implemented under the Build-Own-Operate-Transfer (BOOT) model through a joint venture. NHPC will hold a 74 per cent equity stake, while the Government of Arunachal Pradesh will own the remaining 26 per cent. The total project cost of ₹26,069.50 crore includes interest during construction and financing charges amounting to ₹4,815.64 crore.

Financing has been structured with a debt-equity ratio of 70:30. The project will receive substantial support from the Government of India, including grants worth ₹1,340 crore for enabling infrastructure and ₹4,743.98 crore specifically earmarked for the flood moderation component.

## 2027 Census may reveal demographic concerns for Assam: CM Sarma

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on January 8 warned that the 2027 Census could highlight "disturbing" demographic trends in the state, claiming that nearly 40% of Assam's population might be of Bangladeshi origin. Speaking to the media and sharing his views on social media, Sarma reiterated concerns about uneven population growth among different communities in Assam. He said that in several regions, Muslim communities continue to register higher birth rates, while Hindu birth rates are gradually declining, a trend he described as having potential long-term social and demographic consequences.

"This is not a political issue alone; it pertains to the future social structure of parts of the state," the Chief Minister said. He added that in areas where



Hindus have already become a minority, or are close to doing so, families should consider having more than one child to ensure continuity. "Ideally, families should have at least two children, and if feasible, three," he suggested, framing the advice in terms of social sustainability and community balance. Sarma's remarks follow a statement on December 30, in which he urged Hindu families living in minority-dominated areas to take proactive steps to address demographic shifts. He stressed that the advice is aimed at maintaining long-term social equilibrium and ensuring the welfare of future generations. The comments have sparked debate in Assam's political and civil discourse, with observers noting the sensitive intersection of population policy, community dynamics, and electoral politics in the state.

## Nagaland Congress Launches 45-Day Statewide Agitation Against Repeal and Renaming of MGNREGA

KOHIMA

The Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee (NPCC) on January 8 launched a 45-day statewide agitation against the repeal and renaming of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), alleging that the Centre has dismantled a critical rights-based livelihood programme for rural India.

The agitation was formally launched at Congress Bhavan by AICC secretary and Member of Parliament Saptagiri Sankar Ulaka, who also chairs the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Employment and Panchayati Raj. The programme was attended by NPCC president and Lok Sabha MP S Supongmeren Jamir, NPCC working president Khriedi Theunuo, and several senior party leaders.

Addressing party workers, Ulaka



criticised the manner in which the new Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajevika Mission-Gramin (VBG RAM-G) Act was passed in Parliament, describing it as undemocratic and rushed. He alleged that the legislation was

introduced and cleared without adequate debate, effectively replacing MGNREGA and diluting its core rights-based provisions.

Ulaka further accused the Centre of systematically weakening MGNREGA over the past 11 years through delayed wage payments, chronic underfunding and denial of material costs. Citing Nagaland's case, he claimed that material costs amounting to around Rs 103 crore have remained pending with the Centre for the last nine months, while wage payments to workers have also been delayed. He also alleged that Nagaland continues to have one of the lowest MGNREGA wage rates in the country, with no revision for several years.

Outlining the protest roadmap, Ulaka said the 45-day agitation would include press conferences across the state, symbolic fasts, panchayat-level outreach programmes, submission

of memoranda to district authorities, and rallies aimed at mobilising public opinion in defence of the employment guarantee scheme.

NPCC president Supongmeren Jamir described the launch of the agitation as a significant day for the party, asserting that the Congress has consistently stood for the rights of grassroots communities. He said MGNREGA, introduced during the UPA government led by former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh under the leadership of Sonia Gandhi, played a transformative role in reducing poverty and improving rural livelihoods across the country.

Chairing the programme, NPCC working president Khriedi Theunuo said the protest, titled 'MGNREGA Bachao Sangram', is being carried out as per the directive of the All India Congress Committee (AICC) and would be taken to the grassroots level across Nagaland.

## Over 32,000 Aspirants Vie for 1,176 Nagaland Police Constable Posts



KOHIMA

More than 32,000 candidates have applied for 1,176 constable (general duty) posts in the Nagaland Police, officials said on January 8, underscoring the strong response to the state's largest ongoing police recruitment drive.

The recruitment rally began on Wednesday and is being conducted simultaneously across multiple districts of Nagaland. Officials said the process is progressing district-wise and will continue over several days as per the scheduled plan.

The selection process commenced with document verification, followed by physical standard tests and medical examinations. Candidates who clear these stages will advance to physical efficiency tests,

including running and other endurance events. Successful candidates will then appear for a written examination at a later stage.

Eligibility for the posts has been restricted to indigenous inhabitants belonging to Naga tribes. Officials noted that the entire application process was conducted online for the first time, marking a significant step towards digitisation and procedural transparency in police recruitment in the state.

