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**PERSPECTIVE**

**When maturity hits you, silence is better than arguing.**

**Meghalaya Plans Dedicated Christmas Tourism Policy, Garo Hills in Focus**

SHILLONG

The Meghalaya government is working on a dedicated Christmas Tourism Policy aimed at transforming the state's traditional festive celebrations into a structured global attraction, with special emphasis on the Garo Hills region.

Tourism Minister Timothy D. Shira said on Saturday that the proposed policy seeks to capitalise on the substantial tourist influx witnessed during the Christmas and New Year period, while ensuring better planning and management of festive tourism.

According to Shira, the last festive season recorded strong footfall, with a range of events organised across Meghalaya drawing large crowds. With several tourism projects and destinations nearing completion, the government expects a further rise in tourist arrivals in 2026.

The planned policy is intended to strengthen Meghalaya's image as a premier destination for Christmas celebrations through focused promotion and improved visitor management during peak holiday periods.

The minister noted that tourist interest is increasingly extending to the Garo Hills, supported by gradual improvements in infrastructure. Several destinations in the region that were once difficult to access are now drawing visitors.

To further boost tourism in the Garo Hills, the government is prioritising the upgradation of road connectivity and communication facilities, addressing long-standing infrastructure gaps that had earlier discouraged travellers.

**WHO SAID WHAT**

**"Sabarmati Ashram stands as a powerful reminder of Mahatma Gandhi's ideals which have given strength to countless people around the world. In Ahmedabad this morning, went to Sabarmati Ashram with the Chancellor of Germany, Mr. Friedrich Merz,"**

**Narendra Modi**  
Prime Minister

**Thousands of IDPs Rally in Imphal, Urge Government for Safe Return and Security**



**IMPHAL**  
Thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs), accompanied by volunteers from the Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), staged a massive rally in Imphal West district on Monday, demanding safe return to their homes with adequate security arrangements. The rally began at Takhellambam Leikai and drew a large

turnout, with participants marching in organized groups, holding placards, and chanting slogans to highlight the hardships faced by families living in relief camps.

Tension briefly flared near Keisampat Junction when protesters reportedly clashed verbally with security personnel deployed at the site. After the brief standoff, a delegation of 11 repre-

sentatives, led by COCOMI convenor Khurajam Athouba, was allowed to proceed.

The delegation later met officials at the Chief Secretary's office and submitted a memorandum seeking urgent government intervention. "We have been submitting memorandums outlining the grievances of the people since December 1. The government should respond to the people of Manipur. Yet the present administration has failed even to send a reply. We will continue demanding responses to all the memorandums we have submitted," Athouba said. Following this, the representatives also visited Raj Bhavan and submitted the memorandum again, reiterating their key demand for the safe return and rehabilitation of IDPs to their native villages.

The protest follows a month-long agitation in December, during which IDPs and COCOMI repeatedly sought rehabilitation, resettlement, and restoration of normal life for displaced families. Authorities have yet to issue an official response to the latest memorandum.

**Manipur MP Angomcha Bimol slams BJP over "absence of rule of law" in state**

**IMPHAL**

Manipur Congress MP Angomcha Bimol Ahoijam on Sunday strongly criticised both the state and central BJP-led governments, asserting that "there is a complete absence of rule of law in the state." Speaking at a political conference themed "Women in Politics, Save the Constitution, Save Democracy, Save Manipur" at Sagolband Ingudam Leikai, the MP highlighted the ongoing governance failures that, according to him, have worsened the ethnic crisis in Manipur.

Bimol pointed to what he described as the double standards of the Government of India in handling the state's affairs, saying these lapses contributed to the May 3, 2023 unrest that claimed over 260 lives and displaced more than 60,000 people.

The MP recounted a recent incident where central security forces prevented him from crossing a so-called buffer zone between Bishnupur and Churachandpur districts, despite the government's public denial of such zones. The buffer zones,

advocated by Kuki-Zo groups, have reportedly restricted the free movement of Meitei residents.

To clarify the legal status of these zones, Bimol filed a Right to Information (RTI) application with the Ministry of Home Affairs, seeking official confirmation on their existence, statutory basis, and legal validity. In his statement, he likened the confinement of Meiteis to "fish in a pot" within the valley districts.

Bimol also criticised law enforcement agencies for failing to act during ethnic clashes in Moreh and Churachandpur, areas under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), despite a significant presence of central and state security forces. He alleged that timely intervention could have prevented or mitigated the violence.

"The government's double standards allowed the crisis to escalate unchecked," the MP said, urging accountability and stronger rule of law in the state to prevent similar tragedies in the future.

**Centre May Allow Popular Govt in Manipur by Feb 13: Satyabrata**



**IMPHAL**

Manipur Assembly Speaker Thokchom Satyabrata on Sunday said the Centre is likely to allow the formation of a popular government in the state by February 13, 2026, a year after President's Rule was imposed and the Assembly placed under suspended animation.

Speaking to the media at a function in Imphal East district, Satyabrata, a BJP MLA from the Yaikuk Assembly constituency, expressed confidence that the central leadership would permit the reinstatement of a BJP-led government before the completion of one year of President's Rule.

"The central leadership has assured us that a popular government will be

formed. We are hopeful this will happen by February 13," the Speaker said.

Responding to queries on the conditions under which a new government would be formed, Satyabrata said assurances were given during a closed-door meeting of BJP leaders in New Delhi. He referred to the BJP Manipur Legislature Party meeting held on December 14, 2025, at the party headquarters in the national capital. The meeting was attended by BJP National General Secretary (Organisation) B.L. Santhosh and the party's Northeast coordinator Dr Sambit Patra, among others. According to the Speaker, discussions focused on restoring peace and ensuring progress in the violence-hit state, with assurances given on government formation.

When asked about reports of a proposed BJP legislative meeting in Guwahati in the coming days, Satyabrata said he had heard about it but declined to comment further, stating, "Let us wait and see."

Manipur has been under President's Rule since February 13, 2025, following the resignation of former Chief Minister N. Biren Singh on February 9 that year. The state Assembly remains under suspended animation.

The BJP currently has 37 MLAs in the 60-member Manipur Legislative Assembly. One seat is vacant, bringing the present effective strength of the House to 59.

The political uncertainty continues against the backdrop of prolonged ethnic violence between Meitei and Kuki communities, which erupted on May 3, 2023. The conflict has so far claimed more than 260 lives and displaced around 60,000 people across the state.

**NDA seat-sharing nearly finalised; BJP to skip 22 Muslim-majority Assam seats, says CM Sarma**

**GUWAHATI**

With the February 15 deadline for finalising seat-sharing within the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) approaching, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday said a tentative framework is largely in place, with only "10 to 12 seats" still under discussion.

Speaking on the sidelines of the concluding day of the Chutia Cultural & Ethnic Festival at Birpal Khetra in Titabar, Sarma said, "A general seat-sharing arrangement has been worked out. For instance, AGP in Bokakhat, BJP in Jalukbari, and so on. Only 10 to 12 seats remain to be discussed."

