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**PERSPECTIVE**

**SMILE... IT CONFUSES PEOPLE.**

**Modi, Shah likely to visit Assam in January; dates proposed but programmes yet to be confirmed**

**GUWAHATI**  
Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah are likely to visit the state later this month, though official confirmation of their programmes is still awaited.

Speaking to reporters, Sarma said the state government has already proposed dates for the visits. "We have invited the Honourable Prime Minister on January 17 and 18, and the Honourable Home Minister Amit Shah on January 29. There is a possibility that both leaders may visit Assam in January, but the programmes are yet to be confirmed," he said.

If finalised, the visits would signal intensive high-level Central engagement with Assam within a short span, carrying both political and developmental significance for the state, where the BJP leadership maintains a strong presence.

The announcement follows a politically active December in Assam. Prime Minister Modi visited the state on December 21, when he laid the foundation stone of a Rs 10,601-crore brownfield ammonia-urea plant in Dibrugarh district, a project seen as crucial for boosting fertiliser production and industrial growth in the Northeast.

Union Home Minister Shah was in Assam on December 29, during which he inaugurated the Jyoti-Bishnu Antarjati Kala Mandir in Guwahati, touted as the largest auditorium in the Northeast and a key addition to the region's cultural infrastructure.

**WHO SAID WHAT**

**GAME OVER for illegal encroachment at Jamuna-Moudanga RF. Mission Completed as 5,250 bighas reclaimed through peaceful, lawful & decisive action. No cheat codes needed. Consider this your warning: Illegal encroachment will NOT be tolerated.**  
~ Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, Assam CM

**Dense fog to linger over Assam, Northeast till January 7 as winter chill persists**

**GUWAHATI**  
Dense fog conditions are likely to persist across Assam and the wider Northeastern region until at least January 7, with reduced daytime temperatures continuing to mark the winter spell, weather officials said.

Guwahati recorded a maximum temperature of 22.5°C on Sunday, about 1.5 degrees below the seasonal average, while the minimum settled at 14.3°C, which is 3.3 degrees above normal. Despite relatively stable night temperatures, fog has significantly curtailed daytime warming across much of the region.

Several other locations reported sharper departures from normal daytime temperatures. Dhubri recorded 15.5°C, nearly 6 degrees below normal, while Silchar logged 21.6°C (around 4 degrees below average) and Tezpur 21.4°C, about 2.4 degrees lower than usual for this time of year.

Meteorologists attributed the suppressed daytime temperatures to a persistent fog layer spreading from the Indo-Gangetic plains into Assam and adjoining states over the past week.

"Daytime temperatures are low across



the region, while minimum temperatures remain in the 13-15°C range, which is still slightly above normal," a weatherman explained. "A fog layer, common over north India during winter, sometimes extends into the Northeast. Over the last week, this fog moved across lower Assam and spread up to central Assam, blocking sunlight and preventing daytime temperatures from rising."

During the final week of December, Guwahati did not record a maximum temperature above 20°C for three consecutive days. While daytime readings have since improved marginally to around 22-24°C, fog continues to limit solar heating. "At times, fog may not be dense near the ground but remains present in the upper atmospheric layers, which still affects temperature patterns," the official added. The lowest temperature of the season in Guwahati so far has been 11°C, recorded on January 1. Historically, the lowest-ever temperature in the state capital was 3°C, recorded in January 1964. Weather authorities have advised residents to remain cautious during early morning and late evening hours, particularly while travelling, as foggy conditions are expected to persist over the next couple of days.

**Twin blasts injure two in Manipur's Bishnupur, locals clash with security forces as tension escalates**

**IMPHAL**

Fresh violence erupted in Manipur's Bishnupur district on Monday after two explosive devices detonated in quick succession, injuring two civilians and triggering angry confrontations between local residents and security forces.

The blasts occurred in Ngaukon area under Saiton Gram Panchayat, which falls within the jurisdiction of Phougakchao Ikhai Police Station, close to the Bishnupur-Churachandpur district border. The area has remained sensitive since the outbreak of ethnic violence in the state in May 2023.

According to police sources, the first explosion took place early in the morning at an abandoned residential house belonging to Salam Mani Singh (70). The house has been lying vacant since May 2023, after the owner shifted to a relief camp following



the escalation of ethnic unrest in Manipur.

A second blast occurred around 8.46 am, approximately 200 metres away from the first site. Two people were injured in the second explosion. They have been identified as Soibam Sanatomba Singh (52) of Saiton Makha Leikai and

Nongthombam Indubala Devi (37) of Saiton Heiyaikon Maning Leikai.

Both victims were immediately rushed to Bishnupur District Hospital, where they are currently undergoing treatment. Hospital authorities said their condition is stable.

Following the explosions, irate locals gathered at the site and engaged

in heated exchanges with security personnel, alleging serious lapses despite the presence of a sizeable security deployment in nearby areas. Residents questioned how explosive devices could be planted and detonated in a zone under regular surveillance.

The situation escalated further when locals dismantled a makeshift security bunker located near the blast site, accusing forces of failing to prevent the incident. Tension gripped the area as security personnel attempted to control the crowd and restore order.

Police teams promptly reached both blast locations, cordoned off the area, and launched a detailed investigation. Additional security forces have been deployed, and preventive measures have been intensified to prevent any further incidents. Authorities said the situation remained tense but under control at the time of

filing this report.

The explosions come just three days after security forces neutralised 27 locally made bombs near Mongham village in Imphal East district on January 2. Those explosives were detected during intensified search and area domination operations in fringe and vulnerable areas. Bomb disposal squads later defused the devices at a safe location, averting what officials described as a potential major threat to civilian lives and property.

The latest incident has renewed concerns over the persistence of explosives and militant activity in conflict-affected areas of Manipur, even as security forces continue large-scale operations. Authorities said investigations are ongoing to determine who planted the devices and whether the blasts are linked to recent recoveries of explosives elsewhere in the state.

**5.1-magnitude earthquake hits central Assam, tremors felt across Northeast; no damage reported**



**GUWAHATI**

An earthquake measuring 5.1 on the Richter scale struck central Assam in the early hours of Monday, triggering panic across large parts of the Northeast, though no casualties or damage to property were reported, officials said.

According to the National Centre for Seismology (NCS), the tremor was recorded at 4.17 am, with its epicentre located in Morigaon district on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra. The earthquake originated at a depth of 50 kilometres, at latitude 26.37° North and

longitude 92.29° East.

The tremors were felt across several districts of Assam, including Kamrup Metropolitan, Nagaon, East and West Karbi Anglong, Hojai, Dima Hasao, Golaghat, Jorhat, Sivasagar, Charaideo, Cachar, Karimganj, Hailakandi, Dhubri, South Salmara-Mankachar and Goalpara.

Districts on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra-Darrang, Tamulpur, Sonitpur, Kamrup, Biswanath, Udalguri, Nalbari, Bajali, Barpeta, Baksa, Chirang, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon and Lakhimpur-also reported feeling the tremor.

The impact extended beyond Assam, with residents in parts of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura experiencing shaking. Tremors were also reported from parts of West Bengal, as well as Bhutan, Bangladesh and neighbouring regions of China.

The sudden jolt woke many people from sleep, prompting residents in several areas to step out of their homes and assemble in open spaces as a precaution. However, district administrations and disaster management authorities said there were no immediate reports of injuries or structural damage.

The Northeast lies in one of India's most seismically active zones. Officials have urged residents to remain calm, stay alert to aftershocks, and follow standard safety protocols during earthquakes.