Authorities said stringent measures have been put in place to ensure fairness and merit-based selection. Multiple monitoring teams have been deployed at recruitment centres, and candidates are being evaluated strictly in accordance with prescribed standards.

Deputy Chief Minister Yanthungo Patton, who also holds the Home portfolio, assured aspirants that the recruitment process would be conducted in a fair and transparent manner, with no scope for favouritism or external interference. He urged candidates to rely solely on their preparation and performance.

The recruitment process is scheduled to continue until January 16.

## Arunachal Cabinet Approves Mobile Medical Units, Teaching Posts, Fire Service Reforms

ITANAGAR

The Arunachal Pradesh State Cabinet, chaired by Chief Minister Pema Khandu, on Thursday approved a series of measures aimed at strengthening healthcare, education, public safety, urban governance, and environmental protection across the state.

Healthcare Expansion and Diagnostics  
To improve healthcare access, the Cabinet approved partnering with HLL Lifecare Ltd, a Government of India enterprise under the Health Ministry, to establish diagnostic facilities at 256 Sub-Centres, 82 Primary Health Centres (PHCs), 25 Community Health Centres (CHCs), and 64 Block Public Health Units. HLL Lifecare will implement a Laboratory Management Information System (LMIS) across these facilities, as well as medical colleges and hospitals, to improve inventory tracking, logistics, supply chain management, and data-driven lab operations.

The Cabinet also approved HLL Lifecare obtaining Atomic Energy Regulatory Board certification for all general and district hospitals and CHCs to strength-



en diagnostic radiology. Tele-radiology CT scan services at Aalo, Bomdila, Khonsa, Namsai, Tawang, Tezu, Yingkiang, and Ziro have already benefited nearly 12,000 patients, highlighting the success of such initiatives.

Additionally, 40 Mobile Medical Units (MMUs) will be deployed under the Vibrant Villages Programme, funded by the Ministry of Home Affairs, with operational costs covered by the National Health Mission. These units will serve 455 villages across 11 border districts, providing primary care, maternal and child health, elderly care, diagnostics, teleconsultation, disease screening, essential medicines, and referral services. Public Safety and Fire Services

The Cabinet approved the Arunachal Pradesh Fire and Emergency Services Bill, 2025, replacing the 1991 Act. The new legislation modernises the department's legal and operational framework. Special Grade promotions were sanctioned for fire and emergency personnel after 15, 20, and 30 years of service, benefiting 142 staff members.

Prison Administration and Educa-

tion  
To strengthen prison management, 91 posts will be created across seven sub-jails in Longding, Khonsa, Changlang, Pasighat, Yingkiang, Aalo, and Koloriang.

In higher education, the Cabinet sanctioned 58 new posts, including 14 admin-

istrative and teaching positions, and 32 Assistant Professor roles at Government Model Degree Colleges in Piyong and Kanubari. Twelve additional Assistant Professor positions will introduce Sociology, Commerce, and Mass Communication courses, expanding educational access and generating employment opportunities for youth.

The Department of Urban Affairs will establish a Directorate of Urban Local Bodies to improve coordination between local bodies, state departments, and central agencies, strengthening urban governance.

To address career stagnation in the forest department, a one-time relaxation of residency rules under the Arunachal Pradesh Forest Service Rules, 2019, was approved, enabling immediate promotions for 48 officers and support for 60 frontline forest personnel.

Recruitment rules for the Special Tiger Protection Force in Pakke, Nandapha, and Kamlang Tiger Reserves were also approved, allowing the filling of 324 Special Tiger Guard posts to enhance anti-poaching measures and create local employment.

The Cabinet described these measures as a demonstration of the government's commitment to inclusive development, public service, job creation, environmental protection, and improved access to essential services in remote and border areas.

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## India and Europe can bring stability into global economy, politics: Jaishankar in France



President Emmanuel Macron and top leaders of the European Union.

"I should add, by the way, as soon as I get back that we would be expecting to welcome Chancellor Mertz in India. And as I said, soon, President Macron will be there. A number of other European leaders are also slated to visit India very shortly," Jaishankar said.

He also said India and France working together has become important to stabilise global politics.

The two ministers largely focused on preparing grounds for Macron's visit to India next month to participate in the AI Summit.

In his opening remarks at the meeting with his French counterpart, Jaishankar, elaborating the importance of the talks, mentioned the larger context of "considerable global uncertainty" and said it is natural for strategic partners to consult "very closely" in such a situation.

He noted India chairing the BRICS and France helming the G7 this year and even referred to both sides being part of the G20 grouping.

"We are also otherwise active in a number of international organisations," he said.

"So as two nations committed to multi-polarity, I believe that working together is important for ourselves, also for stabilising the global politics at this stage," he said.