The Chief Minister emphasised that the BJP focuses on candidate merit rather than constituencies alone. "We will give tickets, and people will vote after judging the merit of the candidates. Sitting MLAs will be strictly assessed. If an MLA has done good work, they will get the ticket; if not, they won't," he said.

Sarma also clarified that the BJP will not contest in constituencies where over 80% of the population comprises Muslims. "Around 22 such seats have been excluded from our contest list. We will contest around 103 to 104 seats," he added, noting that Titabar, which currently does not have a BJP MLA, will see a fresh candidate with multiple aspirants in the fray.

Reacting to recent remarks by newly inducted Congress leader



Rezaul Karim Sarkar at a Jorhat programme, Sarma condemned the statement suggesting that Sivasagar and Tinsukia would be "turned into Dhubri" as "serious and deplorable." He alleged that demographic changes in Dhubri had marginalised indigenous communities, claiming that around 80-85% of the population there is now of Bangladesh origin.

"Turning Sivasagar and Tinsukia into Dhubri means bringing Bangladeshis nationals there, just like what happened in Dhubri, Barpeta, Goalpara, and Bongaigaon," Sarma said, adding that Dibrugarh and Charaideo could also be affected.

The Chief Minister criticised Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi for not objecting to the statement,

stating, "Gaurav Gogoi should have immediately stood up and said, 'I am the MP of Sivasagar, let Sivasagar remain Sivasagar.' He failed to do so."

Sarma also defended his own identity amid Congress criticism. "I am the son of Kailash Nath Sarma and Mrinalini Devi. I am an ordinary Assamese from a middle-class family. What more identity is required?" he asked, questioning why Assamese identity was being challenged.

Referring to former Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi's earlier remarks on Badruddin Ajmal, Sarma said, "Today, his son should be asking, 'Who is Rezaul Karim?' or 'Who is Rakibul Hussain?' Instead, they are asking, 'Who is Himanta Biswa Sarma?'"

**Manipuri dancer returns home to distribute US-raised aid for Manipur IDPs**

**IMPHAL**

Eminent Manipuri dancer Rinku Bhat-tacharya Das, who raised funds in the United States for internally displaced persons (IDPs) affected by the ethnic conflict in Manipur, has returned to the state to begin distributing relief assistance among inmates of various relief camps.

Addressing a press conference at the Manipur Press Club on Sunday, Das said her humanitarian initiative was inspired by the emotional impact of witnessing the suffering of displaced families during her visit to Manipur in July 2025.

Recalling her interactions at relief camps, she said the experience left a deep impression on her, particularly the resilience of children and families living under difficult conditions. "When I visited the relief camps last July, I connected deeply with the people there. Their stories, struggles and strength stayed with me, and I felt a responsibility to respond through my art," she said.

Moved by the trauma and resilience of those affected by the crisis, Das conceptualised a special dance production that sought to reflect the pain and endurance of displaced communities. The pro-



duction was later staged in the United States and performed by American students trained under her guidance.

According to Das, the performance received an overwhelming response

from audiences and helped generate awareness about the situation in Manipur. "Many people wanted to help after understanding the crisis through the performance, and that support translat-

ed into donations for families living in relief camps," she said.

She added that the funds raised through the production are now being distributed among IDPs across Manipur. "This effort was possible because of the support of my students, fellow artists and well-wishers. I am here to ensure that the assistance reaches the people it was meant for," Das said.

Currently a PhD candidate in Manipuri Dance at Arizona State University, Das is an accomplished soloist and choreographer who has performed widely in India and the United States. She is empanelled with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) as a solo dance artiste and serves as Director of the Nrityajyoti Dance Academy, where she trains students and promotes Indian classical dance abroad.

Through her initiative, Das said she hopes to continue using art as a medium to build awareness, empathy and solidarity for Manipur's displaced communities. "This may be a small effort, but it comes from a place of deep connection. I believe art can open hearts and bring people together in times of crisis," she said.

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## Tariff test

There is an old maxim about casinos and players—the house never loses. Last week, punters who placed bets on Polymarket.com correctly predicting an invasion of Venezuela learnt that the “snatch and extract” mission doesn’t qualify as an invasion and therefore doesn’t trigger payouts. Even as the issue is being debated, punters are placing their chips predicting the outcome of tariffs case in the US Supreme Court. Only 23 percent—less than one in four—believe the court will rule in favour of Trump’s tariffs. The punters will know next week if they lost their shirts or won, and will collect their payouts.

The one-time owner of Trump Taj Mahal and many other casinos plans to continue to collect. Donald J Trump is planning on winning even if he loses the court case. The war room of the US president is ready with a parade of options—plans B to Z. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, effectively the quarterback of Trump’s economic war room, said, “What is not in doubt is our ability to continue collecting tariffs at roughly the same level,” even if the justices strike them down.

On January 14, the US Supreme Court is expected to rule on case No 24-1287, Learning Resources Inc & Petitioners vs Donald J Trump, President of the United States, et al. The Trump administration used the 1977 International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) to impose tariffs on imports. The IEEPA allows the US president to address declared emergencies concerning “unusual and extraordinary” threats to national security, foreign policy, or the economy, including the authority to “regulate” or “prohibit” imports. The crux: no president in the past 50 years has used the law to “impose tariffs—let alone the sweeping worldwide tariffs”. The petition, filed by educational toymaker Learning Resources, small businesses and 12 state governments, asks “whether the IEEPA authorises the president to impose tariffs”, particularly since the US Constitution gives Congress the power to regulate foreign commerce and impose import tariffs. The importers argued the IEEPA authorises sanctions or asset freezes, not broad duties.

US courts, including a federal one that adjudicates on international trade, struck down the tariffs since the IEEPA contains no explicit statutes on them. The Trump team has argued “regulate... importation” covers imposition of duties. The courts pointed out that the major questions doctrine requires Congress to explicitly grant authority. The justices, during the hearings, raised fundamental questions on definitions and the separation of powers.

What are the possible outcomes? The best-case scenario for Trump is that the Supreme Court upholds the tariffs entirely—a jackpot that only about one in three punters on Kalshi.com is currently betting on. The worst-case outcome—and the jackpot for global exporters—is a total strike-down. Beyond the gamblers, even the legal cognoscenti—interpreting the “tell signs” from other rulings—suspect that Trump may lose. This would mean rollback of the Liberation Day tariffs and the start of a “refund crisis” for the more than \$150 billion collected.

The Trump administration is prepared for the day after. It has arranged an array of three-digit codes to keep the tariff flag flying. Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1934, under a Nixon-era precedent, allows the immediate imposition of 15 percent tariff across the board while building cases under other sections. The commerce department can launch expedited investigations to tag imports in strategic sectors (steel, auto, tech) as security threats and impose tariffs under Section 232, as was done during Trump 1.0. Section 301 empowers US Trade Representative to probe country-specific practices for remedial action. Section 338 can be used on countries that discriminate against US exports. None of these afford the kind of sweeping, universal tariffs attempted under the IEEPA. Team Trump hopes the Supreme Court would weigh ramifications and pray the order would be nuanced even if the issue seems binary.

