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Manipur HC Orders Swift Removal of Viral Killing Video

SEEKS COMPLIANCE REPORT ON BLOCKING DIRECTIVE

IMPHAL

The Manipur High Court on January 24 took urgent cognisance of a viral video allegedly showing the killing of a man by armed miscreants and directed central authorities to ensure its immediate removal, observing that continued circulation could seriously disturb public order.

A single bench of Justice Aribam Guneshwar Sharma passed the order while hearing a writ petition filed by the Manipur government through the Commissioner (Home), represented by the Advocate General. The State sought directions for blocking the video across social media platforms, citing grave law-and-order implications.

During the hearing, the Advocate General submitted that the video depicts the killing of Mayanglambam Rishikant Singh, a resident of Kakching from the Meitei community. It was argued that the clip had gone viral across multiple platforms and had the potential to aggravate tensions and disrupt communal harmony if not taken down promptly.

The State urged the court to direct the official respondents-including the Union of India through the Secretary, Department of Telecommunications; the Director General (Cyber Laws and E-Security) under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY); and the Ministry of Home Affairs-as well as social media intermediaries such as Meta Platforms, Google and YouTube, and WhatsApp, to immediately remove the content.

Counsel assisting the Deputy Solicitor General of India accepted notice on behalf of the Centre and informed the court that MeitY had already issued a blocking order on January 22.

The order was passed under Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000, read with the Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking for Access of Information by Public) Rules, 2009, based on inputs from the Ministry of Home Affairs.

As per the communication placed before the court, the identified URLs were hosting videos depicting a brutal killing in Manipur, which had the potential to

disturb public order, prompting immediate directions for blocking access.

The High Court permitted the State to serve notices on the remaining respondents, including through electronic means, and observed that since MeitY had already acted on the information received from the MHA's nodal officer, the immediate relief sought by the State had been addressed.

However, the court directed the Union of India and the concerned ministries to place updated information on record on or before the next date of hearing regarding the status of the blocking order and compliance by social media intermediaries. The matter has been listed for further hearing on February 18.

The video, which surfaced late on January 21, purportedly shows Singh being shot twice despite pleading for his life. Circulated with the message "No Peace, No Popular Government," the footage triggered widespread outrage and condemnation after going viral on social media.

Banned ASUK Calls 10-Hour Shutdown on Republic Day

IMPHAL

The Alliance for Socialist Unity, Kangleipak (ASUK), a proscribed outfit opposed to Manipur's integration with the Indian Union, has called for a 10-hour total shutdown across Manipur on January 26 to boycott Republic Day celebrations. According to a statement issued by the ASUK Publicity Committee, the shutdown will be observed from 6:00 am to 4:00 pm. The group said essential services including electricity, water supply, medical and emergency services, fire services, and religious or ritual functions would be exempted from the shutdown. In its statement, ASUK reiterated its opposition to the merger of Manipur with India, referring to the erstwhile princely state's accession to the Indian Union in 1949. The group claimed that while India became a republic with the adoption of its Constitution on January 26, 1950, the Manipur Constitution Act had come into force earlier, on July 26, 1947. ASUK further

stated that Manipur had a democratically elected representative government following elections based on adult franchise in 1948, with the first sitting of the Manipur Legislative Assembly held on October 18 the same year. The outfit claimed that Manipur was the first independent country in Southeast Asia to be governed by a democratically elected government. Alleging that Manipur was forcibly annexed by India on October 15, 1949, ASUK said the state was subsequently reduced to the status of a Part-C state before being granted full statehood in 1972. The statement also claimed that the people of Manipur are now confined by a buffer zone or "red line," which it attributed to the merger with India.

The outfit further alleged that the Indian Constitution has failed to protect the lives and properties of the people of Manipur and, citing these reasons, called upon the public to boycott Republic Day celebrations.

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PERSPECTIVE

Actions speak louder than words. We can apologize over and over, but if our actions don't change, the words become meaningless.

Explosive Detonators Seized at Badarpur Railway Station

BADARPUR

A major security alert was sounded in Assam ahead of Republic Day after a large cache of explosive materials was seized at Badarpur Railway Station in Sribhum district. One person has been detained in connection with the recovery, officials said on Thursday. The seizure was made by the Government Railway Police (GRP) during routine security checks at Platform No. 1 of Badarpur station. GRP personnel grew suspicious of a young man moving within the station premises and carried out a search in keeping with standard preventive protocols. During the search, police recovered around 10,000 explosive detonators from the individual's possession, raising serious concerns amid heightened security arrangements in the run-up to Republic Day.

The detained man has been identified as Abdul Rahim, a resident of the Nilambazar police station area in Sribhum district. He has been taken into custody for questioning. Security agencies have launched a detailed investigation to determine the source and intended destination of the seized detonators, as well as to ascertain whether the consignment was linked to a wider network involved in the illegal transportation of explosive materials.

Following the recovery, security has been further tightened at railway stations and other sensitive locations across the region. Officials said coordination with intelligence agencies has been stepped up to rule out any threat to public safety during the national celebrations.

WHO SAID WHAT



Shashi Tharoor
Congress Leader

"It is better to convey concerns directly to the party leadership. Several things have appeared in the media, some of which may be true while others may not be, and that such matters should not be discussed on public platforms. I had informed the party in advance that I would not be attending the programme and whatever I have to say will be said within the party."

'Join to Work, Not for Tickets': CM Sarma to Ex-AASU Leaders Entering BJP



GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday confirmed that several former leaders of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), including its former general secretary Shankarjyoti Baruah, are set to join the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), while making it clear that late entrants should not expect immediate election tickets.

Speaking on the sidelines of a seed-capital distribution programme at Barkhetri in Nalbari district, Sarma said the party welcomes the former student leaders but their primary role would be organisational work rather than seeking electoral positions.

"I want to tell everyone that those joining late should not expect or hope for party tickets. We welcome them, and they should contribute by working at the party front. Joining today and receiving a party ticket tomorrow will be difficult," the Chief Minister said.

Addressing Baruah and other former AASU leaders directly, Sarma added, "Join to work for the party. We welcome you, but do not hope for election tickets this time."

Apart from Baruah, those expected to join the BJP include former AASU central executive member Kanak

Gogoi; Arjun Chetry from Tengakhat in Dibrugarh district; Rajib Gogoi from Jonaï in Dhemaji district; Roktim Bora from Jorhat; former Tinsukia Students' Union president Satya Borgohain; former Majuli Students' Union president Pranjit Hazarika; former ATTSA leader Shibo Karmakar from Dibrugarh; AAP leader and former Duliajan Panchayat president Bablu Bhumi; and Assam Pradesh Congress Committee leader Samiranjan Borsakia.

Meanwhile, the Chief Minister also dismissed criticism surrounding the Special Revision (SR) exercise in Assam, asserting that there was "no debate" on the issue. He claimed that notices under the exercise were being issued only to illegal Bangladesh nationals residing in the state.

"Which Hindu family has received a notice? Which Assamese Muslim household has seen a notice?" Sarma asked, maintaining that the government's actions were targeted and justified. He said steps against illegal immigrants would continue through SR, eviction drives and border police measures.

"We are with everyone, but we cannot live with someone who can kill our community," Sarma said.

Nagaland DGP Warns of Strict Action Against NSCN(K) Cadres in Village Headman Abduction Case

KOHIMA

Nagaland Director General of Police Rupin Sharma on January 23 warned of strict action against cadres of the NSCN (K) Khango group involved in the abduction and assault of a village headman, stating that the police will pursue the remaining accused if they fail to surrender.

Addressing a press conference, Sharma, who is also a member of the Ceasefire Monitoring Group/Ceasefire Supervisory Board (CFMG/CFSB), said the movement of NSCN (K) Khango cadres around the CFSB office had been restricted to prevent any escalation. He said police held negotiations with the group to avoid confrontation, following which three cadres were handed over in connection with the January 19 abduction of village headman Zhimomi.