**IMPHAL, JAN 4**

Crimes against women and children increased in Manipur in 2025, reversing a brief decline seen the previous year, according to data released by the Manipur State Commission for Women (MSCW).

MSCW Chairperson Tiningpham Monsang said the Commission recorded 61 cases in 2025, up from 48 cases in 2024. The figures indicate a fluctuating but persistently high level of gender-based crimes in the state over the past five years. The Commission had registered 58 cases in 2023, 78 cases in 2022, and 84 cases in 2021.

The latest reported crime occurred in Imphal West district in late December 2025. Khaidem (Ongbi) Chaoba Devi (26), a resident of Wangoi Mamang Khaidem, was reported missing on December 26 and was later found dead under suspicious circumstances. The incident triggered protests and agitation by local residents and members of her family, highlighting growing public concern over women's safety in the state.

Breaking down the 2025 data, Monsang said cases of sexual violence included nine rape cases, one gang rape, and 18 cases of molestation. Violent crimes accounted for 15 murders, five assault cases, and four suspicious deaths involving women. Other reported crimes included 12 cases

**Crimes against women and children rose in Manipur in 2025, says State Women's Commission**



of missing persons, two attempted kidnappings, one trafficking case, and one case related to obscene images.

Several high-profile murders during the year drew widespread attention. These included the killing of a 57-year-old woman in Imphal East district in September, who was found with multiple stab wounds, and the murder of a 67-year-old retired psychotherapist at her residence in October 2025.

The MSCW also flagged concerns over maternal deaths reported at Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS) Hospital, where multiple women allegedly died during childbirth. Families of the victims raised allegations of medical negligence, further adding to anxieties around women's health and institutional accountability.

Despite the rise in reported

cases, the Commission cautioned that the actual number of crimes may be significantly higher. Monsang said many incidents go unreported due to fear, social stigma, lack of awareness about complaint mechanisms, or a preference for resolving matters through private or informal settlements.

Appealing to the public, the MSCW chairperson urged victims and families to come forward and report crimes. "Every individual has a role to play in promoting gender equality and ensuring justice for women and children," she said, adding that timely reporting is crucial for effective intervention and accountability.

The Commission reiterated its commitment to supporting survivors and working with law enforcement and civil society to address gender-based violence in Manipur.

**IIT Guwahati scientists develop sunlight-powered catalyst to convert CO<sub>2</sub> into methanol fuel**

**GUWAHATI**

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Guwahati have developed a novel sunlight-driven photocatalytic material that can convert carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) into methanol fuel, marking a significant advance in clean energy and carbon mitigation technologies.

The study, published in the Journal of Materials Science, presents a potential pathway to address the twin challenges of rising energy demand and climate change by transforming a major greenhouse gas into a usable fuel using solar energy.

Explaining the motivation behind the research, Mahuya De, Professor in the Department of Chemical Engineering at IIT Guwahati, said continued dependence on petroleum-based fuels remains one of the largest contributors to carbon dioxide emissions and global warming. "To address this, researchers are exploring photocatalytic methods that can

convert carbon dioxide into clean and sustainable fuels," she said.

Globally, scientists have been studying graphitic carbon nitride, a low-cost, metal-free and non-toxic material, for CO<sub>2</sub> conversion. However, its wider application has been limited due to rapid energy loss and low fuel conversion efficiency.

To overcome these challenges, the IIT Guwahati team engineered a composite material by combining graphitic carbon nitride with few-layer graphene. Graphene, an ultra-thin carbon material known for its exceptional electrical conductivity and energy transfer capabilities, helped minimise energy loss within the catalyst and significantly enhanced its performance.

According to the researchers, the composite demonstrated improved light absorption, better charge generation and longer catalytic activity under visible light and sunlight, resulting in a higher rate of carbon dioxide conversion into methanol.



VOLUME:1, ISSUE 667

## Was the US capture of Venezuela's president legal?

The U.S. captured Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro in a military operation early on Saturday morning, culminating a months-long pressure campaign by President Donald Trump's administration that drew condemnation from some international leaders.

Maduro was on a warship bound for New York to face criminal charges, according to U.S. officials.

Below is a look at the legality of the U.S. action.

On Saturday, U.S. forces attacked Venezuela and seized Maduro, who has been widely condemned as an illegitimate leader, and his wife Cilia Flores.

Trump had been urging Maduro to cede power and has accused him of supporting drug cartels that Washington designated as terror groups, alleging they were responsible for thousands of U.S. deaths tied to illegal drug use.

Since September, U.S. forces had killed more than 100 people in at least 30 strikes on alleged drug trafficking boats from Venezuela in the Caribbean and Pacific, which legal experts said likely violated U.S. and international law.

U.S. authorities said the Justice Department sought military assistance to apprehend Maduro, who had been indicted by a New York grand jury along with his wife, son, two political leaders and an alleged leader of an international gang. They were charged with crimes related to terrorism, drugs and weapons.

Attorney General Pam Bondi said on social media that the defendants "will soon face the full wrath of American justice on American soil in American courts."

However, at a press conference, Trump blamed Venezuela for stealing U.S. oil interests and said Washington would take them back and planned to run Venezuela for a period of time, without offering specifics.

Experts in international law said the Trump administration had muddled the legal issues by claiming the operation was both a targeted law enforcement mission and the potential prelude to long-term control of Venezuela by the U.S.

"You cannot say this was a law enforcement operation and then turn around and say now we need to run the country," said Jeremy Paul, a professor at Northeastern University specializing in constitutional law. "It just doesn't make any sense."

The U.S. Congress has the power to declare war but the president is the commander-in-chief, and presidents of both parties have justified carrying out military action when it was limited in scope and in the national interest.

Trump's Chief of Staff Susie Wiles told Vanity Fair magazine in an interview published late last year that if Trump were to authorize "some activity on land" in Venezuela he would need approval from Congress.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Congress was not notified before Saturday's operation.

International law prohibits the use of force in international relations except for narrow exceptions such as authorization by the U.N. Security Council or in self-defense.

Drug trafficking and gang violence are considered criminal activity and do not rise to the accepted international standard of an armed conflict that would justify a military response, according to legal experts.

"A criminal indictment alone doesn't provide authority to use military force to depose a foreign government, and the administration will probably hang this also on a theory of self-defense," said Matthew Waxman, a law professor at Columbia University specializing in national security law.

The U.S. has not recognized Maduro as the legitimate leader of Venezuela since 2019, following an election the U.S. said was rigged.

The U.S. has captured criminal suspects in foreign countries including Libya but it has sought consent of local authorities. While the administration describes Maduro as an illegitimate leader, Washington has not recognized another Venezuelan leader who could have authorized the capture of Maduro.

In 1989, the U.S. arrested General Manuel Noriega, then the leader of Panama, in similar circumstances. Noriega had been indicted on drug-related charges and Washington said it was acting to protect U.S. citizens after Panamanian forces had killed a U.S. soldier.

The United States had also alleged Noriega was an illegitimate leader and had recognized as the country's leader the candidate who Noriega had claimed to have defeated in a recent election.

The former president of Honduras, Juan Orlando Hernández, was extradited to the United States in 2022 and later convicted on drug-related charges and sentenced to 45 years in prison. Trump pardoned Hernandez in December.

Legal experts were skeptical that the United States would face any meaningful accountability for its actions in Venezuela, even if they were unlawful given the lack of enforcement mechanisms in international law.