Courts often look for an off-ramp in constitutional face-offs with the executive. The queries of the justices suggest a two-pronged approach. They could invoke the major questions doctrine and rule that the power to regulate is not a power to impose tariff. However, it may choose to not pull the plug, citing risks of an economic chaos and, instead, direct the administration to seek ratification by the Congress, shifting the onus on to legislators.

There are other off-ramps cited in case laws. The court could rule that the administration used the wrong law, yet uphold the tariffs relying on the Remand Without Vacatur doctrine, which allows the executive time for housekeeping. In this scenario, the USTR would pivot to an expedited investigation, reclassifying the tariffs under the security tag. Alternatively, the court could accept the president’s power to act in a crisis, but reject the permanency of tariffs specifying a sunset clause. Beyond that, the House and the Senate must bless the trade policy. A day after the November 5 hearings in the Supreme Court, Trump hoped for a victory and, at the same time, acknowledged the need for a backup, stating, “We’ll have to develop a game two plan.” USTR Jamieson Greer is leading the Plan B track and timelines have been drawn out. The buzz is that pre-baked or pre-filed investigations are queued up, ready to roll. Team Trump is also examining the potential of United States Reciprocal Trade Act (HR 735), which explicitly authorises the president to negotiate and impose duties on imports, to be teed up just in case.

Dwight Eisenhower once said, “Plans are worthless, but planning is everything.” Trump is set to spin the roulette again to win. After all, the house never loses! The tariff saga is far from over.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

“The simple things are also the most extraordinary things, and only the wise can see them.”

—Paulo Coelho

# SWAMI VIVEKANANDA IN AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE



DR. VISHAL SHARMA

Swami Vivekananda famously remarked:

“Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested, all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas.”

In this age of intelligence, where the power of Artificial Intelligence (AI) lies in processing large amounts of data at lightning speed, this understanding of education has become more crucial than ever.

Swami Vivekananda’s birth anniversary on 12 January has been observed as National Youth Day in India since 1984, underscoring the Nation’s recognition of his enduring vision and unwavering faith in the transformative power of young minds. Born as Narendra Nath Datta on 12 January 1863 in Calcutta (now Kolkata), Swami Vivekananda emerged as one of India’s most influential thinkers and spiritual leaders. A Hindu monk and the foremost disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, he blended spiritual depth with scientific clarity. Revered as the wandering monk of India and often described as a scientist of spirituality for his rational, fearless, and experiential approach to truth. Vivekananda attained global recognition through his historic address at the Parliament of the World’s Religions in Chicago in 1893, where he presented India’s spiritual wisdom to the world with confidence and scientific facts.

On the occasion of National Youth Day 2026, the relevance of Swami Vivekananda’s teachings for today’s youth in the age of Artificial Intelligence emerges as a pressing and critical question. Today’s young generation is growing up alongside AI systems that influence education, careers, communication, and even decision-making. While AI provides unprecedented speed, efficiency, and access to information, it remains value-neutral and directionless without human guidance. Vivekananda’s emphasis on self-belief, discipline, character-building, critical inquiry, and fearless thinking offers a moral and intellectual compass for youth navigating this technology-driven era. His message reminds us that while machines may enhance intelligence, it is strong character and clarity of purpose that shape wise individuals and responsible societies. He famously declared, “You cannot believe in God until you believe in yourself,” urging people to recognize their inherent strength and divinity. As AI systems take over routine cognitive tasks, this call to discover one’s unique human capabilities becomes increasingly pertinent.

Humans & Artificial Intelligence  
Artificial Intelligence (AI) has captured global attention because it is spreading at an unprecedented speed and scale, faster than almost any previous technology. From smartphones and banking apps to healthcare diagnostics, education platforms, and public governance, AI is rapidly reshaping how societies function. Machines can now analyse vast amount of data at lightning speed, recognise patterns and extract meaningful conclusions,

generate language, and make decisions once associated exclusively with human intelligence. While these advances promise efficiency and innovation but have also raised urgent questions about ethics, bias, inclusion, accountability, and the place of human values in an increasingly automated world.

We often wonder how artificial intelligence is able to perform so many complex tasks at such extraordinary speed. The answer lies in the way it learns by processing and learning from vast amounts of data. Swami Vivekananda has said, “Experience is the only teacher we have. We may talk and reason all our lives, but we shall not understand a word of truth until we experience it ourselves.” This insight invites an interesting reflection in the age of artificial intelligence. AI, too, learns through experience by processing vast volumes of data, identifying patterns, refining its responses, and improving performance through repeated training. Much like humans learn through observation and practice, AI systems evolve through exposure to data and feedback. The key difference, of course, is that AI’s experience is digital and mathematical, not conscious or intuitive. It does not feel, reflect, or possess awareness; its learning is driven by algorithms rather than inner understanding.

Youth in the Age of AI  
Youth are among the most active users of the internet and AI technologies and are now facing unique challenges in this digital landscape. Their constant engagement with digital platforms makes them more vulnerable to distraction, over-dependence, and difficulties in disconnecting, often struggling with digital overload or burnout. Without proper guidance, training and awareness, they are also at a higher risk of using AI unethically whether by spreading misinformation, misusing data, or making decisions without considering ethical consequences. Prolonged exposure to technology and lack of balance can contribute to serious mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, addiction, and in some cases, even substance abuse. The digital world, while connecting people virtually, often isolates them emotionally. Social media comparisons, constant notifications, algorithm-driven content consumption, and reduced face-to-face interactions have contributed to anxiety, low self-esteem, and emotional fatigue. In some cases, this mental vacuum pushes young people towards drugs and other harmful escapes.

Swamiji’s Teachings for AI Youth  
In this context, the teachings of Swami Vivekananda, a prominent youth icon, becomes especially relevant today. Though he lived in an era untouched by digital technology, his focus on character, ethical strength, education, and human dignity offers critical guidance for navigating the challenges of the AI age. At a time when anxiety, low self-esteem, emotional fatigue and substance abuse are emerging as serious global concerns, Vivekananda’s timeless wisdom offers a clear roadmap to guide the youth toward a life of purpose, discipline, and inner fulfillment.  
Inner Strength and Self-Reliance

One of Swami Vivekananda’s core teachings is the cultivation of inner strength and self-reliance. He emphasized that every individual possesses immense potential, which can be realized through self-discipline, courage and determination. For those struggling with depression or addiction, his powerful words “Strength is life, weakness is death” acts as a source of hope and motivation. Depression and Drug dependency often arise from a sense of inadequacy or an attempt to escape life’s challenges. Vivekananda’s call to face difficulties with courage and confidence empowers individuals to break free from the chains destructive cycles.

Youth as the Torchbearers of Change  
Swami Vivekananda’s message to the youth was direct and inspiring: “Arise, awake, and stop not until the goal is reached”. He envisioned young people as the driving force of societal transformation. Vivekananda’s teachings encourage young minds to channel their energy into constructive pursuits, such as education, social service, and spiritual growth. By doing so, they can overcome destructive habits and contribute positively to society.