The DGP reiterated that no faction has the authority to maintain law and order, which rests solely with the police and other security forces under the ceasefire ground rules. He said allegations of illegal activities against any individual should be brought before the CFBSB for amicable resolution rather than through unilateral actions such as abduction or violence.

"No faction can summon, abduct, detain or threaten anyone.

The supervisory board offices exist only to maintain peace and prevent misunderstandings," Sharma said, urging all factions to strictly adhere to the ceasefire ground rules.

Meanwhile, the CFMG/CFSB on January 22 directed the NSCN (K) Khango group to hand over seven cadres identified as prime accused in the case. Sharma said police would take necessary action if the remaining accused fail to surrender.

Kohima to Get Rail Connectivity

NEW DELHI

Kohima is set to be integrated into India's national rail network as work on the 78.42-km Dimapur-Kohima railway line has crossed the 40 per cent completion mark, the North East Frontier Railway (NFR) said on Friday. The strategically important project, declared one of national importance, connects Dhanisiri-an existing station on the Lumding-Tinsukia main line near Dimapur to Zubza, located about 20 km from Kohima city. Once completed, the rail link will provide direct connectivity between Nagaland's capital and the rest of the country, including the national capital.

According to NFR officials, construction is progressing steadily across the remaining stretches, with the entire project targeted for completion by December 2029.

Of the eight stations planned along the route-Dhanisiri, Dhanisripur, Shokhuvi, Molvom, Pherima, Pipheha, Menguzuma and Zubza-four stations have already been completed. These include Dhanisiri, Dhanisripur, Shokhuvi and Molvom.

The project involves significant engineering challenges, with 20 tunnels spanning a total length of 31,169 metres. Seven tunnels have been completed so far. In addition, the line includes 30 major and 150 minor bridges, of which 12 major bridges and 141 minor bridges are ready.

The Dhanisiri-Shokhuvi section (16.5 km) was commissioned in October 2021, followed by the Shokhuvi-Molvom section (14.64

km) in March 2025. As per the current schedule, the Molvom-Pherima section is expected to be commissioned in March 2027, while the final Pherima-Zubza stretch is slated for completion by December 2029. A major milestone was achieved in 2022 when passenger train services began from Shokhuvi, making it only the second railway station in Nagaland, more than a century after Dimapur station was commissioned. In September 2025, cargo operations commenced at Shokhuvi railway station, marking the first such facility in the area and providing a boost to trade and commerce in the state.

Railway officials said the project would significantly strengthen connectivity between Nagaland, neighbouring northeastern states and the rest of India. Regular passenger services are already operating from Shokhuvi to Guwahati in Assam and Naharlagun in Arunachal Pradesh.

With Molvom emerging as the third major railway station in Nagaland and Shokhuvi handling freight traffic, officials said the state has gained safer and more cost-effective options for passenger and goods movement. Improved rail connectivity is also expected to enhance access to education, healthcare, employment and markets, while reducing dependence on road transport in the hilly terrain.

The NFR added that the development of stations and goods sheds along the route is likely to spur economic activity in surrounding areas, generating employment and supporting local businesses.

Scindia Inaugurates, Lays Foundation for Eight Development Projects Worth Rs.365 Crore in Tripura

AGARTALA

Union Minister for Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) and Communications Jyotiraditya Scindia on Friday inaugurated and laid foundation stones for eight development projects in Tripura with a total outlay of ₹365 crore, marking a major push to infrastructure and connectivity in the state.

Scindia carried out the inaugurations and foundation-laying ceremonies on the first day of his visit to Tripura, accompanied by Chief Minister Prof. (Dr.) Manik Saha.

Of the eight projects, five completed works costing ₹270 crore were inaugurated. These include the 13.775-km Jatanbari-Mandirghat via Tirathmukh road, improvement of the KA road from Erarpur to Ambassa over a stretch of 28.90 km, and the 8-km Gandacherra-Raishyabari-Narikel Kunja road. The projects are aimed at strengthening road connectivity between villages and district centres, improving access to markets, educational institutions and healthcare facilities.

Improved connectivity from Amarapur (Fatiksagar) to Chabimura was highlighted as a key intervention to boost access to Tripura's heritage and tourism sites.



A Solar Microgrid project implemented under the Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North East Region (PM-DevINE) scheme was also cited as a significant step towards providing reliable electricity in remote and hard-to-reach areas.

The Union Minister also laid the foundation stone for three new road projects with an estimated cost of ₹95 crore. These include the 9.10-km Kowaifung (Panjirai) to Karbook road, the Jampui (PMGSY point) to Kangrai road, and the Burighat to Sermun-II Road. Officials said the projects are expected to improve all-weather connectivity in hilly and interior regions

of the state. Addressing a function, Scindia said the Centre has invested more than ₹6.5 lakh crore in the Northeastern region over the past 12 years, with all Central ministries mandatorily earmarking 10 per cent of their budgets for the region's development.

The minister is scheduled to visit several development sites across Tripura and offer prayers at the Mata Tripura Sundari Temple at Matabari later in the day, officials said.

Referring to the PM-DevINE scheme, Scindia said the Solar Micro Grid proj-

ect would ensure clean and reliable power supply in remote and difficult areas, strengthening education, healthcare delivery and livelihood options.

In addition, the minister laid the foundation stone for three new road projects to be constructed at a cost of ₹95 crore. These include the Kowaifung (Panjirai) to Karbook Road, the Jampui (PMGSY point) to Kangrai Road, and the Burighat to Sermun-II Road. He said these projects would ensure sustained connectivity for hilly and interior regions, keeping remote areas integrated with the mainstream of development. Scindia reiterated that every Central ministry is mandated to spend 10 per cent of its budget in the Northeastern states, a policy he said has accelerated infrastructure creation and social development across the region. He praised Tripura Chief Minister Prof. (Dr.) Manik Saha, noting that strong Centre-State coordination has helped the state achieve new benchmarks in social, economic and infrastructure growth.

During his visit, the Union Minister is also scheduled to inspect various development sites across Tripura and offer prayers at the Mata Tripura Sundari Temple at Matabari, one of the country's prominent Shakti Peeths, seeking prosperity for the state and the nation.

Assam Rifles Marks 150 Years of 'Vande Mataram' with Patriotic Concerts Across Manipur

IMPHAL

The Assam Rifles on January 23 commemorated the 150th anniversary of India's national song Vande Mataram by organising a series of patriotic musical programmes across Manipur, aiming to promote national pride, cultural unity and community participation ahead of Republic Day.

According to a press release issued by the Headquarters Inspector General Assam Rifles (South), the events were held at Kangla Fort in Imphal, the Khongjom War Memorial in Thoubal district, and Peace Ground in Tuibong, Churachandpur district. The programmes witnessed enthusiastic participation from students, NCC cadets, civilians and tourists.

At Kangla Fort, the Assam Rifles Band performed before an audience of over 200 people, including NCC cadets, college students and visitors. The repertoire featured evocative renditions of Vande Mataram, Kadam Kadam Badhaye Ja and Sare Jahan Se Achha, with the band's brass harmonies and rhythmic percussion resonating across the historic complex.

The programme at the Khongjom War Memorial provided a solemn backdrop for musical tributes honouring Manipur's legendary warriors. Patriotic compositions, led by Vande Mataram, evoked a sense of pride and reflection among visitors to the site.

The largest gathering was recorded at Peace Ground in Tuibong, where the Assam Rifles' Pipe Band and Jazz Band presented a full rendition of Vande Mataram before around 1,200 students from Bethany Christian College, Churachandpur College, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya and Rayburn College. The event was also attended by nearly 300 NCC cadets and 200 civilians. The sight of the tricolour waving amid the musical performances created a strong atmosphere of patriotic fervour.