The external affairs minister mentioned Macron's upcoming visit to India.

"France is amongst our oldest strategic partners, the first in Europe, and I believe that our continuous conversation is an important part of nurturing that relationship," he said.

with the US after President Donald Trump slapped a whopping 50 per cent tariff on India.

"And when I look back, even in the last few weeks, we have had discussions within India on matters dealing with Europe, the FTA (Free Trade Agreement), technology issues, semiconductors, railways, defence, aviation. "So there is really a very substantive relationship, much more than can be done. But other than that, I think there is a larger discussion today that the world needs about the global order," Jaishankar said.

"What kind of world do we want to live in? What would be the norms and the other related issues? And because I think Europe is such an important player in global politics, it is also necessary that India strengthens its relationship (with it)," he said.

Jaishankar added, "I think we can bring more stability both into the international economy and global politics. And that really is why I am here."

In the next few weeks, India will host German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, French

NEW DELHI

India is strengthening its relationship with Europe and both sides can bring more stability into the international economy and global politics, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Wednesday.

His remarks, after holding talks with French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot in Paris, came in the face of a factious geopolitical environment, including global concerns over the way the United States has carried out a military operation in Venezuela to capture President Nicolas Maduro.

The external affairs minister said Europe is an important player in global politics and it is necessary that India strengthens its relationship with it.

"I think it was a very conscious choice. It was a choice which reflected our belief that this relationship with Europe is really poised to grow, grow to the next level," Jaishankar said at a media briefing when asked why he was in Europe.

The comments also came amid New Delhi's frosty ties

## TMC MPs detained in Delhi while protesting outside Amit Shah's office over ED raids on I-PAC

NEW DELHI

Several Trinamool Congress (TMC) MPs were detained by Delhi Police on Friday while protesting outside Union Home Minister Amit Shah's office against the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) raid on the Kolkata offices of political consultancy firm I-PAC. The protest comes amid heightened tensions over Mamata Banerjee's dramatic intervention during the raids on Thursday.

TMC MPs including Derek O'Brien, Mahua Moitra, Satabdi Roy, and Kirti Azad raised slogans alleging misuse of central agencies by the BJP-led government to intimidate opposition parties ahead of elections. Videos from the site showed police personnel lifting MPs and escorting them into vans. Derek O'Brien, as he was dragged, said, "You are seeing what is happening to the MPs here," while Mahua Moitra added, "We will defeat the BJP. The country is seeing how the Delhi Police is treating an elected MP."

Satabdi Roy said the central government deploys investigative agencies during elections to influence results. "They send teams of ED, CBI during the elections just to win, but they won't win the election," she said. Kirti Azad described the raids as "an attempt to win elections in an undemocratic manner," asserting that "the BJP will not win the elections this way."

The confrontation escalated after West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee allegedly interfered during the ED raids at I-PAC offices and the residence of its director, Pratik Jain, in connection with a coal smuggling case. Banerjee claimed the central agency had seized sensitive TMC-related materials, including hard disks, candidate lists, and strategic documents.

"Is it the duty of the ED, Amit Shah, to collect the party's hard disk, candidate list? The nasty, naughty Home Minister who can-



not protect the country is taking away all my party documents," Banerjee said, challenging Shah to "come to West Bengal and fight democratically."

Banerjee maintained that I-PAC was not a private organisation but an authorised team working for the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC), and alleged the ED had confiscated sensitive documents related to electoral roll revision and party strategy.

The ED, countering Mamata's allegations, said she entered Jain's residence during the search and removed "key evidence," including physical documents and electronic devices. Officials added that her convoy proceeded to I-PAC's office, where "Ms Banerjee, her aides, and the state police personnel forcibly removed physical documents and electronic evidence."

The agency clarified that the searches were evidence-based, not targeted at any political establishment, and not linked to elections. The raids are part of a regular money laundering crackdown under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), covering persons and entities connected to a coal smuggling syndicate led by Anup Majhi, and associated hawala operators and handlers.

I-PAC, founded by poll strategist Prashant Kishore, has worked with the TMC since the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, managing the party's IT, media, and election strategy. The company was instrumental in TMC's return to power in the 2021 Assembly elections. On Thursday, raids were conducted at ten premises across Kolkata and Delhi, including Jain's residence on Loudon Street and I-PAC's Sector V office, along

with four other locations in Delhi. During the raids, senior IPS officers, including West Bengal DGP Rajeev Kumar and Bidhannagar Police Commissioner, were present, and CRPF personnel secured the I-PAC premises. The situation intensified when Mamata arrived at the sites, accusing the ED of seizing TMC's organisational data.