Power of Will and Positive Thought  
Another cornerstone of Vivekananda’s teachings is the power of will and focused thinking. He believed that a strong and focused mind could overcome any obstacle. He famously stated, “Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life – think of it, dream of it, live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone. This is the way to success”. Addiction often weakens an individual’s willpower, trapping them in a cycle of dependence. Vivekananda’s emphasis on positive thought, self-belief, and determination can inspire individuals to reclaim control over their lives.

Building a Helpful Community  
Vivekananda also stressed the importance of collective effort and mutual support. He believed that a strong and united community could uplift its members, fostering an environment of growth and healing. He said “the best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” Families, friends, and social organizations can draw inspiration from his teachings to support individuals battling addiction. Through education, awareness, and empathy, communities can create a nurturing space that encourages recovery and discourages substance abuse.

Swami Vivekananda believed that the youth are the real builders of a nation. He famously declared, “Give me a few men and women who are pure and selfless, and I shall shake the world.” Today, when young minds are surrounded by unprecedented technological power, this statement acquires renewed significance. As technology advances, it reminds us that while both humans and AI may learn through experience, only human experience carries wisdom, values, and consciousness. This distinction is crucial at a time when societies are increasingly tempted to equate intelligence with speed, data, and efficiency alone. Swami Vivekananda repeatedly emphasised that true knowledge is not

merely the accumulation of information but the transformation of character. His thought reminds us that the true measure of progress lies not merely in technological capability, but in the moral and spiritual development of human beings who create and use that technology.

The Final Thought

In conclusion, as Artificial Intelligence reshapes the world at unprecedented speed, Swami Vivekananda’s timeless wisdom serves as a much-needed anchor. Perhaps the deepest anxiety surrounding artificial intelligence is existential: what happens to human values in a world increasingly shaped by machines? As

### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

“People like Vivekananda, Rabindranath, Ram Mohan used to roam on this land, now file chor, coal chor is roaming this land. Why because the atmosphere is such, now it is high time to rejuvenate the culture of Bengal. We have to make this land, the land of Vivekananda,” Majumdar told reporters in Kolkata.

The Union Minister’s comments come a few days after the Enforcement Directorate (ED) raided the political consultancy firm I-PAC’s office in relation to a coal pilferage scam, with CM Banerjee coming to the scene of the raid and allegedly took “key evidence” the ED needed to probe the allegations of money laundering.

Majumdar also urged people to take an oath on the auspicious day of Vivekananda’s birth anniversary, to remove the people associated with these scams. “We should try to make Bengal, the heart of Cultural Revolution and Educational Revolution, once again and today is the most auspicious day we should take the oath for that and to do so we have to remove the people those are associated with all these scam and I feel that the TMC government should be removed to bring back the fame of West Bengal again,” he said.

Sukanta Majumdar  
Union Minister



algorithms outperform humans in specific tasks, there is a risk of equating intelligence with computation alone. Vivekananda offered a far richer understanding of intelligence: one that included empathy, self-awareness, moral discernment, and spiritual depth.

These qualities cannot be automated. He reminds us that while machines may learn from data, only humans can learn from values; while AI can process information, only humans can transform knowledge into wisdom. For India’s youth, the challenge is not merely to master AI, but to master themselves. A drug-free, mentally strong, ethically educated, and purpose-driven youth is the real foundation of Viksit Bharat. By blending the power of AI with the spirit of Swami Vivekananda’s teachings, India can move towards a future that is not only technologically advanced, but also deeply humane, inclusive, and enlightened.

In this sense, Vivekananda is not a historical figure confined to the past, but a contemporary thinker whose ideas can shape India’s response to one of the most transformative technologies of our time. In the end, the relevance of Swami Vivekananda in the age of artificial intelligence lies in a simple yet profound truth: technology can transform the world, but only values can humanise it.

(The author is a Fulbright Fellow USA and Head of Electronics & IT, GCW Udhampur)

# Gauhati HC Bar objections won't stop future-ready projects: CJI Surya Kant

GUWAHATI

Chief Justice of India Justice Surya Kant on Sunday expressed surprise and concern over opposition by sections of the Gauhati High Court Bar Association (GHCBA) to the proposed integrated Judicial Court Complex in North Guwahati, asserting that personal or vested interests cannot be allowed to impede infrastructure development meant for the future of the judiciary.

The CJI made the remarks after laying the foundation stone for the integrated Judicial Court Complex at Rangmahal in North Guwahati on January 11. The proposed facility is envisaged to also house the Gauhati High Court, bringing multiple judicial institutions under one roof.

Describing the project as future-ready, Justice Kant said the new complex has been designed to meet the evolving needs of the judicial system. "The integrated Judicial Court Complex is envisaged to match the aspirations of the future," he said, stressing the importance of modern, consolidated infrastructure.



As the head of the judiciary, the CJI said he is duty-bound to look beyond immediate requirements and cater to future generations of lawyers, judges and litigants. Infrastructure planning, he noted, must take into account the steady growth in the num-

ber of legal professionals and court users. Justice Kant said he was taken aback to learn that the Gauhati High Court Bar Association was opposing a project aimed at improving efficiency and accessibility. "Those opposing the new court complex

are either ill-informed or not realising the needs of new members of the Bar," he observed.

Taking a firm stand, the CJI said resistance based on personal convenience or vested interests cannot override the larger public interest. "Personal vested interests should not be valid grounds for opposing the development of infrastructure for the future," he added.

The GHCBA has been objecting to the proposed relocation of the High Court complex from the heart of Guwahati to the northern bank of the Brahmaputra. Defending the choice of location, Justice Kant said the site was strategically selected and planned to offer comprehensive facilities within a single, integrated campus.

According to the CJI, the new complex will enhance efficiency, improve accessibility and create a better working environment for the judiciary, aligning Assam's judicial infrastructure with national standards and long-term requirements.

# Akhil Gogoi hits out at Rezaul Karim Sarkar's controversial remark

SIVASAGAR

Sivasagar MLA and Rajiv Dal chief Akhil Gogoi on Sunday reacted sharply to a controversial remark allegedly made by Rezaul Karim Sarkar, who formally joined the Congress earlier in the day, warning that any deliberate attempt to provoke social or political discord would be firmly resisted. Sarkar was quoted as saying that he would "turn Sivasagar into Dhubri and Dhubri into Sivasagar," a comment that triggered strong reactions across the political spectrum. Responding to the remark, Akhil Gogoi said the intent behind the statement was crucial. "If the comment was made unintentionally, it can be viewed differently. But if it was deliberate, I will oppose it in the strongest possible terms," he said.

The Sivasagar legislator further alleged that Sarkar maintained close links with the ruling establishment and said these associations must be severed. Gogoi claimed that during eviction

drives, whenever questions are raised before the Chief Minister, he often responds by stating that he has spoken to Rezaul Karim Sarkar and the All Assam Minority Students' Union (AAMSU).

The remarks came on a day marked by significant political developments, with Sarkar, a former president of AAMSU, joining the Congress ahead of the 2026 Assam Assembly elections.

Sarkar was inducted into the Congress at a programme held at the Manabendra Sharma Complex in Guwahati in the presence of Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president Gaurav Gogoi. Several senior party leaders, including All India Congress Committee (AICC) secretary Manoj Chauhan, were also present. Along with Sarkar, several former vice-presidents of AAMSU joined the Congress. Rup Kumar Medhi, a leader from the Mising community and a long-serving president of the MMK, was among those inducted.