The Assam Rifles said the programmes were organised to celebrate 150 years of Vande Mataram as a symbol of India's resilience, sacrifice and shared heritage. The force noted that the events reaffirmed the song's enduring significance in inspiring generations and strengthening national integration across Manipur.



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INDIA FINDING ITS OWN NORTH STAR

Operation Sindoor is not just a name but a reflection of the feelings of millions of people of the country. Operation 'Sindoor' is our unwavering commitment to justice.

In contemporary strategic discourse, national security is no longer defined only by firepower or deterrence. It is equally shaped by sovereignty over systems, moral legitimacy of action, and public trust. India's evolving defence posture increasingly reflects this integrated approach.

Two defining markers of this shift are NAVIC and Operation Sindoor offering valuable insight into how India is aligning ancient strategic consciousness with modern capability. Together, they represent a nation reclaiming direction and justice in an uncertain global order.

Indian strategic thought has historically treated war as an extension of Dharma, not conquest. Texts such as Arthashastra and epics like Mahabharata highlight that military campaigns were governed by a precise understanding of time and direction, Observations of nakshatras (constellations) for movement, logistics, and decision-making and Ethical boundaries that defined proportional response and responsibility.

Celestial knowledge functioned as an early system of navigation, intelligence, and timing system. This tradition emphasised that success in war required alignment between cosmic order and human action.

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi dedicated NAVIC to the nation in 2016, his message was unambiguous "India cannot afford strategic dependence on foreign navigation systems, particularly in moments of crisis or conflict."

NAVIC was envisioned as a dual use system serving both national security and civilian needs, from armed forces to fishermen and disaster responders. Its strategic significance lies in assured navigation during geopolitical denial or degradation. Encrypted services for military operations and Strengthening India's C3I (Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence) architecture. In strategic terms, NAVIC restores India's control over direction, timing, and positioning.

Operation Sindoor occupies a unique space in India's defence narrative. It is not merely an operational success, it is a statement of intent.

The term sindoor carries deep cultural symbolism of protection, continuity, dignity, and commitment. By choosing this name, the state embedded emotional legitimacy into strategic action. The operation demonstrated decisive yet calibrated use of force, a commitment to justice rather than retaliation and Reinforcement of national dignity and public confidence.

Much like ancient campaigns aimed to restore Dharma, Operation Sindoor reflects modern India's resolve to act firmly while remaining ethically anchored.

Relationship between NAVIC and Operation Sindoor depicts that warfare is neither symbolic nor coincidental, it is strategic. Control over navigation enables credible power and credible power enables justice.

NAVIC provides sovereign, real-time spatial awareness and Operation Sindoor applies that capability with moral clarity. In this framework, NAVIC functions as the strategic compass, while Operation Sindoor defines the direction of its use. Modern conflict spans multiple domains from Space (satellites, navigation, surveillance), Maritime, Information (signals, cyber, perception) to Public Sentiments (legitimacy, trust, deterrence credibility). NAVIC strengthens India's operational resilience across domains. Operation Sindoor reinforces deterrence by demonstrating that India's responses are measured, just and decisive, a combination that enhances both hard and soft power.

Both initiatives are products of India's broader push for defence indigenisation and strategic management. This is not merely about manufacturing capability, it is about sovereignty in decision making. A nation that controls its navigation systems and operational choices reduces vulnerability to external pressure. In this sense, indigenisation becomes a form of strategic insurance.

From ancient warriors guided by stars to modern forces navigating through NAVIC satellites, India's strategic journey reflects continuity rather than rupture. NAVIC provides direction and Operation Sindoor affirms justice. Together, they illustrate an Indian security doctrine that blends technological self-reliance, ethical restraint, and strategic confidence.

In an era of contested spaces and uncertain alliances, India is not merely responding to events, it is shaping its own trajectory. Guided by its own constellations, India's strategic compass is firmly in its own hands.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Always go with your passions. Never ask yourself if it's realistic or not." —Deepak Chopra

THE CONTESTS THAT WILL DEFINE 2026 POLL SCAPE



RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

The year gone by will be enshrined in the BJP's annals for its spectacular success in two state polls, Delhi and Bihar, which it convincingly wrested against great odds. The new year began with a near-sweep in the prized Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation polls, where it seemed not so long ago that the BJP was doomed to be subordinate to old ally Shiv Sena.

For the BJP, a victory is just that—whether it is for a local body, state assembly or parliament—meant to be celebrated as not just something politically significant but as a morale booster. A message to the cadre to keep working because bigger triumphs are in sight if they keep at it. But this year, the BJP needs a stronger stimulant because most of the year's elections might be more daunting for it than the ones just past. Up for grabs are three states where success has eluded it so far: West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Data from the previous assembly elections in the states afford clues to the tasks before the BJP. Of the 294 assembly seats in West Bengal, the saffron party won just 77 of the 188 it contested in 2021 and registered a vote share of 39 percent. In contrast, victor Trinamool Congress walked away with 213 seats and a poll percentage of more than 48 percent.

Of Tamil Nadu's 188 seats it contested in 2021, the DMK romped home with 133 and a vote share of 38 percent, while its ally Congress picked up 18 seats with 4 percent of the votes. The BJP won just four of the 20 seats it fought, cornering a bit less than 3 percent votes. In Kerala, the BJP was out for a duck despite contesting 115 seats and notching up more than 11 percent of the votes.

The east and the south don't appear promising so far for the BJP. But given its distinctive ability to strategise in unforeseen ways, its capacity for hard work and, most importantly, a special skill to draw narratives that punch holes in the opponents' campaigns that are often hard to fill, who knows

what the impending elections hold for it and its adversaries?

West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala are expected to vote in April-May. So we can be sure to be subject to several cacophonous exchanges in the coming months—between the BJP and the never-say-die Mamata Banerjee spoiling for a feud or two in Bengal; between a combative K Annamalai, presently the BJP's best known face in Tamil Nadu, and the soft-spoken but laser-focused M K Stalin along with family scion Udayanidhi Stalin; and between the two entrenched blocs in Kerala, the UDF and the LDF.

At daggers drawn, the UDF and the LDF are resolute in not allowing space for a third player, certainly not the BJP. The RSS has constructed a network across the state over the years, but has not succeeded in translating its efforts into votes for its political progeny.

In recent years, the BJP's storylines have successfully persuaded voters in the Hindi heartland, unless an opposition party offered a more convincing version like the Samajwadi Party's in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls in Uttar Pradesh.

However, the dynamics shaping the elections vary. If Tamil Nadu's politics is invariably dictated largely by alliances because of the multiple caste-based parties on the canvas, Bengal and to an extent Kerala are driven by narratives pivoting around Centre-state contradictions that have also impacted Tamil Nadu (the alleged imposition of Hindi, for instance).

In Bengal, unfazed by its losses in the 2021 assembly and 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP kick-started its offensive against Banerjee and Trinamool with an unwavering commitment to the Election Commission's special intensive revision to purportedly identify the "infiltrators" from Bangladesh and "illegal" Rohingya settlers from Myanmar. It has gone to town about Trinamool's "Muslim appeasement", juxtaposing it with state-specific issues such as the corruption charges emanating from cash-for-

jobs abuses and the rape-murder of a junior doctor at a Kolkata hospital, with legislative party leader Suvendu Adhikari at the campaign's forefront.

The attacks culminated in an Enforcement Directorate raid on I-PAC, the private consultancy functioning as Trinamool's principal database and back-up apparatus. The raid was enough to draw out the street-fighter in Banerjee, who confronted the raiders with her Trinamool warriors and put the officers on the defensive. In between, the BJP leadership's numerous gaffes on Bengal's cultural icons were grist to the Trinamool's charge that the BJP has still not comprehended the state's history and legacy—a point its state leaders couldn't counter.