"It's hard to see how any legal body could impose practical consequences on the administration," said Paul, of Northeastern.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

"We all have different desires and needs, but if we don't discover what we want from ourselves and what we stand for, we will live passively and unfulfilled." - Bill Watterson

# After Khaleda Zia: The BNP at a Crossroads in Bangladesh's Uncertain Political Future



MK PANDEY

The death of Begum Khaleda Zia marks the end of an era in Bangladeshi politics. For decades, she was not merely the chairperson of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) but one of the two towering figures-alongside Sheikh Hasina-who defined the country's political life through rivalry, confrontation, and occasional convergence. That she had been gravely ill for some time made her passing less unexpected, yet the national response to her death underscored just how deeply she remained embedded in Bangladesh's political consciousness.

In the days following her demise last Tuesday, tributes flowed in from across the political spectrum, reaffirming her stature as a former prime minister and a central actor in the country's post-independence history. One gesture, in particular, stood out. Former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, Khaleda Zia's long-time political adversary, publicly expressed her condolences and personally telephoned Tareque Rahman to convey her grief. In a polity long accustomed to bitterness and zero-sum politics, the gesture was widely seen as magnanimous and deeply humane.

For many Bangladeshis, Hasina's act transcended partisan divides. It suggested that, at moments of loss, the shared human experience could override entrenched political hostility. Commentators noted that the respect shown to the late BNP leader seemed to open a wider emotional space-one that momentarily lifted the conversation above the acrimony that has so often characterised Bangladesh's public life.

Yet that moment of collective restraint and dignity was short-lived. At Khaleda Zia's funeral, senior BNP leader Nazrul Islam Khan issued a statement on behalf of the party accusing the Awami League government-and Sheikh Hasina personally-of responsibility for the steady deterioration of Khaleda Zia's health. The accusation struck many as jarring, coming as it did at a solemn occasion when the country appeared inclined toward reflection rather than recrimination.

To be sure, there is no shortage of public sympathy for Khaleda Zia's ordeal in her later years. Large sections of Bangladeshi society, including some who are otherwise politically aligned with the Awami League, have long expressed discomfort over the manner in which she was treated by the state. Her incarceration in the old Dhaka central jail, the repeated denial of permission to travel abroad for advanced medical treat-

ment, and the broader atmosphere of humiliation surrounding her final years left many citizens uneasy. These episodes became emblematic of the harshness that had come to define Bangladesh's winner-takes-all politics.

Still, timing and tone matter. At a moment when the nation is increasingly vocal in its demand for the end of Muhammad Yunus' unconstitutional regime and the holding of a credible, inclusive election, the BNP's decision to revive the language of blame at a funeral puzzled and disappointed many. It raised an unavoidable question: why reopen old wounds precisely when the political context demands coalition-building, restraint, and strategic clarity?

Blame, after all, cannot be placed solely on one individual. Nazrul Islam Khan spoke on behalf of the BNP; the statement reflected a collective decision. That choice is difficult to explain, particularly when the BNP today finds itself in a precarious and, in many respects, lonely position on the national political landscape.

Arrayed against the BNP are not only the forces associated with the Yunus regime but also Jamaat-e-Islami and several other Islamist parties, along with the National Citizens Party. These groups have shown little interest in seeing the BNP return to power. Indeed, the return of Tareque Rahman to Bangladesh after seventeen years of exile in the United Kingdom appears to have unsettled Islamist forces rather than reassured them. Signals from these quarters suggest a clear priority: preventing a BNP electoral victory whenever elections are eventually held.

This reality poses a stark challenge for Tareque Rahman and the BNP leadership. If the party's long political exile is to end, it must confront the strategic implications of its isolation. The question is no longer simply how to oppose an illegitimate regime, but how to build a broad-based political consensus capable of neutralising anti-democratic and anti-liberation forces.

This inevitably brings the Awami League back into the equation. Whether the BNP likes it or not, any credible plan for a return to constitutional democracy will require a working understanding-if not a formal alliance-between the country's two major political forces. An election in which the Awami League and its substantial support base remain disengaged would lack legitimacy from the outset. With an estimated 35-40 per cent of voters traditionally aligned with the Awami League, their absence from the polling booths would render any electoral exercise hollow and contested.

From this perspective, it is in the BNP's own interest to ensure

that the Awami League participates fully in the electoral process. That requires more than tactical silence; it demands political maturity and a willingness to rethink old habits of confrontation. The priority for the BNP leadership should be twofold: internal reorganisation and external reassurance. The party must demonstrate that it is not only capable of contesting elections but also prepared to govern responsibly-potentially in coalition with pro-liberation, democratic forces.

An informal understanding between the BNP and the Awami League, however unpalatable it may seem to hardened partisans, may be unavoidable if the objective is the restoration of proper democracy and constitutional legitimacy. History offers a precedent. In the 1980s and early 1990s, Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia led rival alliances-the former heading a fifteen-party combine, the latter a seven-party front-in a sustained struggle against the military autocracy of General Hussein Muhammad Ershad. Despite their differences, that joint pressure ultimately succeeded.

The present moment arguably calls for a similar, though differently shaped, convergence. The challenge today is not military rule but an anti-liberation, unconstitutional regime imposed in August 2024. Removing it will require coordination among forces that may distrust one another but share a larger interest in democratic restoration.

In this context, the burden of initiative rests heavily on the BNP. With Khaleda Zia gone, the party can no longer rely on her charisma or symbolic authority. Tareque Rahman and his colleagues must navigate a far more complex political terrain, one in which missteps could prove fatal. If the BNP stumbles, its rightist and Islamist rivals are well positioned to capitalise. If it fails to articulate a credible, inclusive election strategy, the broader political crisis will only deepen. There are, however, tentative signs of recalibration.

The recent visit of Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar to Dhaka to convey condolences from the Indian government has been widely interpreted as a signal of New Delhi's interest in seeing constitutional order restored in Bangladesh. Jaishankar's meeting with Tareque Rahman, in particular, has been read as an indication that India is open to engaging constructively with a future BNP leadership.

Equally significant is the BNP's recent restraint in avoiding anti-India rhetoric-a notable departure from past patterns. This suggests a recognition within the party that regional stability and

diplomatic pragmatism are essential, not optional, components of responsible governance. Such shifts, if sustained, could contribute to a healthier political environment both within Bangladesh and

### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

**India has begun 2026 by paying homage to peace, compassion, and its timeless civilisational values. The return of Lord Buddha's sacred Piprahwa relics after 127 years is a profoundly historic and emotional moment, symbolising the homecoming of India's spiritual heritage. Lord Buddha's message of ahimsa, wisdom, and harmony continues to guide humanity, and the return of these sacred relics strengthens our cultural continuity and responsibility towards future generations. As Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri**

**@narendramodi ji rightly said, this is a moment of "pride, reverence, and cultural connect." It reflects an India that progresses with development while remaining deeply rooted in its civilisational ethos in its civilisational ethos.**  
~ Pema Khandu, CM Arunachal Pradesh



across South Asia.

All of this underscores the delicacy of the moment. The ground beneath the BNP remains slippery. Progress will require careful, patient politics rather than emotional reflexes. The central national task today is the holding of an inclusive election-one in which all major parties, including the Awami League, participate freely and competitively.

Adding to the pressure on the Yunus regime to accept this necessity must become the BNP's overriding objective. That pressure will be effective only if it is principled, inclusive, and anchored in a clear commitment to democratic norms.

The passing of Khaleda Zia closes one chapter of Bangladesh's political history. Whether it opens the door to a more constructive future depends largely on how the BNP chooses to act in her absence. The memory of past struggles-when bitter rivals found common cause in the defence of democracy-offers both a lesson and a possibility. The question now is whether today's leaders are prepared to learn from it.