Opposition leaders in the state, including Leader of Opposition Suwendu Adhikari, CPM Bengal secretary Mohammad Salim, and Congress state chief Shubhankar Sarkar, questioned the legality and propriety of Mamata's intervention. Meanwhile, the TMC MPs' protest in Delhi escalates the political standoff, highlighting the high-stakes tension ahead of the 2026 West Bengal Assembly elections.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Internet and phones cut in Iran as protesters heed exiled prince's call for mass demonstration

DUBAI

Iran's government cut off the country from the internet and international telephone calls Thursday night as a nighttime demonstration called by the country's exiled crown prince drew a mass of protesters to shout from their windows and storm the streets.

The protest that went on into Friday morning represented the first test of whether the Iranian public could be swayed by Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi, whose fatally ill father fled Iran just before the country's 1979 Islamic Revolution. Demonstrations have included cries in support of the shah, something that could bring a death sentence in the past but now underlines the anger fueling the protests that began over Iran's ailing economy.

The demonstrations that have popped up in cities and rural towns across Iran continued Thursday. More markets and bazaars shut down in support of the protesters. So far, violence around the demonstrations has killed at least 42 people while more than 2,270 others have been detained, said the U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency.

The growth of the protests increases the pressure on Iran's civilian government and its Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. CloudFlare, an internet firm, and the advocacy group NetBlocks reported the internet outage, both attributing it to Iranian government interference. Attempts to dial landlines and mobile phones from Dubai to Iran could not be connected. Such outages have in the past been followed by intense government crackdowns.

Iranian state television's 24-hour news channel did not acknowledge the internet outage that cut the nation over 85 million people off from the world, highlighting instead food subsidies in their 7 a.m. Friday broadcast.

Meanwhile, the protests themselves have remained broadly leaderless. It



remains unclear how Pahlavi's call will affect the demonstrations moving forward.

"The lack of a viable alternative has undermined past protests in Iran," wrote Nate Swanson of the Washington-based Atlantic Council, who studies Iran.

"There may be a thousand Iranian dissident activists who, given a chance, could emerge as respected statesmen, as labor leader Lech Walesa did in Poland at the end of the Cold War. But so far, the Iranian security apparatus has arrested, persecuted and exiled all of the country's potential transformational leaders."

Pahlavi had called for demonstrations at 8 p.m. local (1630 GMT) on Thursday and Friday. When the clock struck, neighborhoods across Tehran erupted in chanting, witnesses said. The chants included "Death to the dictator!" and "Death to the Islamic Republic!" Others praised the shah, shouting: "This is the last battle! Pahlavi will return!" Thousands could be seen on the streets before all communication to Iran cut out.

"Iranians demanded their freedom

tonight. In response, the regime in Iran has cut all lines of communication," Pahlavi said. "It has shut down the Internet. It has cut landlines. It may even attempt to jam satellite signals."

He went on to call for European leaders to join U.S. President Donald Trump in promising to "hold the regime to account."

"I call on them to use all technical, financial, and diplomatic resources available to restore communication to the Iranian people so that their voice and their will can be heard and seen," he added. "Do not let the voices of my courageous compatriots be silenced."

Pahlavi had said he would offer further plans depending on the response to his call. His support of and from Israel has drawn criticism in the past — particularly after the 12-day war Israel waged on Iran in June. Demonstrators have shouted in support of the shah in some demonstrations, but it isn't clear whether that's support for Pahlavi himself or a desire to return to a time before the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Iranian officials appeared to be taking the planned protests seriously. The hard-line Kayhan newspaper published a video online claiming security forces would use drones to identify those taking part.

Iranian officials have not acknowledged the scale of the overall protests, which raged across many locations Thursday even before the 8 p.m. demonstration. However, there has been reporting regarding security officials being hurt or killed.

The judiciary's Mizan news agency report a police colonel suffered fatal stab wounds in a town outside of Tehran, while the semiofficial Fars news agency said gunmen killed two security force members and wounded 30 others in a shooting in the city of Lordegan in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province.

A deputy governor in Iran's Khorasan Razavi province told Iranian state television that an attack at a police station killed five people Wednesday night in Chenaran, some 700 kilometers (430 miles) northeast of Tehran. Late Thursday, the Revolutionary Guard said two members of its forces were killed in Kermanshah.

Iran has faced rounds of nationwide protests in recent years. As sanctions tightened and Iran struggled after the 12-day war, its rial currency collapsed in December, reaching 1.4 million to \$1. Protests began soon after, with demonstrators chanting against Iran's theocracy.

It remains unclear why Iranian officials have yet to crack down harder on the demonstrators. Trump warned last week that if Tehran "violently kills peaceful protesters," America "will come to their rescue."

Speaking to talk show host Hugh Hewitt, Trump reiterated his pledge.

Iran has "been told very strongly, even more strongly than I'm speaking to you right now, that if they do that, they're going to have to pay hell," Trump said.