Perhaps realising that his digs on Banerjee didn't go down well with voters in 2021, Narendra Modi advised his Bengal MPs to depict the SIR process in the "right" way without getting boastful about the numbers or belligerent about the intention. The BJP's apprehension that was the Matua community—dominant in at least 30 of the 294 assembly seats—which the party had nurtured as a vote bank, was rattled by the SIR exercise because many who had migrated from Bangladesh did not have the required documents. As of now, Bengal seems a long haul for the BJP.

In Chennai, where the BJP's priority is ostensibly putting together a broad anti-DMK front, the latest acquisition—or rather, reacquisition—was the T T V Dhinakaran-helmed Amma Makkal Munnettra Kazhagam for the NDA. Dhinakaran revived the legacy of former AIADMK chief J Jayalalithaa and promised to honour it—an indication that Dravida politics principally survives on the memories of K Karunanidhi for the DMK and Jayalalithaa for the NDA.

But getting actor Vijay's Tamila Vetrri Kazhagam would be the icing on the cake for the BJP, except that Vijay's anti-BJP utterances and the censor certificate controversy over his film Jana

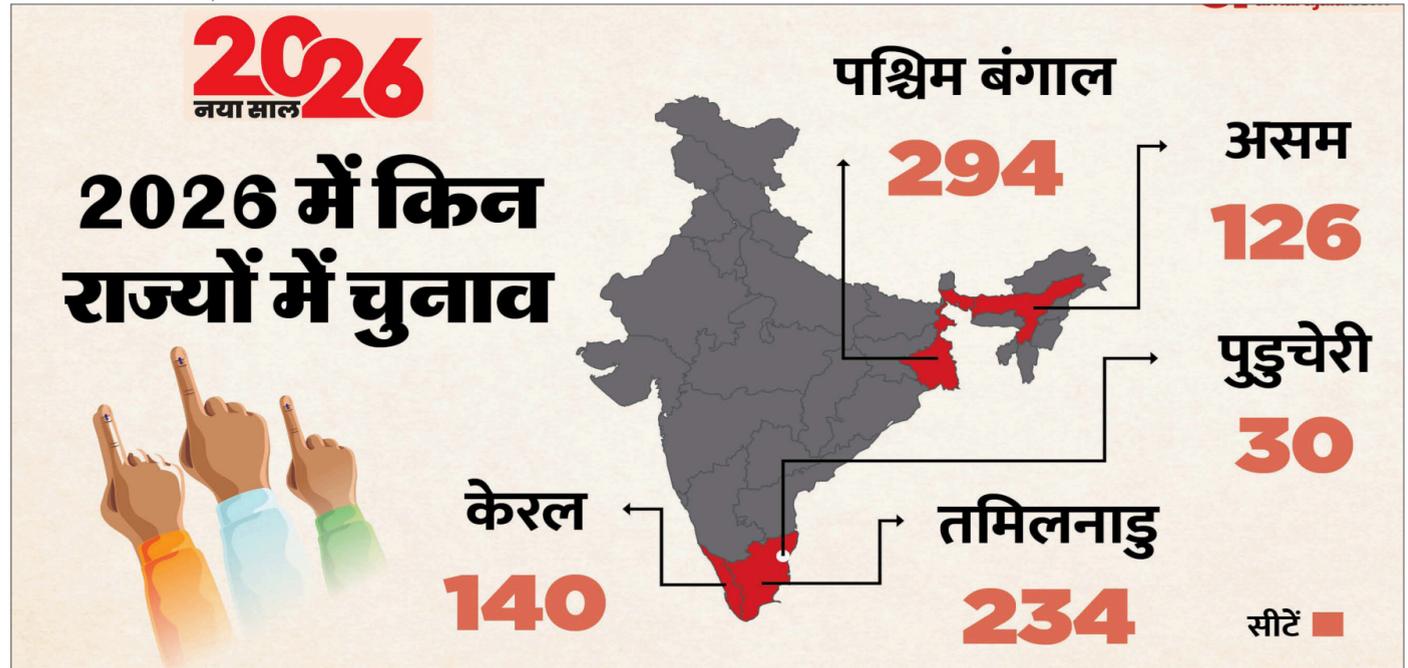
Nayagan could be impediments in the path to negotiations.

In Kerala, BJP's win in the Thiruvananthapuram corporation was toasted as a "big breakthrough". But in a recent interview, Rajeev Chandrasekhar, the party's state president, conceded that the UDF and the LDF "amplified that the BJP is a communal party" and alleged that the fronts had an "implicit partnership" to thwart the BJP's rise. Nonetheless, Chandrasekhar added that the BJP had not given up on its programme to reach out to Muslims and Christians through community clerics and influencers.

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

"I think there is a lot of freedom in the Congress Party. There is nothing like slavery in Congress. Just tell them this is why I did it, and they will never stop you or get angry about it. Freedom is very much present in the Congress Party. They don't treat you like slaves. They believe that you are a trustworthy person. A country's Prime Minister meets people from all sections of society, and he continues to meet them, it does not mean that he belongs to any particular party." "Especially, we had a very good relationship with Rajiv Gandhi. I used to cover the Prime Minister's office for the Sunday magazine. That's when I first met them. Then, journalists traditionally went along with the Prime Minister for coverage. Now the journalists go separately. I developed friendship with them and got to know them well,"

Rajeev Shukla
Congress leader



Assam-Mizoram Border Talks Back on Track, Date for Next Round Yet to Be Finalised

GUWAHATI

After a long pause, Assam and Mizoram have resumed official-level communication to restart negotiations aimed at resolving their 123-km inter-State boundary dispute, a senior Mizoram Home Department official confirmed on January 24.

Mizoram Home Secretary Vanlal-mawia said the next round of talks is expected to be held in the Mizoram capital, as agreed during the previous meeting in Guwahati on April 25 last year. However, no official date has been finalised so far. "There have been exchanges between the two State governments, but a specific date for the next round of talks is yet to be fixed," Vanlal-mawia said, adding that Mizoram had repeatedly sought to advance the process last year, but responses from Assam were delayed.

During the last official-level discussions, both sides reviewed Mizoram's



claims based on the 1875 notification under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873, as well as submissions made to Assam in February and November 2023. Mizoram maintains that 62 vil-

lages in the disputed belt fall within its jurisdiction, and these claims were discussed extensively during the Guwahati meeting. Both States had also agreed to maintain strict status quo in the dis-

puted areas until a final settlement is reached, with district administrations instructed to halt any activities that could escalate tensions.

The 123-km Assam-Mizoram border has witnessed sporadic incidents of violence over the years, most notably on July 26, 2021, when an exchange of fire resulted in the deaths of five Assam policemen. Since then, several rounds of dialogue have been held, including ministerial-level and political-level discussions, involving leaders such as Assam Minister Atul Bora, Mizoram Home Minister K. Sapdanga, and Chief Ministers Zoramthanga and Himanta Biswa Sarma, with Union Home Minister Amit Shah also facilitating talks in New Delhi.

Officials said the renewed communication between the two States has raised hopes that the stalled dialogue process could regain momentum, though progress will depend on how quickly a date for the next round of talks is set.

Kohima Court Awards Four Years' Rigorous Imprisonment in 2021 Culpable Homicide Case

KOHIMA

A district and sessions court in Kohima has sentenced a 39-year-old man to four years of rigorous imprisonment and imposed a fine in connection with a culpable homicide case dating back to 2021.

According to a press release issued by the Office of the Public Prosecutor, Kohima, the Court of Smt Mezivolu T. Therieh, NJS, Principal District and Sessions Judge, Kohima, on January 23 convicted Raju Rao under Section 304 Part II of the Indian Penal Code for the culpable homicide of Ninaju Raj Bangshi, 37. The incident had occurred at Jotsoma village in 2021.