# 'Cash handouts don't create empowerment': Gaurav Gogoi targets Assam BJP's welfare-first model

TINSUKIA

Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president Gaurav Gogoi on Friday launched a sharp attack on the BJP-led Assam government's welfare approach, arguing that cash transfers and piecemeal assistance schemes cannot substitute for genuine economic empowerment.

Addressing reporters in Tinsukia, Gogoi accused Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's administration of lacking a long-term vision and of reducing women and economically disadvantaged sections to permanent scheme beneficiaries rather than enabling them to become financially self-reliant.

Gogoi questioned the rationale behind the state government's decision to provide Rs 1,500 per month as assistance to temple attendants, while allegedly failing to create sustainable economic models for traditional institutions such as *sattras*,



which play a significant socio-cultural role in Assam.

"There is nothing innovative about distributing schemes," Gogoi said. "Programmes like Arunodoi or similar cash assistance schemes exist in almost every state in India. What Assam truly needs are policies that help ordinary people stand on their own feet economically."

The Congress leader argued that

welfare measures should act as stepping stones to empowerment rather than becoming ends in themselves. According to him, repeated reliance on cash transfers risks deepening dependency instead of addressing structural economic challenges such as livelihoods, skills, and access to markets.

Drawing a contrast with the Congress's tenure in Assam, Gogoi claimed

that earlier governments placed greater emphasis on economic sustainability. "During the Congress government, focus was laid on economic empowerment. Even *sattras* were provided institutional support, enabling many of them to remain economically viable to this day, at least to some extent," he said.

He alleged that the present dispensation had failed to build on that legacy, choosing instead to prioritise headline-grabbing announcements over long-term institutional strengthening.

Gogoi said that if the Congress returns to power, the party would undertake a detailed study to design schemes that genuinely empower women and marginalised communities. "Real development happens only when programmes respond to the actual problems people face, not when they are reduced to monthly handouts," he added.

The APCC president also criticised what he described as the selective nature

of budgetary priorities under the BJP government. He alleged that increases in old-age pensions or women-centric schemes are announced after prolonged delays and marginal revisions, while allocations for infrastructure and development projects allegedly awarded to a limited group of contractors see sharp and rapid escalation. "This is precisely why a small section of people in Assam is becoming extremely wealthy, while the poor remain stuck in the role of beneficiaries," Gogoi said. "Wealth is getting concentrated, and inequality is widening, even as the government claims inclusive development."

Expanding his criticism beyond welfare policies, Gogoi took aim at the chief minister's recent statements on granting Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to six communities in Assam. He accused Sarma of misleading the public by projecting the tabling of a ministerial committee report in the Assembly as a historic breakthrough, only to later concede that ST status would

not be granted before the Assembly elections.

"Presenting the tabling of a report as a major achievement and then admitting that no decision will come before elections only exposes the government's political duplicity," Gogoi alleged.

Looking ahead to the 2026 Assam Assembly elections, the Congress leader struck a confident note, asserting that public discontent with governance and corruption would translate into electoral consequences. "This time, the people of Assam will show the entire country that when a self-respecting society unites, an arrogant and corruption-ridden government collapses very easily," he said. "The BJP will not be able to mislead the conscious people of Assam." Gogoi's remarks come amid an intensifying political climate in the state, with welfare delivery, economic inequality, and social representation emerging as key fault lines ahead of the polls.

## Indian Army strengthens civil-military cooperation in Arunachal Pradesh

TAKSING

In a significant step towards enhancing civil-military cooperation and improving the quality of life in remote border areas, Indian Army troops from the Spearhead Division of Spear Corps have constructed a Log Hut with an attached Water Storage Facility at Ojugo village in Takasing, Upper Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh. According to a press release, the infrastructure was created as part of Operation *Sadbhavana*, the Indian Army's flagship initiative aimed at promoting welfare, development and trust-building among local communities in far-flung and strategically important regions.

The newly constructed facility will provide essential shelter and assured water availability, directly benefiting local villagers and graziers. This initiative aligns with the objectives of the Vibrant Village Programme, which seeks to foster sustainable development, improve infrastructure, and enhance socio-economic conditions in border villages, while reinforcing national integration and security, the release stated.

The Indian Army remains steadfast in its resolve to support the nation's border populations, reflecting the ethos of "We Love Arunachal" and reinforcing its role as a force for both security and social good, as per the release. Meanwhile, the Indian Army flagged off an Eco-Tourism Exposure Tour from Along Military Station, Arunachal Pradesh, marking a significant step towards youth empowerment and sustainable development in the border regions.

## Tripura opposition seeks government job for Anjel Chakma's kin, alleges police lapses in Dehradun killing

AGARTALA

The Opposition in Tripura on Sunday demanded that the state government pursue a government job for a member of the family of Anjel Chakma, a Tripura youth who died after being stabbed in Dehradun last month, while also flagging alleged serious lapses by the Uttarakhand Police in the initial handling of the case.

Leader of the Opposition in the Tripura Assembly Jitendra Chaudhury, who visited Anjel's family at Machmara village in Unakoti district, said the sequence of events surrounding the investigation and medical treatment raised troubling questions. He alleged that the police initially registered the case under a less stringent legal provision, despite the victim having suffered grievous stab injuries. Anjel Chakma, a resident of Machmara and an MBA student in Dehradun, was stabbed on December 9 after he allegedly objected to a racial slur. He later succumbed to his injuries on De-

cember 26.

Chaudhury also cited claims made by Anjel's father, Tarun Prasad Chakma, that timely and appropriate medical intervention could have saved his son's life. "The manner in which the case was handled—both by the police and the hospital—raises serious concerns and warrants a thorough probe," he said.

Terming monetary compensation inadequate, the opposition leader urged the Tripura government to formally approach Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami to facilitate a government job for one of Anjel's family members. He pointed out that Anjel's father, a serving BSF jawan, is due to retire next year, and that stable employment would offer long-term security to the bereaved family. "Money cannot be the price of Anjel Chakma's life," Chaudhury said. "A government job would be a meaningful step towards justice and rehabilitation for the family."

# 'Voter rolls are ECI's responsibility, not BJP's': Himanta Sarma dismisses Opposition allegations

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday rejected Opposition allegations of manipulation of electoral rolls, asserting that the preparation of the voters' list rests exclusively with the Election Commission of India (ECI) and that the Bharatiya Janata Party has "no role whatsoever" in the process.

Responding to claims by Leader of the Opposition Debabrata Saikia that the BJP was planning to add thousands of names to voter lists ahead of the Assembly elections, Sarma said all political parties, including the ruling party, must follow the statutory claims and objections process laid down by the ECI.

"The full responsibility of the voters' list lies with the Election Commission of India. We have no say in it," Sarma told reporters

in Guwahati. "There is time till January 22 to submit complaints, and we will also file our objections wherever required."

Sarma was reacting to allegations that the BJP intended to influence the electoral outcome by adding "5,000 to 10,000 names" in each constituency at the last moment. Dismissing the charge, the Chief Minister said such claims should be backed by formal complaints rather than public statements. "If the Congress believes we are adding or removing 10,000 votes, why don't they file a complaint? There are prescribed forms—Form 6, Form 7 and Form 8," he said. "Even if there is a minor error, such as a spelling mistake in a surname, Form 6 can be submitted for correction. Fighting only through news portals and television debates will not help." The Chief Minister acknowledged

that discrepancies are common in draft electoral rolls, stressing that the publication of a draft list is precisely meant to allow corrections through the claims and objections mechanism.