## Cachar police arrest another fake doctor, seize forged MBBS certificates

SILCHAR

Cachar Police have arrested another individual for allegedly practising medicine using forged qualifications, continuing their sustained crackdown on illegal medical practitioners in the district.

The accused has been identified as Shamim Ahmed Laskar, a resident of the Bhaga area under Dholai, police said.

The arrest followed a written complaint filed by Dr Abhijit Neog, Anti-Quackery and Vigilance Officer of the Assam Council of Medical Registration (ACMR). Acting on the complaint, police conducted a raid on Saturday at the accused's medical chamber and apprehended him on the spot.

During the operation, police seized forged MBBS certificates and other related documents from Laskar. Preliminary investigations revealed that he had been running the medical chamber illegally for a considerable period, posing a serious risk to public health.

Police officials said further investigation is underway to determine the full extent of his activities and to ascertain whether others were involved in the illegal practice. Over the past few months, Cachar Police have arrested around 20 fake doctors as part of an intensified drive against quackery and unqualified medical practice in the district.

## Manipur books 18,759 traffic violations since 2024, collects over Rs .5 crore in fines



IMPHAL

Manipur's Traffic Control Police have recorded 18,759 cases of traffic violations and collected more than ₹5 crore in fines since 2024 as part of an intensified drive to curb motor vehicle offences, official records show.

According to data released by the authorities, a total of ₹5,19,19,400 was collected from traffic rule violators over the past two years.

In 2025 alone, the Traffic Police issued 15,700 challans between January 1 and December 31, collecting ₹4,47,85,700 in fines. In comparison, during the previous year from January 1 to December 31, 2024-3,059 cases of traffic violations were recorded, resulting in the collection of ₹71,33,700.

Manipur Government Transport Director Khumanthem Diana (IAS) said enforcement efforts have continued into the new year as well. From January 5 to January 11, 2026, the police issued 77 challans and collected ₹74,500 in fines.

Officials said the most common traffic offences in the state include the use of mobile phones while driving, riding two-wheelers without helmets, underage driving, failure to wear seat belts, use of loud sound devices in vehicles, and violation of traffic signals.

The authorities said sustained enforcement and awareness drives are being carried out to improve road discipline and reduce accidents across the state.

# Tripura Congress demands restoration of MNREGA, opposes VB GRAM G Act as 'attack on people's rights'

AGARTALA

The Tripura Congress on Sunday demanded the restoration of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) and called for the scrapping of the VB GRAM G Act, alleging that the new legislation seeks to deprive people of their basic rights while imposing an additional financial burden on the state.

The demand was raised during a silent protest organised by the Tripura Congress Committee below the statue of Mahatma Gandhi at the Circuit House in Agartala. The protest was held simultaneously across all nine organisational districts of the party in the state.

Addressing the gathering, Tripura Congress Committee president Asish Kumar Saha



said MNREGA was enacted to guarantee 100 days of employment and to protect the right to work for rural households. He alleged that the present government had effectively scrapped MNREGA by replacing it with the VB GRAM G Act.

"MNREGA was implemented in the name of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation. By removing his name, the present government has maligned Gan-

dhi's legacy before the world. This is part of a larger conspiracy by the BJP and the RSS," Saha alleged.

Former minister and Congress MLA Sudip Roy Barman, who also participated in the protest, said the Congress was holding sit-in demonstrations across the country and in every district of Tripura to demand the restoration of MNREGA.

Roy Barman alleged that the

VB GRAM G Act was designed to curtail the right to work and wages guaranteed under MNREGA. "Under the new act, work will no longer be universal. It will be decided selectively in certain areas or villages, creating widespread uncertainty and placing an extra financial burden on the state," he said. Calling the move a direct attack on the basic rights of the people, the Congress leader demanded the immediate reinstatement of MNREGA and the repeal of the VB GRAM G Act. He also alleged that the removal of Mahatma Gandhi's name from the employment scheme reflected a deliberate attempt to undermine his legacy.

The Congress leaders reiterated that they would continue their agitation until MNREGA is restored and the VB GRAM G Act is withdrawn.

## Four new lighthouses planned on Brahmaputra to boost inland navigation safety

GUWAHATI/VISAKHAPATNAM

Four new lighthouses will be constructed at Bogibeel, Silghat, Pandu and Biswanathghat along National Waterway-2 on the Brahmaputra to strengthen inland navigational safety, Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal announced on Sunday.

The announcement was made at the valedictory session of the Indian Lighthouse Festival 3.0 in Visakhapatnam, where the Union Minister underlined the growing role of lighthouses beyond coastal regions to support riverine transport and safety infrastructure.

Addressing the concluding session of the two-day festival, Sonowal said the event had transformed Visakhapatnam into "a beacon of India's coastal culture and maritime



legacy," showcasing how lighthouses can connect people with history, culture and livelihoods.

He said the festival went beyond a symbolic celebration, demonstrating the potential of lighthouse-led initiatives through cultural performances, local crafts, coastal cuisine, fashion showcases and illuminated night-time displays. The event, he

added, witnessed enthusiastic participation from families, youth, artists, students and entrepreneurs.

Highlighting a key initiative, Sonowal announced the development of Andhra Pradesh's first Lighthouse Museum in Visakhapatnam. Envisioned as a hub for maritime education, heritage conservation and tourism, the project will be implemented through a memorandum of understanding between the Visakhapatnam Port Authority and the Directorate General of Lighthouses and Lightships. Under the agreement, over 3,100 square metres of land at the Old Lighthouse area within the port premises will be allocated for the museum.

Building on the success of converting 75 lighthouses into tourism destinations across the country, the minister said the government now

plans to develop 25 more, with a special focus on identifying suitable locations in Andhra Pradesh to further boost lighthouse tourism along the eastern coast.

Reiterating the government's broader maritime vision, Sonowal also referred to the construction of a 77-metre-high Lighthouse Museum at the National Maritime Heritage Complex, being developed at a cost of ₹266 crore. Once completed, it is expected to become the world's tallest lighthouse museum and among the largest maritime museums globally.

He said the addition of new lighthouses on the Brahmaputra would significantly improve navigational safety on one of India's most important inland waterways, while reinforcing the Centre's commitment to strengthening inland water transport infrastructure.

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## Like visiting Vrindavan, I went to Korea for Taekwondo: BJP MLA Khemchand on martial arts journey



IMPHAL

BJP legislator and Taekwondo master Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Sunday likened his journey to South Korea for advanced martial arts training to

the spiritual pilgrimage Meitei Vaishnavite Hindus undertake to Vrindavan. Speaking at a reception organised in his honour in the Singjamei Assembly constituency, Khemchand, a 5th Dan Taekwondo exponent, said that mastering the sport was incomplete without visiting the birthplace of the discipline.

"For Meitei elders, Hinduism feels incomplete without visiting Vrindavan. In the same way, I felt that learning Taekwondo was incomplete without going to Korea," he said. Khemchand began his Taekwondo journey in 1978 and travelled to Seoul in 1990 to pursue advanced training at the World Taekwondo Academy, Kukkiwon, the global headquarters of the martial art.