The court sentenced the convict to undergo rigorous imprisonment for four years and imposed a fine of Rs 5,000. In default of payment of the fine, he will have to

undergo simple imprisonment for one year.

The case was investigated by UBSI Tsalamo Odyou of Sechu Zubza Police Station, Kohima. During the course of the trial, six prosecution witnesses were examined.

The prosecution was conducted by Special Public Prosecutor L. Sashimongla Jamir, who proved the case against the accused beyond reasonable doubt. After evaluating oral, medical and documentary evidence, the court held the accused guilty under Section 304 Part II IPC.

Additional Public Prosecutor, Kohima, Abraham said the conviction was the outcome of coordinated efforts by the police, prosecution and witnesses, and commended the investigating agency for its effective handling of the case.

Rs 213.24 Crore Kamakhya Ropeway Project to Boost Pilgrimage Connectivity in Guwahati

GUWAHATI

The Assam government is set to significantly strengthen pilgrimage infrastructure with the ₹213.24 crore Kamakhya Ropeway Project, aimed at improving access to the sacred Maa Kamakhya Temple while preserving the spiritual and cultural heritage of the region.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma described the project as an initiative that would give "new momentum to sacred journeys," aligning with the state's broader vision of Vikas Bhi, Virasat Bhi.

The 1.43-kilometre-long modern ropeway will connect Kamakhya Railway Station with the hilltop shrine, reducing travel time from around 20 minutes to just six minutes. Designed to handle over 16,500 passengers, the ropeway will operate with 18 state-of-the-art gondolas, ensuring safer and smoother movement for devotees and tourists.

Conceived as an eco-friendly green mobility solution, the project is expected to ease traffic congestion on the Nilachal Hills road and reduce environmental stress in the area. Apart from enhancing pilgrim convenience, it is also projected to generate local employment and provide a sustained boost to tourism in and around Guwahati.

With an investment of ₹213.24 crore, the project underscores Assam's commitment to integrating modern infrastructure with its centuries-old spiritual traditions, marking a major milestone in the state's pilgrimage and tourism landscape.



Manipur Announces Rs10 Lakh Ex Gratia for Family of Abducted, Murdered Civilian



IMPHAL

The Manipur government on Friday announced an ex gratia payment of ₹10 lakh to the family of Mayanglangbam Rishikanta Singh, also known as Ginnimthang (29), who was abducted and shot dead by suspected militants in Churachandpur district earlier this week.

Rishikanta Singh, a resident of Kakching Khunou Hijam Uchan Makhong Leikai in Kakching district and son of M Tombi Singh, was reportedly abducted at gun-

point along with his wife, Chingu Haokip, from their residence near the district headquarters of Tuibong in Churachandpur. The incident occurred on the night of January 21.

According to officials, Singh was later taken to the Natjang village area, where he was shot dead by unidentified armed miscreants.

The state government expressed its condolences to the bereaved family and said it shared their grief. The Commissioner-cum-Secretary (Home), Government of Manipur, stated that the ex gratia amount of ₹10 lakh would be provided to the next of kin of the deceased.

Meanwhile, Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla announced that the case would be handed over to the National Investigation Agency (NIA) for a thorough and impartial investigation.

BJP Alleges Gaurav Gogoi Promoting 'New Greater Assam' Narrative Favouring Miya Community

GUWAHATI

The Assam Pradesh BJP on January 23 launched a sharp political attack on Assam Congress president Gaurav Gogoi, accusing him of pursuing what it described as a "new Greater Assam" agenda dominated by the Miya community, allegedly at the cost of the state's historical and cultural foundations.

Addressing a press conference at the BJP state headquarters, Atal Bihari Vajpayee Bhavan, party spokesperson Jayanta Kumar Goswami claimed that Gogoi's political outlook has been influenced by the ideology propagated by Miya leader Rezaul Karim. Goswami alleged that this narrative runs contrary to the concept of Greater Assam envisioned by Ahom king Swargadeo Chaolung Sukapha, who unified seven kingdoms, and by Srimanta Sankaradeva, the saint-reformer who fostered social and cultural unity across communities.



Referring to past events, Goswami recalled that Rezaul Karim, after joining the Congress earlier, had allegedly made statements from party platforms claiming that indigenous-dominated regions such as Sivasagar would be turned into

Miya-dominated areas like Dhurbri. Although Karim later left the Congress, the BJP spokesperson alleged that Gogoi has continued to advance a similar ideological line.

Questioning Gogoi's political stance, Goswami said the BJP

subscribes to the idea of Greater Assam shaped by Sukapha, who unified diverse communities and resisted Mughal expansion, and by Sankaradeva, who laid the foundations of a culturally cohesive society transcending caste and community divisions. He cited Sankaradeva's role in integrating Chand Sai into the Neo-Vaishnavite fold as an example of cultural assimilation rooted in Assamese traditions. Goswami further alleged that Gogoi's vision of a "new Greater Assam" involves engagement with Miya youth leaders who have reportedly demanded reservation of 48 Assembly constituencies exclusively for the Miya community. According to the BJP, such demands threaten Assam's social harmony and political balance. The allegations were made through an official statement issued by BJP state spokesperson Jayanta Kumar Goswami. No immediate response was available from the Congress or Gaurav Gogoi at the time of publication.

New Tourism Facilities Inaugurated in Arunachal's Dibang Valley Near Indo-China Border

ITANAGAR

In a significant push to strengthen tourism infrastructure and promote community-led development in India's remote border regions, a series of tourist facilities were inaugurated in Dibang Valley near the Indo-China border during the Pre-Reh Festival celebrations at Angrim Valley.

The facilities were inaugurated by Anni MLA and Advisor to the Minister of Tourism, Civil Aviation and Geology & Mining, Mope Mihu, in the presence of Deputy Commissioner Bekir Nyorak, Zilla Parishad Chairperson Sadhu Mihu and senior district officials. The newly commissioned infrastructure includes a Tourist Centre, a Tourist Lodge and a Community Hall, aimed at improving visitor amenities while supporting local socio-economic growth.



Addressing the gathering, the MLA emphasised the role of sustainable tourism as a catalyst for economic empowerment in

frontier districts. He said the new infrastructure would help attract tourists to the scenic Dibang Valley, create livelihood opportunities for

local residents and contribute to the preservation of indigenous culture and traditions.

The inauguration coincided with the Pre-Reh Festival, a major cultural celebration of the Idu Mishmi community. The festival featured traditional rituals, music and customs, highlighting the community's rich cultural heritage and collective identity, and lending cultural significance to the development initiative.

Officials said the new facilities are expected to play a key role in promoting Dibang Valley as a responsible and sustainable tourism destination, while encouraging community participation in development activities. The project, they added, reflects the government's commitment to balanced regional growth, cultural preservation and strategic development in border areas.

Boko Village to Mark Silver Jubilee of Bathou Puja Along Assam-Meghalaya Border

GUWAHATI

The sacred Bathou Puja, a major religious and cultural observance of the Bodo community, will be celebrated with special significance on January 27 and 28 at Kathalpara village in Boko, along the Assam-Meghalaya border, as the village marks 25 years of the annual ritual.

Preparations are underway to commemorate the occasion as a Silver Jubilee celebration, underscoring both cultural continuity and the spirit of communal harmony that has defined the event over the years.

According to Jitu Boro, General Secretary of the Silver Jubilee Celebration Committee, the two-day programme will feature a range of religious and cultural activities. The celebration is expected to be attended by Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) Chief Hagrama Mohilary and Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Chief Executive Member Tankeswar Rabha, along with other dignitaries. Cultural performances highlighting indigenous

traditions are also planned as part of the festivities.

Boro said preparations in Kathalpara village have seen active participation from residents across communities. He noted that people belonging to Garo, Rabha and Gorkha communities have extended support and guidance, reflecting the strong tradition of inter-community cooperation and mutual respect in the border village.