"In many places, we have noticed names of people who have died or individuals who are working in Kerala still appearing on the voters' list," Sarma said. "The BJP will also highlight such discrepancies and submit objections before January 22. Errors in draft rolls are normal and are corrected through Forms 6, 7 and 8."

On Sunday, Debabrata Saikia had alleged that a "secret directive" had been issued by the BJP to include non-Assamese voters in the electoral rolls to help the ruling party retain power. He claimed that names were being added without the knowledge of residents in certain areas.

"A secret order has come from the BJP to add at least 5,000 to 10,000 names at the last moment through non-Assamese voters so that the BJP, which does not follow the Constitution, can rule for five more years," Saikia had alleged.

Sarma dismissed the accusation as baseless and politically motivated, reiterating that only the Election Commission has the authority to prepare and revise electoral rolls. He urged Opposition parties to use institutional mechanisms if they had evidence of irregularities, instead of making sweeping public allegations.

The controversy comes amid heightened political activity in Assam as parties gear up for the 2026 Assembly elections, with electoral rolls emerging as a key point of contention between the ruling coalition and the Opposition.

## Manipur security forces recover heavy arms, explosives; three militants arrested in statewide operations

IMPHAL

Manipur security forces carried out a series of coordinated counter-insurgency operations across multiple districts between January 3 and 4, recovering a large cache of weapons and explosives and arresting several active militant cadres, officials said.

On January 4, security personnel seized a significant haul of arms and explosives from Yairipok Top Ningthoumai Lai Ching under Andro Police Station in Imphal East district. The recovery included one self-loading rifle (SLR) with magazine, a single-barrel gun, a 9 mm pistol with magazine, a .32 pistol with magazine, a .32 automatic pistol with two magazines, two improvised explosive devices (IEDs), two No. 36 hand grenades, one Chinese-made hand grenade, and 37 live rounds of ammunition. Additional items such as a raincoat, sleeping bed kit and a foldable tent were also recovered.

In another operation on January



3 at Lanchingmanbi, Chingphei village under Henglep Police Station in Churachandpur district, forces recovered a rocket containing approximately 100 kg of explosives, a sniper rifle fitted with a telescopic daylight scope, two country-made single-barrel breech-loading guns, a 9 mm pistol with magazine, five rounds of 7.62 mm ammunition, ten 12-bore cartridges, and an IED weighing around 3 kg.

The same day, a separate oper-

ation at Kangaching Tellou under Lamlai Police Station in Imphal East led to the seizure of two .32 bore pistols with magazines, a 51 HE mortar bomb, two No. 36 hand grenades, 91 live rounds of assorted calibres, two .303 LMG magazines, a BAOFENG wireless set, seven bulletproof plates, a bulletproof helmet, a pistol holster and a grenade.

Security forces also arrested multiple militant cadres during the operations. On January 4, Laishram

Kullabi Meitei (35), also known as Ronel, an active cadre of the RPF/PLA from Liwa Road Kha Maibam Leikai in Imphal West district, was apprehended, and two mobile phones were seized from his possession. On the same day, Tensubam Bangkim Singh (25), also known as Chak-thekpa or Mangang Punshiba, a cadre of KCP (Taibanganba) from Nambol Leitonjam Makha Leikai in Bishnupur district, was arrested. A 9 mm pistol with four live rounds and a mobile phone were recovered from him.

Earlier, on January 3, Mahesh Sarangthem (19), an RPF/PLA cadre from Kairembikkok Matiyai Leikai in Thoubal district, was arrested from his residence.

Officials said the operations are part of sustained counter-insurgency measures aimed at dismantling militant networks, recovering illegal arms, and preventing potential threats to public safety in the state.

## National textiles ministers' conference in Guwahati on January 8-9 to chart growth roadmap

GUWAHATI

A national roadmap to accelerate the growth of India's textiles industry will be deliberated in Guwahati on January 8 and 9, as the city hosts the National Textiles Ministers' Conference, bringing together Union and State ministers, senior officials and key stakeholders from across the sector.

The two-day conference is being jointly organised by the Ministry of Textiles and the Government of Assam, and aims to align central and state policies to strengthen India's position as a global textile manufacturing hub. The discussions are linked to the national objective of building a USD 350 billion textile industry and increasing textile exports to USD 100 billion by 2030.

The inaugural session on January 8 will be attended by Union Textiles Minister Giriraj Singh, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, and Minister of State for Textiles Pabitra Margherita, along with ministers from various states and senior government officials.

Over the course of the conference, participants will deliberate on a wide range of issues, including infrastructure development, investment promotion, export expansion, competitive-

ness, raw materials and fibres, and emerging areas such as technical textiles, innovation, and research and development. Traditional sectors like handloom and handicrafts will also be discussed, with an emphasis on connecting them to contemporary and global markets.

Ministers and officials from States and Union Territories are expected to share best practices, identify regional challenges, and offer policy recommendations to strengthen the textile value chain at the state and district levels.

A dedicated conclave on strengthening the textiles sector in the North-Eastern Region will be held on January 8.

The session will focus on silk, handloom and bamboo-based textiles, promotion of women-led enterprises, and branding initiatives such as "Textiles from North-East" to improve market access and integration with national and international value chains.

An exhibition showcasing Indian handlooms and handicrafts from across the country will be organised alongside the conference by the offices of the Development Commissioners for Handlooms and Handicrafts, highlighting the diversity and heritage of India's textile traditions.

## Assam CM honours 1,534 meritorious students for outstanding results in HSLC and HS examinations, 2025

KAMRUP

Cherishing a moment of achievement, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday felicitated 1,534 students from Bezera and Sualkuchi for coming out with flying colours at the HSLC and HS Examinations, 2025 at a function held at Changsari in Kamrup district. Addressing the students, Chief Minister Sarma said that since he was elected MLA from the Jalukbari constituency in 2001, he has honoured meritorious students who achieve good results in the HSLC and HS Examinations. In 2002, only 288 students received this honour; this year, the number has risen to 2,116.

Calling students' attention to the ever-changing needs of the world, Sarma said society is constantly evolving. He said that at times the pace becomes so fast that even those who initiate the change fall behind.

He stated that advances in medical science have increased average life expectancy. Today's students may live to 90 or older. As a result, they will experience many changes in their lives and must prepare for them.

Referring to rapid changes across fields, he recalled that when the Asian



Games were held in Delhi in 1982, television first came to India. Those televisions displayed only black-and-white images. Colour television followed gradually, and later, mobile phones replaced television as the primary device in people's hands. Now, even smartphones have replaced mobile phones. Sarma also noted that people once wrote using typewriters. He said that electronic typewriters followed, and later, large box-like computers and laptops appeared. Commenting that artificial intelligence has taken over almost everything, he said the era of software is over.

Referring to rapid changes in dietary habits, Sarma said that laboratories now produce food tailored to human needs. Bio-engineered food has entered the market.

He said earlier, doctors treated diseases once they appeared. Later, the idea of disease prevention emerged. Now genetic screening has arrived. People can now

learn in advance about diseases that may occur 10 years later and take preventive steps. Gradually, it will become possible to identify diseases a person may develop over a lifetime, even in childhood, and prevent them through various methods.