### India-US trade deal didn't happen as Modi did not call Trump, says US commerce secretary



WASHINGTON

The proposed India-US trade deal failed to materialise because Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not directly call US President Donald Trump, US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick has said, offering a rare behind-the-scenes account of stalled negotiations.

Speaking on the All-In Podcast on Thursday, Lutnick said the Trump administration followed a strict, time-bound approach to trade negotiations, under which countries that moved first secured better terms.

"I'll tell you a story about India," Lutnick said, recalling that after concluding a trade deal with the United Kingdom, Washington set firm deadlines for other partners. "President Trump does deals like a staircase. The first stair gets the best deal."

According to Lutnick, India was told it had a limited window, "three Fridays," to conclude talks. While officials had largely negotiated the framework, Lutnick said a direct leader-level intervention was required to close the deal.

"I said, 'You've got to have Modi call the President. It's all set up,'" he said, adding that New Delhi was uncomfortable with such a call. "So Modi didn't call."

After the deadline passed, the US announced trade agreements with Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam, Lutnick said, assuming India would conclude its deal before those countries. "Instead, those deals came out at a higher rate," he added.

Lutnick said India later reached out, indicating it was ready to proceed, but by then the opportunity had passed. "I said, 'Are you ready for the

train that left the station three weeks ago?'" he said, using a seesaw analogy to describe India being on the "wrong side" of the process.

"As other countries kept doing deals, India just went further back in the line," he said, though he added that New Delhi would eventually work things out, noting the complexity of internal politics and parliamentary approvals.

Lutnick's remarks come days after Trump said Modi was aware of Washington's displeasure over India's continued purchases of Russian oil, warning that the US could raise tariffs on Indian goods "very quickly."

India and the US have held six rounds of negotiations so far on a proposed bilateral trade agreement, including discussions on resolving the 50 per cent tariffs imposed on certain Indian exports to the American market.

## “Let Us Take an Oath to Make Our Planet Sustainable for the Next Generation,” Says Dr. Sukamal Deb at NEIR 2026 Flag-off

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#### OUR CORRESPONDENT

#### COOCH BEHAR:

Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University, named after the iconic social reformer Thakur Panchanan Barma, witnessed a moment of reflection, cultural exchange, and collective resolve with the flag-off of the North East Integration Rally 2026 from its campus on January 9. The event brought together academics, students, civil society representatives, and rally organisers in a programme that blended ideas, music, and purpose.

Thakur Panchanan Barma, also known as Roy Saheb Panchanan Barma, was a towering Rajbanshi leader and reformer from Cooch Behar whose legacy of social awakening continues to shape the region's intellectual and cultural landscape. The university that bears his name served as a fitting venue for an initiative rooted in unity, awareness, and regional integration.

The programme was organised through the collaboration of the university's NSS unit and the North East Integration Rally organisers. The in-



said, linking environmental responsibility with social harmony and regional cooperation. On behalf of KRC Foundations, Prof. Dr. Deb also felicitated the university authorities in recognition of their support and participation.

KRC Foundations CEO Biswadeep Gupta spoke at length on the personal, professional, and social dimensions of human life. Emphasising the role of awareness and information, he remarked that those who read newspapers never lag behind in life. He also outlined the benefits available to student participants, including certificates, internship exposure, feedback mechanisms, online workshops, disaster management orientation, and a free one-year subscription to KRC TIMES.

The programme also highlighted future possibilities of collaboration. The Registrar assured that steps would be taken to establish a HAM Radio Club at the university, underlining the institution's interest in disaster communication and practical skill development.



augural ceremony was attended by Registrar Prof. Dr. Madhab Chandra Adhikari, Examination Controller Dr. Abhijit Deb, Finance Officer Dr. Tapas Manna, and NSS Programme Coordinator Prof. Prabir Kumar Haldar. NEIR 2026 advisor and guest of honour Prof. Dr. Sukamal Deb, KRC Foundations CEO Biswadeep Gupta, Dr. Dipankar Paul, Development

Officer Dr. Soumendra Kumar Saha Choudhury, along with other faculty members and students, were also present.

The initiative for hosting the rally's flag-off at the university was taken by HoD of the Department of Economics, Dr. Ramakrishna Mandal, whose proactive role was acknowledged by speakers throughout the programme. Several speakers lauded the organisers for taking the rally to academic spaces and engaging students directly in conversations around integration, responsibility, and social awareness.

Delivering the welcome address, Registrar Prof. Dr. Madhab Chandra Adhikari spoke about the significance



of the North East Integration Rally, which began its journey from Kolkata on January 4. He congratulated the organisers for what he described as a noble and timely initiative, stressing the importance of such activities in shaping socially conscious and informed citizens.

In a lighter and memorable moment, the Registrar also sang a song, drawing warm applause from the audience.