Bathou Puja is traditionally observed on the second Tuesday of the Assamese month of Magh and holds deep spiritual significance for the Bodo community. The ritual centres on the worship of the Sijou plant, through which devotees offer prayers to the five elements of nature - earth, water, fire, sky and air - seeking peace, prosperity and collective well-being.

According to Bodo belief, the Sijou plant has existed since the creation of the world and symbolises life, balance and cosmic order. Its ritual worship during Bathou Puja remains an integral part of Bodo religious faith and cultural identity.

Forged Letter Row Followed by Banner Gaffe: Protocol Lapses Put Sarbananda Sonowal in Spotlight

GUWAHATI

Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal has come under the spotlight following two separate controversies within days, triggering public outrage, administrative embarrassment and sharp criticism on social media.

The back-to-back incidents - one involving a forged letter bearing the minister's name and another a glaring protocol lapse at a government function - have raised serious questions about misinformation, administrative diligence and respect for constitutional offices.

Earlier this week, the Union Minister's office issued a clarification stating that a letter circulating in public, purportedly carrying Sonowal's signature and official letterhead, was entirely forged. Describing it as a malicious attempt to spread misinformation and damage the image of a senior constitutional authority, the office said the document had no official authenticity.

An FIR has since been registered, and law enforcement agencies have launched an investigation to trace those behind the fabrication and circulation of the fake letter. The minister's office also urged the public and the media to rely only on verified and of-

The Union Minister's office issued a clarification stating that a letter circulating in public, purportedly carrying Sonowal's signature and official letterhead, was entirely forged. Describing it as a malicious attempt to spread misinformation and damage the image of a senior constitutional authority, the office said the document had no official authenticity

ficial sources of information.

The controversy deepened following a separate incident in Assam's Dibrugarh district, where a government event witnessed an embarrassing misrepresentation of the Union Minister's designation. At the inauguration of an Aadhaar Seva Kendra at the AMTRON office, a welcome banner described Sarbananda Sonowal as "Secretary of Waterways Minister Assam", a title entirely unrelated to his current position as a Union Cabinet Minister. The banner also reportedly misidentified Assam Power Minister Prasanta Phukan as the "Electricity Minister of Assam" and contained a spelling error in Sarbananda Sonowal's name in Assamese, further compounding

the lapse.

Reacting strongly, Dibrugarh Municipal Corporation Mayor Dr Saikat Patra termed the incident a serious blunder and demanded accountability.

"An Aadhaar Seva Kendra was inaugurated in Dibrugarh by State Power Minister Prasanta Phukan. However, a controversy erupted after a banner wrongly described Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal as Secretary to the Waterways Minister Assam, while Minister Phukan's portfolio was also incorrectly mentioned. This is a major lapse. A probe should be initiated and those responsible must be identified and punished," Dr Patra said.

The incident has triggered sharp reactions from social media users, political observers and civil society members, many of whom described the errors as a serious administrative failure and a sign of disrespect towards a senior Union Minister. Several commentators noted that such negligence undermines the dignity of constitutional offices and reflects poorly on official preparedness and adherence to protocol.

As of now, no official explanation has been issued by the event organisers regarding how the errors occurred at a government function.



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'Ignored' Tharoor skips crucial Congress meet, Kerala unit told to stay united



NEW DELHI

The Congress central leadership on Friday asked party leaders in Kerala to close ranks and fight the upcoming Assembly elections in a united manner at a key strategy meeting for the state polls, which saw senior leader Shashi Tharoor skipping it, as he is believed to be upset over Rahul Gandhi not acknowledging his presence at a recent event in Kochi.

The meeting, chaired by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, was attended by Rahul Gandhi, AICC general secretary K C Venugopal, and state leaders Sunny Joseph, VD Sathesan, and Ramesh Chennithala, among others. Sources said the Kerala leadership was asked to begin deliberations on candidate selection amid indications that most sitting MLAs are likely to be renominated. The state unit is expected to hold discussions on candidate selection and alliance strategy by the end of the month, a party leader said.

Rahul Gandhi, the sources added, was keen on bringing the Kerala Congress (M) back into the Congress-led fold.

While the leadership maintained that Tharoor had informed them in advance about his inability to attend the meeting due to prior commitments, sources close to the

Thiruvananthapuram MP said that he has chosen to stay away from the meeting as a mark of protest against both the state and central leadership of the party.

Tharoor walks out of KPCC 'Maha Panchayat', alleges snub by Congress leadership

Sources said the immediate trigger for the fallout is an incident at the Kochi event. AICC asked Tharoor and other leaders to speak after Rahul Gandhi's address, a leader said. When Gandhi arrived on the stage, Tharoor stopped his speech and greeted him. However, contrary to the initial instruction, at least six leaders went on to speak after Gandhi's arrival.

Tharoor was particularly upset that Rahul Gandhi did not acknowledge him by name in his speech, despite mentioning several other leaders present on the dais. "Given his seniority and his position as a Congress Working Committee member, Tharoor felt that Rahul Gandhi should have mentioned his name. The party cannot afford to ignore his popularity during the assembly election campaign," said a senior party leader.

Before leaving the venue, Tharoor reportedly conveyed his displeasure to some leaders present at the event. According to sources close to him, he is

deeply upset at the treatment meted out to him by the party, especially after differences had been ironed out at the Wayanad meetings on the sidelines of the Lakshya 2026 leadership camp organised by the KPCC to chalk out strategies for the assembly elections.

Sources added that Tharoor felt there had been a temporary improvement in his ties with the party following his interventions in Parliament during the winter session and his participation in the Wayanad leadership camp. However, the latest episode has reinforced his belief that the leadership is once again distancing itself from him.

Tharoor's uneasy equation with the party's official line has been evident for some time. His recent public comments praising Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his remarks critical of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty had earlier caused embarrassment to the Congress.

After the meeting, Kharge wrote on X, "3.6 crore people of Kerala are yearning for change. The Congress party along with our partners in the UDF are determined to ensure progressive, development-oriented, welfare based governance in the state.

An important preparatory meeting with Kerala leaders was held for the forthcoming Assembly elections".

From BrahMos to Akash, India to showcase military might on Republic Day

NEW DELHI

As India is set to hold its first Republic Day parade after Operation Sindoor, the Indian Armed Forces' military might will also be on display with the BrahMos missile system, Akash weapon system and other weaponry, focusing on the resolve of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'.

The long-range supersonic cruise missile, BrahMos, which was used to strike the Pakistan army's bases during Operation Sindoor, surely serves as the centre of attraction for the parade.

Capt Animesh Rohila, Contingent Commander for the BrahMos Missile System, hailed the missile's capabilities as displayed during Operation Sindoor. "The only thing that I would like to say about BrahMos is that it needs no introduction. It is a combination of supersonic speed and accuracy that delivers the package to the target with good precision, so it arrives before the enemy defences can even react or do anything to stop it," he said.

"I can say that the enemy air defences do not have an answer to it, and I believe you have seen the imagery and the effects of destruction and lethality that it has caused in the hearts, minds, and psychology of the enemy," he added.

The Akash Weapon System, an indigenously developed medium-range surface-to-air missile (SAM) system, also demonstrated its capabilities during Operation Sindoor, causing significant losses to the enemy. The system will also be displayed during the parade.

Captain Aniket Ojha, Contingent Commander for Akash Weapon System, said, "Akash weapon system is India's first indigenously made surface-to-air missile and has the capacity to engage at high altitude. The major aspect of the Akash weapon system is that it is effective in all kinds of terrain. It has been deployed and actively engaged at all the targets over there. It has the capability of engaging with multiple targets that include enemy aircraft, helicopters, UAVs, drones and missiles," he said.

Hailing the defence system perfor-



mance during the operation, he said, "The stories are all true, it has proved its mettle in the battle as well as in any kind of operations. We had tracked multiple targets, and we engaged them. You can say there was no loss from our side, and the enemy has suffered large losses."