He observed that technology has also brought remarkable changes to medical procedures. Earlier, doctors performed surgery by opening the body. Later, surgeons inserted cameras through small openings to perform the operation. In many cases, robots perform surgery while doctors remotely guide them. Such robotic surgeries have already been performed at Guwahati Medical College. A time will come when doctors will operate on patients from faraway places. As technologies like augmented reality and virtual reality grow stronger, people from a distance will feel very near. These technologies will even enable classroom instruction with-

out a teacher. Referring to Tesla's development of self-driving cars using sensor technology, he said that within 10 to 15 years, many tasks will become possible without doctors, engineers, or teachers.

Calling the unimaginable changes driven by artificial intelligence and machine learning only the tip of an iceberg, Chief Minister Sarma urged students to prepare themselves and stay alert as they move forward in a fast-changing world. He told the students that textbook learning alone is insufficient. They must prepare for the human resources the future world will need and move forward in sync with change.

Urging them to choose fields of study that align with Industry 4.0, he said the government has also tried to keep pace with change. Assam's ITIs have replaced traditional courses with subjects that create employment opportunities in artificial intelligence, augmented reality, virtual reality, and machine learning. The government plans to install an advanced proton therapy machine at Guwahati Medical College for Rs. 500 crore to treat cancer. Since solar energy is available only during daylight, the government has arranged to store daytime solar power in pump storage systems and supply it to the grid during periods of high demand.

Sarma said that the students who received felicitations possess higher merits than others. Therefore, their responsibilities would also increase. At the end of his speech, he read out the citation presented to the meritorious students.

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## Trump says Modi 'knew he was not happy' over Russian oil purchases, hints at new tariffs



WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump on Sunday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi "knew he was not happy" with India's Russian oil imports, signalling further potential trade pressure from Washington. Speaking aboard Air Force One en route from Florida to Washington DC, Trump said India had tried to keep the US "happy" amid ongoing discussions on oil trade.

"They wanted to make me happy, basically. Modi is a very good man; he is a good guy. He knew I was not happy, and it was important to make me happy. They do trade, and we can raise tariffs on them very quickly. It would be very bad for them," Trump said.

His remarks followed US Senator Lindsey Graham's comments that tariffs imposed by the Trump administration were a key factor in India's reduced Russian oil imports. Graham had earlier cited a bill proposing 500% levies on countries continuing to buy Russian oil and said the US is

pressuring Moscow's buyers to curb revenues for Russia amid the Ukraine conflict.

The US had already imposed a 25% tariff on Indian goods linked to Russian oil. Trump added that during a recent visit to the Indian Ambassador's residence, officials expressed concerns over the impact of these tariffs.

President Donald Trump (R) with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The US President's latest warning comes just weeks after a phone call with PM Modi, in which both leaders stressed the importance of sustaining momentum in bilateral trade amid ongoing tariff disputes.

The conversation coincided with the start of a new round of negotiations between the two countries aimed at resolving the tariff deadlock.

Just days earlier, Trump had threatened additional tariffs on Indian rice following complaints from a farmer representative at a White House roundtable about alleged dumping by India, China,

and Thailand.

India became the largest buyer of discounted Russian seaborne crude after the 2022 Ukraine war. While imports have fallen from a June peak of around 2 million barrels per day (bpd) to about 1.2 million bpd in December, India has resisted full US pressure, citing energy security and strategic interests.

Though other major economies have struck trade deals with Washington to reduce tariff burdens, negotiations between India and the US have so far failed, largely over India's refusal to open its markets to US farm products and concerns about US mediation during brief Indo-Pak tensions. Trump later doubled the tariff rates on Indian goods in August 2025.

Despite tariff threats, India continues to balance energy needs with diplomatic and trade ties. Negotiations with Washington on a broader trade deal remain ongoing, though Russian oil purchases continue to be a sticking point.

## 'People of Bengal embraced SIR as beacon of hope': BJP's Suvendu writes to CEC, countering Mamata



KOLKATA

West Bengal's Leader of the Opposition Suvendu Adhikari on Monday wrote to Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, urging him to continue the SIR of electoral rolls "undaunted", two days after Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee sent a letter stating that the exercise should be halted.

Adhikari claimed that the CM's call

to "halt" the special intensive revision (SIR) is nothing short of an "admission of defeat", and a "brazen attempt to perpetuate the electoral malfeasance" that has defined her tenure.

He alleged Banerjee's "litany of grievances" is not only factually inaccurate but a deliberate distortion designed to malign the EC as "politically motivated" and to manufacture a false narrative of widespread discom-

fort and disenfranchisement.

"By contrast, the people of West Bengal have embraced the SIR as a beacon of hope. Her narrative of 'anxiety and harassment' is a TMC-orchestrated mirage, drowned out by the chorus of approval from those who reject her politics of patronage and prefer the purity of the ballot," he claimed in the letter that he shared on X.

Dismissing allegations of undue

haste and inadequate preparation, Adhikari said more than 50,000 Booth Level Officers (BLOs) and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) in the state had undergone training for the revision exercise.

He defended the use of digital platforms such as WhatsApp for urgent clarifications, calling them supplementary to formal circulars and consistent with modern administrative practices.

The BJP leader, in turn, accused the state administration and TMC members of attempting to derail the SIR by intimidating field officials and spreading misinformation.

He said the exclusion of Booth-Level Agents (BLAs) from certain hearings was necessary to ensure neutrality and prevent "cadre-led disruptions" during the process.

"I implore the ECI to press forward with the SIR undaunted, fortified by the unwavering support of the democratic masses. This exercise is not an assault on the Constitution but its truest vindication, purging the shadows that have eclipsed our polls for too long," he said.

In a strongly worded letter dated January 3, Banerjee urged Kumar to halt the "arbitrary and flawed" SIR in the state, warning that its continuation in the present form could trigger "mass disenfranchisement" and "strike at the foundations of democracy".

Banerjee accused the EC of presiding over an "unplanned, ill-prepared and ad hoc" process marked by "serious irregularities, procedural violations, and administrative lapses".

## INTERNATIONAL

### Trump's intervention in Venezuela: the 3 warnings for the world

LONDON

The January 3 US military operation in Venezuela seizing President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Adela Flores de Maduro, was in equal measure audacious and illegal under international law.

It's even more breathtaking that the Trump administration now says it "will run" Venezuela on an interim basis. The US will also seek to control the country's vast oil interests.

Irrespective of its contested domestic politics and the chequered record of the Maduro regime, Venezuela remains a recognised sovereign state under international law. This includes permanent sovereignty over its natural resources. Any US seizure of Venezuelan oil would be a further violation of international law.

But the US hasn't tried to justify its strikes with international law. Instead, the Trump administration is using domestic laws to ignore global rules entirely. It's a new strategy, but one with no international legal basis, regardless of how you slice it.

Both the first and second Trump administrations have shown animosity towards the Maduro regime.

The US government has consistently raised two key issues: the role Venezuela has played in illegal Latin American migrants entering the US, and support for the flow of drugs into the US.

Both were major issues during the 2024 US presidential election campaign and are key planks of the Trump MAGA movement.

The legitimacy of the Maduro regime has also been called into question. There were disputed election outcomes in 2018 and 2024.

However, the legitimacy or otherwise of the Maduro regime is not a legal basis for a military intervention.

Rather, the Trump administration is relying on US domestic laws to justify its actions in Venezuela. A 2020 US grand jury indictment of Maduro and his wife for drug trafficking underpins the legal argument.

Protesters rally in front of the Ohio Statehouse in Columbus, Ohio, on Sunday, Jan. 4, 2026, after the U.S. captured Venezuelan President Nicolás



Maduro and his wife in a military operation.

That Maduro has been paraded before television cameras in New York like any other detained prisoner further emphasises the importance of US domestic law in this matter. It's unprecedented for a foreign head of state to be arrested in their presidential compound, detained and legally processed in the US within the space of 24 hours.