The reception was attended by notable figures including Raj Kakoti, vice-president of the Assam Olympic Association, and Peleselie Khezhei, president of the North East Taekwondo Federation.

Kakoti highlighted Khemchand's early contributions, noting that the master arrived in Guwahati in 1980 during the height of the anti-foreigner agitation in Assam and established the All Assam Taekwon-

do Association in 1982, continuing to teach despite facing harassment. After the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985, he began training Assam Police personnel.

Khezhei praised Khemchand's regional influence, saying, "He is not only an MLA but a sportsman at heart. His guidance has shaped Taekwondo across the Northeast and the country." R K Shivachandra, a fellow Taekwondo exponent, added that Khemchand played a pivotal role in forming the Taekwondo Federation of India and served as its vice-president. Addressing the ongoing crisis in Manipur, Khemchand urged the Meitei community to take a constructive role in restoring peace. "Being the majority community, Meiteis need to play the role of a big brother in resolving the conflict," he said, stressing the importance of rebuilding trust and addressing lingering fears about travel and security across different areas.

Khemchand, now recognised as a pioneer of Taekwondo in Manipur and Assam, said that fostering harmony among Manipur's 36 communities is essential for lasting peace in the state.

## Rising MSM population poses HIV prevention challenge in Mizoram: MSACS

AIZAWL

The Mizoram State AIDS Control Society (MSACS) has flagged growing concern over a steady rise in the number of men who have sex with men (MSM) in the state, warning that the trend presents a significant public health challenge in efforts to control the spread of HIV.

According to MSACS officials, 1,105 MSM have so far been registered with the society and are currently receiving counselling services. However, they said the registered figure represents only a fraction of the actual number, as many individuals remain outside the formal health system.

"This group is considered at higher risk of HIV infection. If they remain unidentified and un-reached, it becomes a serious concern for public health," MSACS officials said.

They noted that fear of disclosure continues to be a major barrier to registration. Many MSM, including married men, avoid coming forward due to concerns about social stigma and exposure of identity. "Even when we are aware of individuals, treatment and targeted interventions cannot be provided unless they are formally registered," officials added.

Contrary to the perception that MSM populations are largely concentrated in urban areas, MSACS said such individuals are found not only in Aizawl but also in rural villages across Mizoram, suggest-

ing that the actual numbers are significantly higher than official records indicate.

Official data show that since 1990, a total of 33,781 people have been diagnosed with HIV in Mizoram. Between April and November 2025 alone, 3,257 new HIV infections were detected from 1,45,525 blood samples tested, reflecting a positivity rate of 2.24 per cent.

Sexual transmission remains the dominant mode of HIV transmission in the state, accounting for 70.04 per cent of cases. This is followed by sharing of syringes at 27 per cent, mother-to-child transmission at 1.8 per cent, while in 0.90 per cent of cases the mode of transmission could not be determined.

Health and Family Welfare Minister Lalrinpuoi said Mizoram currently ranks third in the country in terms of HIV prevention efforts. She said the state has 14 antiretroviral therapy (ART) centres, including four in Aizawl, with the remaining centres attached to district hospitals.

At present, 18,231 people living with HIV are alive and receiving ART in the state. However, 1,169 individuals who had registered for treatment have discontinued therapy, while more than 7,000 HIV-positive persons are yet to begin ART, the minister said, underlining the need for sustained outreach, counselling and stigma-free access to treatment.

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## ISRO faces second consecutive setback with PSLV-C62 mission



BENGALURU

The scientific community's hopes of a smooth PSLV comeback were dashed on Monday, January 12, 2026, as the PSLV-C62 mission suffered a major setback.

ISRO Chairman V Narayanan said: "PSLV-C62 was launched as scheduled, and everything proceeded as planned until the third stage separation. Disturbances were observed at the end of the third stage. The flight path deviated from the plan. We are analysing the data."

The launch took place at 10:18 am from the first launch pad of the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota. This was the first satellite launch of 2026, with ISRO aiming to restore confidence in the PSLV, often referred to as the organisation's workhorse. It follows the PSLV-C61 setback in May 2025, which experienced a technical glitch in the third stage due to changes in cham-

ber pressure.

Ahead of the launch, Chairman V Narayanan had visited Tirupati Temple on Saturday.

The launch took place at 10:18 am from the first launch pad of the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota.

The PSLV-C62 was carrying the EOS-N1, also known as Anvesha, an advanced Earth observation satellite developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). The satellite is intended for strategic defence purposes as well as civilian applications such as agriculture, urban mapping, and environmental monitoring.

This marked the 64th PSLV flight and the fifth mission of the PSLV-DL variant. ISRO had also aimed to celebrate its 101st orbital launch with this mission. The rocket had a lift-off mass of 260 tonnes, stood 44.4 metres tall, and was scheduled to reach an altitude of 505.291 km.

In addition to EOS-N1, the mission carried 15 co-passenger satellites from commercial and international agencies, including a demonstration of the Kestrel Initial Technology Demonstrator (KID) from a Spanish startup. KID is a small-scale prototype of a re-entry vehicle, planned for splashdown in the South Pacific Ocean following deployment. The mission plan involved placing EOS-N1 and 14 co-passenger satellites into a Sun-synchronous orbit, while the fourth stage would de-boost the KID capsule into a re-entry trajectory. The PSLV has a legacy of 63 successful flights, including Chandrayaan-1, Mars Orbiter Mission, Aditya-L1, and Astrosat, and in 2017 set a world record by deploying 104 satellites in a single mission.

This second consecutive setback underscores the challenges of complex space missions, even for ISRO's most reliable launch vehicle.

## Gandhi's teachings are needed more than ever: German Chancellor Friedrich Merz at Sabarmati Ashram

AHMEDABAD

On his first visit to India, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz on Monday said Mahatma Gandhi's legacy unites Indians and Germans as friends and his teachings are more needed today than ever.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Merz visited the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad in the morning and paid homage to Mahatma Gandhi.

PM Modi, who reached the ashram a few minutes earlier, welcomed the German Chancellor upon his arrival.

After paying floral tributes at the statue of the Father of the Nation, both leaders visited 'Hridaya Kunj', a room inside the ashram where Mahatma Gandhi and his wife Kasturba lived during India's freedom struggle.

At the ashram, Merz also witnessed how khadi yarn is woven using the 'charkha', or spinning wheel.

Mahatma Gandhi spun yarn on the charkha as part of his campaign to promote khadi and self-reliance during India's struggle for independence.

In a note in the ashram visitors' book, Merz stated, "Mahatma Gandhi's unshakeable belief in the power of freedom and dignity of each and every individual inspires us to this day. This legacy unites Indians and Germans as friends in a world that may more than ever be in need of Gandhi's teachings."

Sabarmati Ashram, also known as Gandhi Ashram, was established by Mahatma Gandhi in 1917. It was home to Gandhi from 1917 until 1930 and served as one of the main centres of India's freedom struggle.