India's indigenously developed third-generation Main Battle Tank (MBT), the Arjun, will also be on display. This is the first time the MBT Arjun will be on the Kartavya Path.

MBT Arjun Tank Contingent Commander, Major Hitesh Mehta told, "I am leading MBT Arjun, which is a Make in India tank, and for the first time we are leading with different innovations that we have done. This is the first time that the MBT Arjun has got a lot of field innovations, and we are running on the Kartavya Path."

Along with this, the new Shaktibaan regiment, focused on modern drone war-

fare, will also grace the Kartavya Path.

Lt. Raman Mishra, Contingent Commander for 'Shaktibaan' regiment, said, "I am very proud to be part of this 77th Republic Day. I come from a gunner's family, still, what I feel now is that the age is changing, and as part of this modern transformation, we have raised two new entities. One Shaktibaan Regiment and the second Divyastra batteries.

Additionally, Capt D Mukherjee, leading the 7010 EME battalion, emphasised the role of drones in modern warfare.

"Drones have become essential components of multi-domain warfare and help us achieve operational success in the modern battlefield. As far as the Project Drone Shakti is concerned, it showcases the Indian Army's integrated ecosystem," he said.

The Medium Range Surface-to-Air

Missile (MRSAM) system, Suryashtra rocket system, and Long Range Anti-Ship Hypersonic Missile (LR-ASHM) will also feature during the parade.

The Indian Air Force (IAF) will showcase the "Sindoor" formation during the flypast at the Republic Day parade 2026, with fighter aircraft that participated in Operation Sindoor taking to the skies in a symbolic display of air power.

The formation will comprise two Rafale jets, two Su-30 aircraft, two MiG-29 fighters and one Jaguar fighter jet.

Additionally, the Indian Armed Forces will showcase a tableau on Operation Sindoor with a motto of "Victory through jointness", highlighting India's success and the coordination of the tri-services in the military operation against Pakistan's terror infrastructure, following the Pahalgam terror attack.

INTERNATIONAL

Bangladesh gears up for first post-Hasina election as Awami League supporters face uncertain future



GOPALGANJ

Bangladesh is preparing for the first election since the overthrow of Sheikh Hasina, but supporters of her banned Awami League (AL) are struggling to decide whether to shift their allegiance.

In Gopalganj, south of the capital Dhaka and a strong bastion of Hasina's iron-grip rule, residents are grappling with an election without the party that shaped their political lives for decades.

"Sheikh Hasina may have done wrong - she and her friends and allies - but what did the millions of Awami League supporters do?" said tricycle delivery driver Mohammad Shahjahan Fakir, 68, adding that he would not vote.

"Why won't the 'boat' symbol be there on the ballot paper?" he said, referring to AL's former election

icon. The Muslim-majority nation of 170 million people will hold elections on February 12, its first since the uprising.

Hasina, who crushed opposition parties during her rule, won landslide victories in Gopalganj in every election since 1991.

After a failed attempt to cling to power and a brutal crackdown on protesters, she was ousted as prime minister in August 2024 and fled to India.

She was sentenced to death in absentia for crimes against humanity by a court in Dhaka in November, and her former ruling party, once the country's most popular, has been outlawed.

Human Rights Watch has condemned the AL ban as "draconian".

"There's so much confusion right now," said Mohammad Shafayet Biswas, 46, a banana and

betel leaf seller in Gopalganj.

"A couple of candidates are running from this constituency - I don't even know who they are."

As a crowd gathered in the district, one man shouted: "Who is going to the polling centres? We don't even have our candidates this time." Hasina's father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding president of Bangladesh, hailed from Gopalganj and is buried in the town. Statues of Rahman have been torn down nationwide, but in Gopalganj, murals and statues are well-maintained.

Since Hasina's downfall, clashes have broken out during campaigning by other parties, including one between police and AL supporters in July 2025, after which authorities filed more than 8,000 cases against residents.

Sazzad Siddiqui, a professor at

Dhaka University, believes voter turnout in Gopalganj could be the lowest in the country.

"Many people here are still in denial that Sheikh Hasina did something very wrong," said Siddiqui, who sat on a government commission formed after the 2025 unrest.

"At the same time, the government has nonetheless tried to dehumanise them."

This time, frontrunners include candidates from the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami, the country's largest Islamist party.

Both are from Hasina's arch-rivals, now eyeing power. "I am going door to door," BNP candidate S.M Zilany, 57, told AFP, saying many would-be voters had never had a candidate canvass for their backing.

"I promise them I will stand by them."

Zilany said he had run twice against Hasina - and was struck down by 34 legal cases he claimed had been politically motivated.

This time, he said that there was "a campaign to discourage voters from turning up".

Jamaat candidate M.M Rezaul Karim, 53, said that under Hasina, the party had been driven underground.

"People want a change in leadership," Karim told AFP, saying he was open to all voters, whatever their previous loyalties.

"We believe in coexistence; those involved in crimes should be punished; others must be spared," Karim said. Those once loyal to Hasina appear disillusioned.

Some say they had abandoned the AL, but remain unsure whom to support.

"I am not going to vote," said one woman, who asked not to be named.

"Who should I vote for except Hasina? She is like a sister."

Iran warns any attack will be treated as all-out war as US moves fleet toward region



TEHRAN

Iran warned on Friday that it would treat any attack "as an all-out war against us" and respond with maximum force, as the United States deploys an aircraft carrier strike group and other military assets to the Middle East.

A senior Iranian official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the military was on high alert for a "worst-case scenario" amid the buildup. "This time we will treat any attack, limited, unlimited, surgical, kinetic, whatever they call it, as an all-out war against us, and we will respond in the hardest way possible to settle this," the official told news agency Reuters. President Donald Trump said on Thursday that the US had an "armada" heading toward Iran but hoped military action would not be necessary. Speaking aboard Air Force One, he warned Tehran against killing protesters or restarting its nuclear program. "We're watching Iran... we have a lot of ships going that direction just in case... we have a big flotilla going in that direction," he said. Trump also threatened Denmark over Greenland, saying: "You can say no and we will remember."

The escalation comes amid the aftermath of a brutal crackdown on nationwide protests in Iran that began in late December. Activists say at least 5,032 people have died, though some groups estimate the toll could be higher. The pace of protests slowed last week, in part due to a communication blackout imposed by the Iranian government.

Iran's top prosecutor, Mohammad Movahedi, on Friday denied Trump's repeated claims that Tehran had halted the execution of 800 detained protesters, calling the statement "completely false," according to a report by the Associated Press which quoted the judiciary's Mizan news agency. Analysts said the US military buildup could give Trump the option to carry out strikes, though he has not acted despite repeated warnings.

"While President Trump now appears to have backedtracked, likely under pressure from regional leaders and cognizant that airstrikes alone would be insufficient to implode the regime, military assets continue to be moved into the region, indicating kinetic action may still happen," the Soufan Center, a New York-based

think tank, said, reported AP.

Former US national security adviser Jake Sullivan noted that Trump's confrontations with allies may strengthen China's strategic position. Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska said U.S. partners are increasingly wary: "It may be you just had a bad telephone call with the president and now you're going to have tariffs directed at you... this lack of stability is causing what were traditionally reliable trade partners to be cautious."

Trump's aggressive posture has drawn criticism from global leaders. In the UK, Prime Minister Keir Starmer called Trump's remarks about NATO "insulting and frankly appalling," noting Britain's sacrifices in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Canadian Governor Mark Carney urged middle powers to act together to counter unilateral actions by the U.S., a position that reportedly prompted Trump to revoke Carney's invitation to his Board of Peace. The situation underscores the potential for miscalculation as Washington and Tehran navigate heightened tensions in the region. The American military's aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln and associated warships are travelling towards the Middle East from the South China Sea.