Chief resource person Prof. Dr. Sukamal Deb, in his address, called upon students and faculty to think beyond immediate concerns and commit themselves to a sustainable future. “Let us take an oath to make our planet sustainable for our next generation,” he

Cultural performances added depth to the event, with students presenting Rabindra Sangeet and an Assamese song. The NEIR theme resonated through the performances, leaving the audience visibly engaged and moved.

As the rally flag was ceremonially flagged off from the varsity, the event concluded on a note of optimism and shared purpose.

The gathering reflected not just a formal launch, but a collective affirmation of dialogue, sustainability, and integration, values that both Thakur Panchanan Barma's legacy and the North East Integration Rally seek to uphold.



Life is a short trip. Enjoy!

# NEIR Team Meets Dept of Culture's Chief Engineer Rimp Dorjee Lepcha



## OUR CORRESPONDENT

**GANGTO:** A delegation of the North East Integration Rally (NEIR), led by Biswadeep Gupta, founder of KRC Foundation, met Rimp Dorjee Lepcha, the Chief Engineer of the Department of Culture, as part of the rally's official engagements. During the meeting, the team briefed the Chief Engineer on the vision and activities of NEIR, which aims to promote cultural exchange, regional integration, and community participation across the Northeast. The Chief Engineer appreciated the initiative and extended his support to the visiting delegation.

The Chief Engineer expressed particular interest in the HAM Radio initiative associated with NEIR, describing it as a valuable tool for communication, learning, and



public engagement.

The Chief Engineer assured that the department would explore ways to take the initiative forward in collaboration with the KRC Foundation in the future.

The Chief Engineer also stated that the Department of Culture would explore the possibility of sending a cultural team to participate in the closing ceremony of NEIR, scheduled to be held in Guwahati on February 4. The North East Integration Rally was flagged off from Kolkata on January 4 and will conclude in Guwahati after traversing several Northeastern states. The North East Integration Rally was flagged off from Kolkata on January 4 and is scheduled to conclude in Guwahati on February 4, covering multiple states in the Northeast along the way.

# Unakoti: Where Ancient Shaivite Legends, Stone Carvings, and the Living History of Tripura Converge

**U**nakoti is one of those places where geography, myth, and history refuse to stay in separate boxes. It sits quietly in northern Tripura, surrounded by forested hills and seasonal waterfalls, yet carries layers of time that stretch from ancient Shaivite worship to modern administrative reshaping.

At its heart is the Unakoti hill, a site that has made Tripura visible on the spiritual map of India. The name itself tells a story. Unakoti literally means one less than a crore. Local legend says a crore of gods and goddesses once passed through this region on their way to Kashi under the leadership of Lord Shiva. When dawn broke, Shiva found that all but one had failed to wake up in time. Enraged, he turned them to stone. What remains are colossal rock-cut faces and reliefs, frozen in time, watching over the forested slopes.

The visual impact is immediate and overwhelming. Massive stone carvings of Lord Shiva dominate the landscape, especially the iconic Unakotiswara Kal Bhairava, whose towering face emerges directly from the rock. Around it are reliefs of Ganesha, Durga, Parvati, and other deities, carved with a mix of classical Hindu iconography and local tribal artistic sensibility. There is no neat symmetry here, no temple walls to frame the divine. The sculptures are part of the hill itself, shaped by human hands but inseparable from nature.

Waterfalls cascade nearby, particularly during the monsoon months, adding movement and sound to an otherwise still and solemn space. The setting feels deliberately untouched. Dense greenery, uneven paths, moss-covered stones, and the constant presence of water give Unakoti a meditative quality that goes beyond ritual. Pilgrims come to worship, tourists come to marvel, and both leave with the sense that this is not a site meant to be rushed.

Every year, Unakoti comes alive during the Ashokastami Mela, held in April. Thousands of devotees gather to take ritual baths in the nearby streams and offer prayers to Lord Shiva. For a few days, the quiet hills turn into a vibrant meeting point of faith, culture, and community. Temporary stalls, chants, and the hum of conversation fill the air, yet the ancient rock faces remain unchanged, observing another chapter of human activity unfold before them.