After paying tributes at the historic ashram, both leaders reached Sabarmati Riverfront, where PM Modi inaugurated the International Kite Festival-2026 and later enjoyed kite flying with Chancellor Merz.

At the venue, Modi and Merz interacted with women artisans and understood the process of making kites. After the inauguration, both



the leaders took a ride on the ground in an open vehicle and also tried their hands at flying kites.

As many as 135 kite flyers from 50 countries and nearly 1,000 enthusiasts from India are participating in the International Kite Festival-2026 in Ahmedabad, according to a Gujarat government release.

As part of the festival organised by the state government, the kite flyers have already visited places like

Rajkot, Surat, Dholavira (in Kutch) and Statue of Unity (Narmada) during the last two days and enthralled the visitors, it said, adding that the festival in Ahmedabad will continue till January 14.

The festival is held annually ahead of 'Uttarayan', also known as Makar Sankranti, which falls on January 14 and marks the sun's northward journey and the transition towards summer.

Last year, the festival attracted more than 3.83 lakh visitors across Gujarat. Through the 'International Kite Festival', Gujarat Tourism is attracting visitors to leading cultural and tourist destinations, such as Dholavira and the Statue of Unity.

More than five lakh tourists are expected to visit Gujarat to witness the International Kite Festival this year, the release added.

## INTERNATIONAL

### 'Iran called to negotiate, but we may have to act before a meeting' says Trump



WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump said Sunday that Iran's leadership had called him seeking "to negotiate" after he repeatedly threatened to intervene militarily if Tehran killed protesters.

For two weeks, Iran has been rocked by a protest movement that has swelled in spite of a crackdown rights groups warn has become a "massacre".

Initially sparked by anger over the rising cost of living, the demonstrations have evolved into a serious challenge of the theocratic system in place since the 1979 revolution.

Information has continued to trickle out of Iran despite a days-long internet shutdown, with videos filtering out of capital Tehran and other cities over the past three nights showing large demonstrations.

As reports emerge of a growing protest death toll, and images show bodies piled outside a morgue, Trump said Tehran indicated its willingness to talk.

"The leaders of Iran called" yesterday, Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One, adding that "a meeting is being set up... They want to negotiate." He added, however, that "we may have to act before a meeting".

The US-based Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI) said it had received "eyewitness accounts and credible reports indicating that hundreds of protesters have been killed across Iran during the current internet shutdown".

"A massacre is unfolding," it said. The Norway-based NGO Iran Human Rights (IHR) said it confirmed the killing of at least 192 protesters but that the actual toll could be much higher.

"Unverified reports indicate that at least several hundreds, and according to some sources, more than 2,000 people may have been killed," said IHR.

More than 2,600 protesters have been arrested, IHR estimates.

A video circulating on Sunday showed dozens of bodies accumulating outside a morgue south of Tehran.

The footage, geolocated by AFP to Kahrizak, showed bodies wrapped in black bags, with what appeared to be grieving relatives searching for loved ones.

President Donald Trump talks to reporters as he walks on the South Lawn of the White House, Sunday, Jan. 11, 2026, in Washington.

In Tehran, an AFP journalist

described a city in a state of near paralysis.

The price of meat has nearly doubled since the start of the protests, and many shops are closed. Those that do open must close at around 4:00 or 5:00 pm, when security forces deploy en masse.

There were fewer videos showing protests on social media Sunday, but it was not clear to what extent that was due to the internet shutdown.

One widely shared video showed protesters again gathering in the Pounak district of Tehran shouting slogans in favour of the ousted monarchy. The protests have become one of the biggest challenges to the rule of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, 86, coming in the wake of Israel's 12-day war against the Islamic republic in June, which was backed by the United States.

State TV has aired images of burning buildings, including a mosque, as well as funeral processions for security personnel.

But after three days of mass actions, state outlets were at pains to present a picture of calm returning, broadcasting images of smooth-flowing traffic on Sunday. Tehran Governor Mohammad-

Sadegh Motamedian insisted in televised comments that "the number of protests is decreasing".

The Iranian government on Sunday declared three days of national mourning for "martyrs" including members of the security forces killed.

President Masoud Pezeshkian also urged Iranians to join a "national resistance march" Monday to denounce the violence.

In response to Trump's repeated threats to intervene, Iran's parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said Iran would hit back, calling US military and shipping "legitimate targets" in comments broadcast by state TV. President Donald Trump talks to reporters as he walks on the South Lawn of the White House, Sunday, Jan. 11, 2026, in Washington.

Reza Pahlavi, the US-based son of Iran's ousted shah, who has emerged as an anti-government figurehead, said he was prepared to return to the country and lead a democratic transition.

"I'm already planning on that," he told Fox News on Sunday.

He later urged Iran's security forces and government workers to join the demonstrators.

"Employees of state institutions, as well as members of the armed and security forces, have a choice: stand with the people and become allies of the nation, or choose complicity with the murderers of the people," he said in a social media post.

He also urged protesters to replace the flags outside of Iranian embassies.

"The time has come for them to be adorned with Iran's national flag," he said. The ceremonial, pre-revolution flag has become an emblem of the global rallies that have mushroomed in support of Iran's demonstrators.

In London, protesters managed over the weekend to swap out the Iranian embassy flag, hoisting in its place the tri-colored banner used under the last shah.

## Malaysia, Indonesia become first to block Musk's Grok over AI deepfakes



KUALA LUMPUR

Malaysia and Indonesia have become the first countries to block Grok, the artificial intelligence chatbot developed by Elon Musk's xAI, after authorities said it was being misused to generate sexually explicit and non-consensual images.

The moves reflect growing global concern over generative AI tools that can produce realistic images, sound and text, while existing safeguards fail to prevent their abuse.

The Grok chatbot, which is accessed through Musk's social media platform X, has been criticized for generating manipulated images, including depictions of women in bikinis or sexually explicit poses, as well as images involving children.

Regulators in the two Southeast Asian nations said existing controls were not preventing the creation and spread of fake pornographic content, particularly involving women and minors. Indonesia's government temporarily blocked access to Grok on Saturday, followed by Malaysia on Sunday.

"The government sees non-consensual sexual deepfakes as a serious violation of human rights, dignity and the safety of citizens in the

digital space," Indonesia's Communication and Digital Affairs Minister Meutya Hafid said in a statement Saturday.

The ministry said the measure was intended to protect women, children and the broader community from fake pornographic content generated using AI.

The Grok chatbot, which is accessed through Musk's social media platform X, has been criticized for generating manipulated images.

Initial findings showed that Grok lacks effective safeguards to stop users from creating and distributing pornographic content based on real photos of Indonesian residents, Alexander Sabar, director general of digital space supervision, said in a separate statement. He said such practices risk violating privacy and image rights when photos are manipulated or shared without consent, causing psychological, social and reputational harm.

In Kuala Lumpur, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission ordered a temporary restriction on Grok on Sunday after what it said was "repeated misuse" of the tool to generate obscene, sexually explicit and non-consensual manipulated

images, including content involving women and minors.

The regulator said notices issued this month to X Corp. and xAI demanding stronger safeguards drew responses that relied mainly on user reporting mechanisms.