Maduro and his wife will eventually face trial on various criminal charges. That Nicolás Maduro is the Venezuelan president and therefore entitled to head of state immunity from criminal prosecution before a US court will presumably be set aside as the Trump administration does not recognise the legitimacy of his presidency.

Likewise, US courts will probably not bother themselves too much with the manner of Maduro's arrest via US extra-territorial law enforcement in a foreign state.

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foreign state.

Protesters rally in front of the Ohio Statehouse in Columbus, Ohio, on Sunday, Jan. 4, 2026, after the U.S. captured Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife in a military operation.

In the normal course of events, once the US grand jury indictment had been released, Maduro's extradition could have been sought via a US arrest warrant.

The Trump administration likely assumed any such extradition request would have been ignored. So, instead, it used the US military to enter Maduro's Caracas compound to facilitate his arrest by Department of Justice officials.

At the core of how the Trump administration has advanced its legal campaign against Venezuela and the Maduro regime has been its reliance on US law.

Starting in September, the US began targeting small boats linked to the Venezuelan drug trade through military strikes at sea. The US justified these, in part, on the basis of extra-territorial enforcement of US laws against known cartels shipping drugs throughout the Caribbean to American entry points.

In December, the US Coast Guard began to pursue and seize oil tankers subject to US sanctions. This conduct was also justified on the basis of US law, with the sanctioned tankers being stopped and seized in waters off the Venezuelan coast on the high seas. US law enforcement has now been extended to the seizure, arrest and detention of the Maduros.

By relying on the argument that the US is enforcing its own laws, the Trump administration provides itself with a domestic legal basis for its actions, no matter what international law may have to say.

This is a clear case of US exceptionalism towards international law, of which there is a long history. It reflects a US view that its own laws prevail over all other law. According to the US, international law should not unduly limit its ability to advance its national interests.

Protesters rally in front of the Ohio Statehouse in Columbus, Ohio, on Sunday, Jan. 4, 2026, after the U.S. captured Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife in a military operation.

It's the oil, stupid! Trump's energy ambitions in Venezuela face major hurdles despite Maduro's capture.

It's also based on an assumption that any international opprobrium it may encounter can be managed or safely ignored.

There are three immediate regional and global lessons from these events.

First, the Trump administration has shown a vast capacity to sanction whomever it chooses based on domestic political whims. Individuals, entities and corporations have all been targeted through presidential executive orders, laws and force. Many will be on high alert.

Second, while the cumulative US actions against Venezuela violate the United Nations Charter, the UN will be virtually powerless to constrain the US. This is due to the veto powers held by the permanent members of its Security Council, not to mention Trump's disdain for the UN generally.

Third, US allies and partners need to be very aware of the ramifications of this exceptional US law enforcement practice.

If, down the line, the US military encounters a more robust response than it did in Venezuela, it could trigger NATO treaty obligations for European countries and Canada, and ANZUS treaty obligations for Australia. So, if the US continues down this road, there's every chance the consequences of its interventionism could be felt by many around the world.

## Guinea's junta leader is confirmed President-elect after first vote since 2021 coup



CONAKRY

The Supreme Court in Guinea on Sunday (January 4, 2026) upheld the election victory of General Mamadi Doumbouya, cementing the junta leader's transition to a democratically elected president four years after staging a coup in the West African nation.

Mr. Doumbouya won the country's first election since the 2021 coup after polling 86.7% of the votes, according to the General Directorate of Elections. His victory, which had been predicted by analysts, was confirmed by the Supreme Court in the capital Conakry.

"Today, there are neither winners nor losers. There is only one Guinea, united and indivisible," Mr. Doumbouya said in a broadcast late on Sunday, calling on citizens to "build a new Guinea, a Guinea

of peace, justice, shared prosperity, and fully assumed political and economic sovereignty."

Yero Balde, the runner-up who won 6.59% of the vote, had filed a petition accusing the electoral body of manipulating the results in Mr. Doumbouya's favor. But authorities said he withdrew the petition a day before the Supreme Court verdict.

The December 28 election was held under a new Constitution that revoked a ban on military leaders running for office and extended the presidential mandate from five years to seven years.

Critics say Mr. Doumbouya has clamped down on political opponents and dissent since the 2021 coup, leaving him with no major opposition among the eight other candidates in the race.

The weakened opposition

"focused attention on Mamadi Doumbouya as the only key figure capable of ensuring the continuity of the state," said N'Faly Guillaugui, a Guinean political analyst. "Guineans are waiting to see what efforts he will make to ensure political stability and reconciliation," Mr. Guillaugui added.

Despite the country's rich mineral resources including the world's biggest exporter of bauxite, which is used to make aluminum, more than half of its 15 million people are experiencing record levels of poverty and food insecurity, according to the World Food Program.

The junta's most important initiative has been a mega-mining project at Simandou, the world's largest iron ore deposit. The 75 per cent Chinese-owned project began production in December after decades of delays.

# When Identity Becomes a Fault Line: The Death of Anjel Chakma and India's Unfinished Reckoning with Prejudice

**T**he death of Anjel Chakma, a young student from India's North-East, is not merely a personal tragedy confined to one family or one city. It is an unsettling mirror held up to Indian society, forcing a reckoning with how difference-of appearance, region, and identity-is perceived and treated in everyday life. Beyond the legal process that will determine individual culpability, Anjel's death raises a larger, more uncomfortable question: how safe and accepted do Indians from marginalised regions truly feel when they step outside their home states in pursuit of education and opportunity?

Anjel Chakma had travelled from Tripura to Dehradun, Uttarakhand, to enrol in an MBA programme-an aspiration shared by thousands of young Indians who leave familiar surroundings each year to study, grow, and build careers. His journey reflected the promise of a modern, mobile India, where education is meant to transcend geography and where opportunity is not confined by birthplace. Yet that promise was violently interrupted.

Friends and classmates remember Anjel as quiet, diligent, and focused on his studies. Like many students studying far from home, he was navigating the challenges of a new city-different social norms, languages, food habits, and a cultural atmosphere unfamiliar to someone from the North-East. Such transitions are rarely easy, particularly for students encountering them for the first time. They require resilience, adaptability, and, crucially, a degree of acceptance from the host environment.

On the evening of December 9, 2025, Anjel and his brother were reportedly involved in an altercation near their residence in Dehradun. What began as a dispute escalated into violence, leaving Anjel grievously injured. Despite medical intervention, he succumbed to his injuries. The news sent shockwaves through student communities, particularly among those from the North-Eastern states who have long spoken of feeling vulnerable, misunderstood, or unwelcome in parts of mainland India.

As investigations continue, it is vital to separate the legal facts of the case from the broader social questions it provokes. Justice, in the narrow sense, will depend on courts and due process. But justice, in its deeper sense, requires society to confront the conditions that allow prejudice-sometimes subtle, sometimes overt-to fester.

At the heart of this tragedy lies an enduring problem: bias rooted in physical appearance and regional identity. For many from the North-East, discrimination rarely announces itself loudly. More often, it emerges in quieter, corrosive forms-assumptions, stereotypes, casual jokes, intrusive questions, or the persistent suggestion that one is somehow an outsider. Questions such as "Where are you really from?" or being mistaken for a foreign national may seem trivial to some, but repeated over time, they erode a person's sense of belonging.