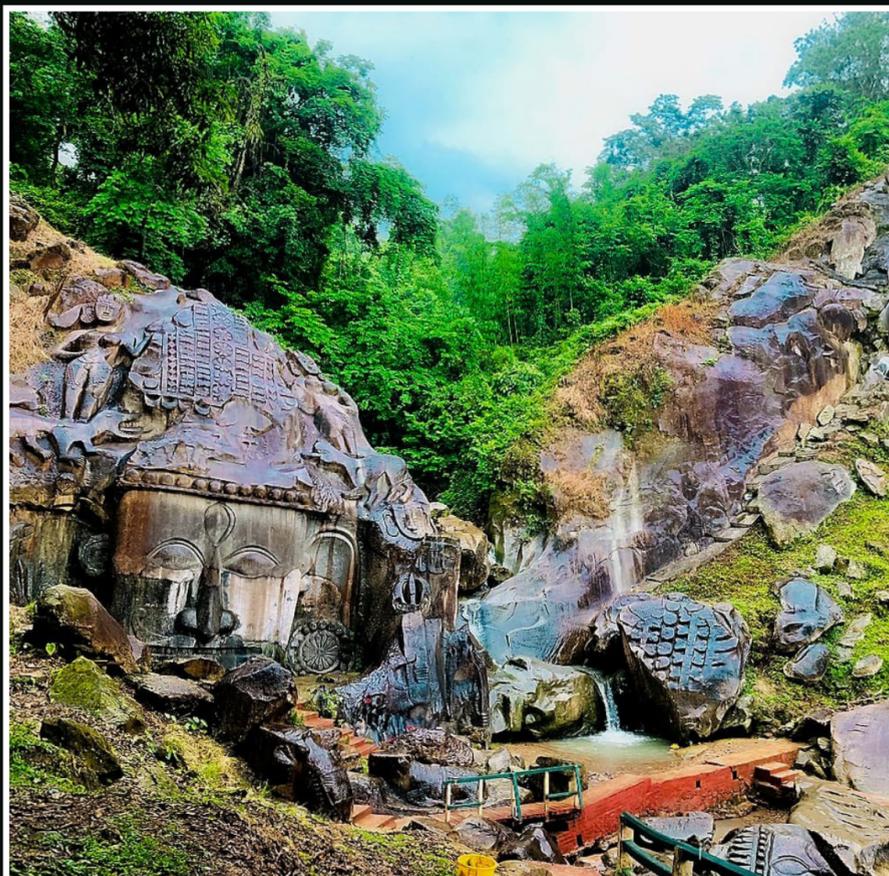
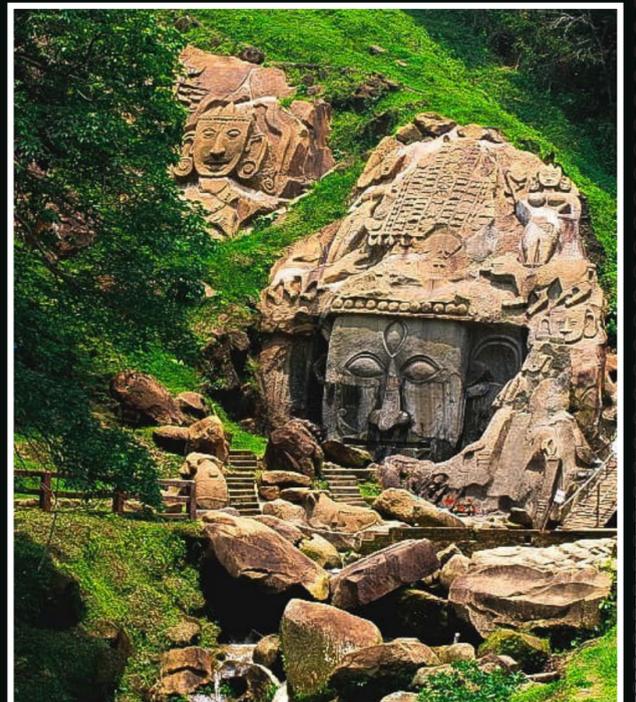
Beyond the pilgrimage site, Unakoti is also a district with a relatively young administrative history. It was carved out of North Tripura district in January 2012, with Kailashahar as its headquarters. Despite being the least populated district in the state, it stands out for its strong literacy rate, ranking fourth highest in Tripura. According to the 2011 Census, the district has a population of 2,76,506, with a near-balanced gender ratio and an overall literacy rate of 86.91 percent.

Administratively, Unakoti district is divided into two subdivisions, Kailashahar and Kumarghat, and four development blocks: Kumarghat, Pecharthal, Chandipur, and Gournagar. These divisions reflect an effort to manage development across both plains and hilly terrain, each with its own challenges and needs.

To understand Unakoti fully, it helps to place it within the larger historical arc of Tripura. The region was once part of the princely state ruled by the Manikya dynasty, a lineage that governed Tripura for centuries. Even during British rule, Tripura retained a degree of administrative independence, though always under British recognition as the paramount power. As recorded in the Rajmala, the royal chronicle of Tripura, 184 kings ruled the state before it merged with the Indian Union on 15 October 1949.

Post-independence, Tripura went through several administrative transitions. It became a C category state in 1950, a Union Territory in 1956, and finally attained full statehood in January 1972 under the North-East Reorganisation Act. District boundaries were redrawn multiple times to accommodate governance and development. North Tripura itself was formed in 1970, later giving rise to Dhalai district in 1995, and eventually Unakoti district in 2012.