"The restriction is imposed as a preventive and proportionate measure while legal and regulatory processes are ongoing," it said, adding that access will remain blocked until effective safeguards are put in place.

Launched in 2023, Grok is free to use on X. Users can ask it questions on the social media platform and tag posts they've directly created or replies to posts from other users. Last summer the company added an image generator feature, Grok Imagine, that included a so-called "spicy mode" that can generate adult content.

The Southeast Asian restrictions come amid mounting scrutiny of Grok elsewhere, including in the European Union, Britain, India and France. Grok last week limited image generation and editing to paying users following a global backlash over sexualized deepfakes of people, but critics say it did not fully address the problem.

# North East Integration Rally, Cultural Events Lined Up in Silchar from January 22

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## SILCHAR

The North Eastern Integration Rally (NEIR) 2026 will arrive in Silchar on January 22, coinciding with the Barak Festival 2026. The announcement was made by the organisers, KRC Foundations, at a press conference held at the Silchar Press Club on Monday.

Addressing the media, NEIR organising committee member Bhaskar Das said the month-long rally, led by Biswadeep Gupta, was flagged off from Kolkata on January 4. Since then, it has been travelling through several northeastern states with the aim of promoting unity, integration, and mutual understanding among diverse communities.

The rally will be formally received in Silchar at Gandhi Bhawan with a flag-in ceremony, accompanied by the rendition of the National Song Vande

Mataram. Das noted that 2026 marks the 150th anniversary of Vande Mataram, lending added historical and cultural significance to the event. A cultural

programme and felicitation ceremony will also be held at Gandhi Bhawan the same day as part of the Barak Festival celebrations.

On January 23, marking the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, the rally, referred to as the Netaji Rally, will be flagged off from Silchar for Hailakandi district. It will then proceed to Sribhumi district, where participants will pay homage to martyrs at the Malegarh War Memorial in Latu.

The rally will be formally received there by the commandant of the memorial.

In Sribhumi district, the Barak Festival will be observed as a five-day event featuring art competitions and various cultural contests.

The prize distribution ceremony is scheduled for January 24 at Rajiv Bhawan, followed by the closing ceremony, which will include a felicitation programme and cultural performances.

Organising committee members Biswajit Roy and Jayanta Roy Choudhury described the rally and the festival as timely and meaningful initiatives. They said the NEIR would serve as a platform to bring people from different backgrounds together and strengthen regional bonds. Silchar Press Club general secretary Shankar Dey was also present at the press conference.



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## Jiribam: A Town Shaped by Rivers, Borders, History



forest. There were no villages to speak of, only a ferry point at Jirighat on the Cachar side. Travelers moving between Silchar and Manipur relied on this crossing. The road itself was known simply as the Cachar Road. Jiribam, as a settled space, did not yet exist.

That changed in the early twentieth century. In 1907, the Manipur state government opened the valley for agricultural settlement. By 1911, more than fourteen thousand bighas of land had been settled. Rice became the primary crop, supported by sugarcane cultivation. In areas unsuitable for paddy, betel leaf thrived. Agriculture did not just feed families. It anchored people to the land and turned forest into village.

By 1931, Jiribam had grown into a cluster of forty-six villages. Its population reflected the valley's border character. Meitei Hindus and Muslims lived alongside Bengali Hindus and Muslims, with smaller numbers of Kuki and Kabui communities. This diversity was not accidental. Most settlers came from Cachar rather than the Imphal Valley. As a result, many residents were treated as British subjects instead of Manipur state subjects. Administrative matters, from land revenue to dispute resolution,

Jiribam had five primary schools, matching the number found in the Imphal Valley outside the capital. For a frontier settlement, that mattered. It signaled permanence. People were not just farming here. They were raising families and planning futures.

After India's independence, Jiribam's political identity shifted again. Manipur elected its own legislative assembly under a separate constitution, and Jiribam was grouped with the hill areas for representation. Soon after, Manipur merged into India and became a union territory. Administrative divisions followed. Jiribam emerged as a subdivision, stretching far beyond the town itself, covering the Vangai range and reaching south to Tipaimukh. It was officially classified as a hill subdivision, even though parts of it did not fit that description on the ground.

Reorganization came in stages. In 1969, Manipur was divided into five districts. The southern part of Jiribam subdivision became Tipaimukh, now part of Pherzawl district. The northern part was attached to what was then Manipur Central district, headquartered in Imphal. This change reclassified Jiribam as part of the valley area rather than the hills. To correct the mismatch, the eastern Vangai range was transferred out. Over

**J**iribam sits at the edge of Manipur, geographically and historically. It is the state's westernmost town, touching Assam, shaped as much by rivers and borders as by politics and migration. To people in Manipur, it is often called the western gate. That description is not poetic license. It is literal.

The town lies in a narrow valley carved by the Jiri River, close to where it meets the Barak. The river does more than define the landscape. It defines jurisdiction. Only the eastern bank belongs to Manipur and forms Jiribam town. The western bank, just across the water, is Jirighat in Assam's Cachar district. Two towns face each other across a river, sharing history, trade, and daily movement, yet governed by different states. That border reality shapes everyday life in Jiribam in ways maps rarely capture.

Physically, Jiribam feels different from the rest of Manipur. Unlike the central Imphal Valley or the surrounding hill districts, it is a low-lying, river-fed settlement with fertile land. This geography explains why it became one of the fastest-growing towns in the state. Agriculture came first, then trade, transport, and administration. Growth followed the river.

In the early nineteenth century, the Jiribam valley was part of the Cachar kingdom. The political shift came in 1832, when the British annexed Cachar and later reached an agreement with Raja Gambhir Singh of Manipur. The deal redrew boundaries. Territory between the eastern stretch of the Barak and the Jiri River went to Manipur, while the rest stayed with



Cachar, which later became part of Assam. A line on paper split a valley that had not yet fully formed a population.

At that time, the valley was mostly

were handled by the British Political Agent. Jiribam, even then, sat in an administrative grey zone.

Education arrived early. By 1931,

time, Jiribam found itself attached to Imphal East district. The final administrative shift came in 2016, when Jiribam subdivision was declared a full-fledged district. For residents, this was not just a bureaucratic upgrade. It meant local governance, focused administration, and recognition of Jiribam's distinct identity within Manipur.

Politics in Jiribam has also reflected its social composition. In 2017, Md Ashab Uddin became the first member of the Bengali minority community to win a Manipur Legislative Assembly election from Jiribam. The victory carried symbolic weight. It acknowledged the town's demographic reality and its long history of migration and settlement. Today, Jiribam stands as a place shaped by borders rather than confined by them. Its rivers connect it to Assam. Its people connect it to multiple cultures. Its history shows how geography, colonial decisions, and administrative reshuffling can shape a town's character over generations.

Jiribam is not just a peripheral town at the edge of Manipur. It is a reminder that borders are lived spaces. They are negotiated daily through language, trade, farming, education, and politics. Jiribam grew because people crossed rivers, cleared forests, and stayed. That is what turned a ferry point into a town, and a border valley into one of Manipur's fastest-growing districts.