These experiences are not isolated. Students and professionals from the North-East have long recounted feeling compelled to explain their Indianness, justify their presence, or endure comments about their looks, accents, or food habits. Even when not accompanied by physical violence, such daily encounters create emotional fatigue and social distance. In unfamiliar environments, they can foster insecurity and isolation.

Educational hubs like Dehradun attract students from across the country, creating spaces of remarkable diversity. Yet diversity, by itself, does not guarantee inclusion. Without sensitivity and mutual respect, difference can become a source of unease rather than enrichment. For students living away from home, academic challenges are often compounded by the pressure to adapt socially while protecting their dignity.

Anjel Chakma's death underscores a reality that is often overlooked: students require more than classrooms and degrees. They need emotional safety, social support, and an environment where difference does not translate into vulnerability. Educational institutions, host communities, and local administrations all share responsibility in creating such conditions.

In the days following the incident, candlelight vigils were held in several cities. These gatherings were marked not by rage, but by grief and solidarity. Participants remembered Anjel not as a statistic or a headline, but as a young man with aspirations, family ties, and an unfinished future. The tone of these assemblies reflected a collective desire for understanding rather than retaliation-a recognition that anger alone cannot heal deep social fractures.

Educators, activists, and social commentators have since emphasised the role of early education and socialisation in shaping attitudes towards difference. Prejudice is rarely innate; it is learned, absorbed, and normalised through social cues. Schools and universities therefore occupy a crucial space in nurturing empathy, cultural awareness, and respect for diversity. Curricula that engage meaningfully with India's regional histories and social complexities can help dismantle ignorance before it hardens into bias.

India prides itself on being one of the world's most diverse societies. Its national identity is built from a mosaic of cultures, languages, ethnicities, and traditions-stretching from the North-East to the southern peninsula, from coastal belts to hill regions. Yet diversity also imposes responsibility. It demands listening rather than assuming, learning rather than stereotyping, and engaging rather than dismissing.

The loss of Anjel Chakma compels society to ask an uncomfortable but necessary question: are existing efforts enough to ensure that every Indian feels equally accepted, regardless of appearance or origin? Laws alone cannot answer this. While legal safeguards are essential, social attitudes ultimately shape everyday experiences.

Preventing such tragedies requires sustained social awareness. Conversations about diversity must extend beyond symbolic gestures and enter daily interactions-in classrooms, hostels, neighbourhoods, and workplaces. Institutions can help by fostering intercultural dialogue, establishing support systems for students from different regions, and responding swiftly and sensitively to complaints of harassment or dis-

crimination.

Host communities, too, stand to gain from greater exposure to India's internal diversity. Simple acts-respectful language, curiosity without intrusion, patience with difference-can significantly reduce misunderstanding. Inclusion is not an abstract ideal; it is practiced in small, everyday choices.

It is important that Anjel Chakma's death does not become a catalyst for further division. Blame and counter-blame risk obscuring the deeper issue: the need to cultivate a society where difference does not provoke fear or hostility. Tragedies often reveal hidden weaknesses within social structures, but they also offer an opportunity for reform.

Remembering Anjel should therefore mean more than mourning. It should inspire a commitment to human dignity, empathy, and shared responsibility. His life, though brief, reflects the aspirations of countless young Indians who leave home with hope and determination. Honouring his memory means ensuring that future students can pursue education without fear of isolation, prejudice, or harm.

National unity is not sustained by slogans or symbols alone. It is measured in everyday interactions-by how citizens treat one another in streets, campuses, and communities. When respect becomes habitual and understanding instinctive, tragedies rooted in prejudice can be prevented.

The death of Anjel Chakma is a reminder that every life matters, and that building a truly inclusive India remains an unfinished task-one that demands effort, empathy, and continuous learning from all.

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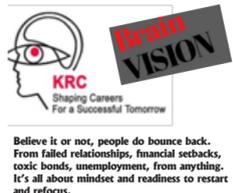
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# Farakka Barrage: Lifeline on the Ganga



**N**estled in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal, just 18 kilometres from the Bangladesh border near Sahibganj, the Farakka Barrage is one of India's most ambitious river projects. Stretching over 2.3 kilometres, the barrage stands as a testament to modern engineering while simultaneously representing decades of environmental, geopolitical, and social challenges. Completed in 1970 at a cost of around one billion dollars, and operational from 21 April 1975, Farakka remains both a crucial water management structure and a source of contention between India and Bangladesh.

The Farakka Barrage was conceived primarily to address a pressing concern: sediment accumulation at the Kolkata port. Over the years, the Hooghly River, which connects Kolkata to the Bay of Bengal, had become increasingly clogged with silt, threatening maritime navigation. To combat this, engineers designed the barrage to divert 1,800 cubic metres per second of water from the Ganga into the Hooghly River via a 42-kilometre feeder canal. This flow was expected to flush out sediment without the need for continuous dredging, ensuring Kolkata's ports remained functional.

The barrage, constructed by Hindustan Construction Company, consists of 109 gates, 108 of which span the river while a single gate is built over the low-lying land in Malda as a precautionary measure. Beyond flushing silt, Farakka serves multiple purposes: it supplies water to the Farakka Super Thermal Power Station and feeds a network of 60 smaller canals that support local drinking water needs. The township surrounding the bar-

rage, Farakka Barrage Township, has grown around the structure, serving as a hub of administration and industrial activity.

The Farakka Barrage is not merely a story of environmental and political struggle. It has deep ties to India's broader water network and regional development, including the Northeast. The Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna system links northern India and the Himalayan watershed to Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, and the Brahmaputra basin in Bangladesh. Changes in the Ganga's flow impact sediment transport, flood regimes, and freshwater availability downstream in As-

sam and other northeastern states, where agriculture and fisheries are heavily dependent on river cycles. For example, excessive siltation and altered water levels can worsen flooding in Assam during the monsoon, disrupt hydropower generation, and affect livelihoods in towns and villages along tributaries feeding into the Brahmaputra.

The Northeast's reliance on riverine systems highlights the interconnectedness of projects like Farakka with broader regional stability. The barrage is part of a network of interventions meant to optimize water usage, manage floods, and generate

power, but these benefits come with trade-offs. Northeast India, sharing borders with Bangladesh, is indirectly affected by upstream water management and international agreements, making Farakka a pivot point not just for West Bengal or Bangladesh, but for cross-border river governance.

In recent years, steps have been taken to address ecological concerns. Starting in 2016, fish ladders were installed to help migratory species like Hilsa navigate the barrage and reach upstream spawning grounds. While still limited in scope, these interventions represent a recognition that engineering solutions must coexist with ecological realities. The barrage also continues to support electricity generation and water supply, demonstrating the duality of development projects that promise human utility while straining natural systems.

Farakka remains a symbol of the complexities of river management in South Asia. It is a marvel of engineering, a source of regional water security, and a flashpoint for geopolitical negotiations. At the same time, it underscores the unintended consequences of large-scale interventions in natural systems: flooding, erosion, species decline, and the displacement of communities. The Northeast's reliance on shared water systems further emphasizes the barrage's regional significance, linking hydrological management in West Bengal to lives and livelihoods hundreds of kilometres away.

Ultimately, Farakka is more than concrete and gates. It is a living reminder that rivers are dynamic, shared, and essential to the social and economic fabric of the regions they traverse. Its story intertwines engineering ambition with environmental caution, domestic needs with international diplomacy, and development with ecological stewardship. As India and Bangladesh continue to negotiate water sharing and as upstream and downstream communities adapt to its presence, Farakka stands as both a lifeline and a cautionary tale—a testament to the power, promise, and perils of harnessing nature on such a massive scale.





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**Barak Festival 2025**  
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