Geographically, Unakoti district occupies a strategically sensitive and diverse space. It shares borders with several subdivisions of North Tripura on the northeast, east, and southeast, and with Dhalai district to the south. To the north, it touches the international border with Bangladesh, adding an



element of geopolitical significance to its otherwise quiet profile.

The district's climate follows a monsoon pattern, shaped heavily by its topography. Plains and hills

experience noticeably different conditions. The plains tend to be hotter and more humid, while the hills enjoy a milder, more temperate climate. Four distinct seasons define the year: winter from December to February, pre-monsoon from March to May,

monsoon from June to September, and post-monsoon from October to November. Temperatures generally range between 10 degrees Celsius in winter and 35 degrees Celsius at peak summer.

Rain plays a central role in shaping life here. Thunderstorms often begin as early as April, preceding the southwest monsoon, which arrives by June and continues through September. The heaviest rainfall is typically recorded in June and July, transforming the landscape into a lush green expanse and feeding the streams and waterfalls around Unakoti hill.

Connectivity has improved steadily over the years. National Highway 8 runs through the district, linking it to Assam and the southern parts of Tripura. Rail connectivity comes via the Lumding-Sabroom line of the Northeast Frontier Railway, with Kumarghat railway station serving as the main railhead in the district. From here, passengers can travel to Agartala and other major towns like Dharmanagar, Udaipur, and Belonia, connecting Unakoti to the broader regional network.

Yet, despite better roads and railways, Unakoti retains a sense of distance from the hurried rhythms of urban India. Life here moves at a different pace, shaped by agriculture, local markets, festivals, and the changing seasons. The presence of the ancient Shaivite site is not just a tourist attraction but a living part of the district's identity, influencing cultural practices and collective memory.

What makes Unakoti distinctive is this coexistence of the ancient and the administrative, the mythical and the measurable. On one hand, there are census figures, literacy rates, subdivisions, and blocks. On the other, there are legends carved into stone, worship rituals passed down generations, and a landscape that resists over-structuring.

Unakoti does not announce itself loudly. It does not rely on grand infrastructure or aggressive promotion. Its strength lies in quiet continuity. The rock faces remain, the hills stand firm, the waterfalls return every monsoon, and people continue to arrive, some with folded hands, others with curious eyes.

What this really means is that Unakoti is not just a destination. It is a reminder that history in the Northeast often survives not in textbooks or monuments behind fences, but in living landscapes where belief, art, and nature intersect. And in that intersection, Unakoti holds its place, one less than a crore, yet complete in its own way.



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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.



**11 JAN**  
**Barak Valley Conclave**  
Potential Issues and Challenges of Barak Valley by different sector stakeholders. Includes NGOs, and Governmental institution for development, awareness, awareness, environment, and preservation programs. Participation through invitation only. Different rewards are provided.



## BARAK FESTIVAL

JANUARY 10-12, 2025

**ACTIVITY PROGRAM**



**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 (Webinars, Seminars, Guest Panel, Talks and Conferences) are part of the 'Barak Festival 2025'. Theme: 'One for All, All for One'. Webinars, panel talks, seminars, symposiums, master & corporate talks, speeches, guest speakers, webinars.



**11 JAN**  
**5E For Success Conclave**  
The 4th 5E For Success Conclave is going to be held on the theme: 'From School to Campus to Corporate'. Schools, Educational Institutions and corporate houses can join the Conclave as sponsors.



**10 JAN**  
**Media Conclave**  
Media Conclave (Webinars, Seminars, Guest Panel, Talks and Conferences) are part of the 'Barak Festival 2025'. Theme: 'One for All, All for One'. Webinars, panel talks, seminars, symposiums, master & corporate talks, speeches, guest speakers, webinars.



## BARAK FESTIVAL

JANUARY 10-12, 2025

**ACTIVITY PROGRAM**



**10-12 JAN**  
**Science Studio**  
Use a glimpse of Science to arts through digital. Class VI-XI | Teachers | Seniors, Administrators | Parents. Raw science into real-life experiences of students.



**10-12 JAN**  
**E-Sports**  
FIFA Football | DOTA 2 | CASH PRIZES | Trophy



**10-12 JAN**  
**Book Bank**  
Anti-theft Campaign Book Bank at Silchar, Assam | Online



**10-12 JAN**  
**Book Club**  
Meet Authors, Publishers, Read & Discuss, Buy and Sell Books



**10-12 JAN**  
**Painting Carnival**  
Water Colour painting and Saw-Power Campaign



**DEC-24-JAN'25**  
**Photography**  
Online Photography Contest: River Barak | NE India | Art & Culture of NE | NE Culture Real-Time Photography Contest of 'Barak Festival 2025'



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

## 5E SUCCESS

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Discover valuable experience and learn more about the Industry.

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