A US Navy official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss military movements, said Thursday the Lincoln strike group is in the Indian Ocean.

The UK Defense Ministry separately said its joint Eurofighter Typhoon fighter jet squadron with Qatar, 12 Squadron, "deployed to the (Persian) Gulf for defensive purposes noting regional tensions."

Barak Festival and NEIR 2026 light up Sribhummi with culture, harmony, and hope

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OUR CORRESPONDENT SRIBHUMI

Sribhumi turned bright and cheerful as the Barak Festival and NEIR 2026 unfolded with colour, music, and deep emotion. From early hours till late evening, the town stayed alive with songs, dances, and happy faces. People from all communities gathered at one place. They sat side by side. They clapped in the same rhythm. Culture became the common language. The feeling was simple yet powerful.

The festival was formally inaugurated by lighting the ceremonial lamp by former MP Mission Ranjan Das. Speaking as the chief guest, he said only art and culture have the power to bring true brotherhood among people. He spoke about the Northeast, often called the land of the "seven sisters". He highlighted its natural beauty, rich diversity of communities, languages, and traditions. He said the Barak Festival plays a strong role in deepening the bond of harmony through cultural exchange. He

praised KRC Foundation for taking such a meaningful initiative and expressed hope that the festival would be organised on a much larger scale in the coming years.

The stage came alive with one performance after another. Loko Sangeet filled the air with folk tunes rooted in the soil. Baul songs touched the soul. Solo songs were presented by both regular and differently-abled artistes, proving that music knows no barriers. Each voice carried emotion and honesty. Chorus songs by cultural groups created a strong wave of sound and unity.

Dance items added colour and rhythm to the evening. Solo dances spoke without words. Chorus dances brought energy and joy. Traditional forms like Dhamail spread a feeling of sisterhood. Manipuri dance flowed with grace and calm. Bihu dance brought festive Assam to the stage. Bamboo dance amazed the audience with sharp timing and balance. Hajagiri and Jhumur dances reflected tribal life and joy. Every performance represented a community. Together, they reflected the shared soul of Barak Valley and the Northeast.

Children played a key role in the festival. Their confident steps and innocent smiles filled the ground with hope. Parents watched with pride. Elders watched with calm happiness. For a while, daily worries faded away. One of the most touching moments

came when differently-abled artistes performed. Their courage and talent moved everyone present. The audience stood up and applauded. Many eyes turned moist.

It was a strong reminder that art belongs to everyone.

KRC Foundation's Managing Trustee and CEO Biswadeep Gupta was present along with many dignitaries. Among the speakers were Sribhumi Municipal Board Chairman Rabintra Chandra Deb, former chairman Mission Ranjan Das, former principal of Rabindra Sadan Women's College Dr Sharmista Khajanchi, Krishna Das, Subrata Choudhury, Siddhartha Sekhar Pal Choudhury, Anjan Goswami, Dr Poulomi Chanda, and others. The meeting was presided over by Ashit Dutta. On behalf of the organising committee, Amar Krishna Saha and Mrityunjay Chakraborty honoured the guests with traditional scarves, mementoes, and saplings, sending a message of respect and sustainability.

The cultural segment featured performances by Khushi Cultural Organisation in the opening song. Solo songs were presented by differently-abled artiste Shubhashree Nath, Sushmita Chakraborty, Bandana Das, Ritotopa Chakraborty, and Bapi Das. Group songs were presented by Samanway

Sangeet Vidyalaya and Saptasur Cultural Organisation. Solo dance was performed by differently-abled dancer Kanchana Roy. Dhamail dance came from Geetbitaan Sangeet Vidyalaya. Manipuri dance was presented by Adarsha Vidyalaya, Baithakhal, Patharkandi. Hajagiri dance came from Yogasan Training Centre, Sribhumi. Jhumur dance was presented by Bishwa Beena Cultural Organisation. Bamboo dance was performed by Nupur Nriyalaya.

Bihu dance came from Nriyashree Kalaniketan. Baul songs were presented by Sribhumi Loko Sangeet Kala Kendra. The programme was smoothly conducted by anchor Shrabani Pal.

Speakers throughout the evening praised the organisers. They called the Barak Festival and NEIR a noble initiative. Not just an event, but a movement to connect people beyond language, religion, and region. As the lights dimmed and the programme ended, people were still talking about the performances.

Some hummed the songs. Some discussed the dances. Many wished the festival would return soon. Barak Festival and NEIR 2026 did more than entertain. It brought hearts closer and reminded everyone that culture is the strongest bridge between people.



When I let go of what I am, I become what I might be.

NEIR PUSHES FOR UNITY BEYOND IDENTITY POLITICS IN NORTHEAST INDIA



OUR CORRESPONDENT

HAILAKANDI

At a time when identity often dominates public debate, a clear and strong message came from the North East Integration Rally (NEIR) platform at the prestigious S.S. College, Hailakandi, on January 23. The message was simple but powerful. The future of the Northeast lies in unity, jobs, and shared growth, not in narrow identity politics. Addressing students, teachers, and community members, Biswadeep Gupta, managing trustee and CEO of KRC Foundations, spoke about the urgent need to integrate the nearly 200 communities that make up Northeast India. He said that while the region is rich in culture and diversity, constant focus on caste, race, and community differences has slowed real development.

Gupta said the core aim of NEIR is to bring people together and build a common future. "Today, your identity should not be your caste or your race," he told the students. "Your education, your skills, and your profession should define who you are." His words drew attention to the changing needs of society, where employment and skill-based growth matter more than labels. Speaking directly to college students, Gupta urged them to prepare themselves for the world of work. He stressed the importance of education, vocational training, and self-reliance. According to him, employment does not only provide income but also dignity, confidence, and direction in life. He said a skilled and employed youth population is the strongest foundation for a stable society. Gupta also made a strong appeal to elders

and social leaders. He asked them to stop creating and practising politics based on identity, calling such trends harmful for the younger generation. Instead, he urged them to focus on creating job opportunities and supporting platforms that help youth grow. "Give them work, not divisions," he said, adding that many social problems reduce naturally when young people are meaningfully employed. The programme at S.S. College saw active participation from students and faculty members, who listened closely and interacted during the session. Social workers and local thinkers also joined the discussion, making it a space for dialogue and reflection. The interaction helped create awareness about unity, shared responsibility, and the need for collective progress in the Northeast. Prof. M. M. Goel and noted social work-

er Shankar Choudhury were present at the programme, along with several others from different fields. Their presence added depth to the discussion and highlighted the importance of community involvement in social change. The event was not limited to speeches alone. Cultural performances, including songs and dance items, were presented by students, adding colour and warmth to the programme. The performances reflected the cultural richness of the region and matched the spirit of unity promoted by NEIR. Through such programmes across educational institutions, the NEIR initiative continues to spread its message of integration, harmony, and development. The Hailakandi event stood as a reminder that while diversity is the strength of the Northeast, unity and employment are the keys to its future.



BARAK FESTIVAL

JANUARY 10-12, 2025

ACTIVITY PROGRAM



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





11 JAN
Adventure Sports
 Trekking & Canoe, Obstacle Navigations, Sport Climbing, Disaster Management Technique, Water Sports.



11 JAN
Barak Valley Conclave
 Potential Issues and Challenges of Barak Valley to be discussed by stakeholders.
 Industry, NGOs, and Government can register for this important awareness & awareness program and present their proposals. Participation through invitation only. Different rewards are provided.

10 Jan
Barak Festival: Peace Progress & Prosperity



Barak Festival

Adventure Sports, Art & Culture Promotion

ACTIVITY PROGRAM



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



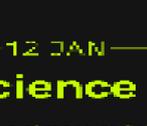
10 JAN
Media Conclave
 Media Conclave (Media Awards, Workshops, and the Film, Talks and Conferences are part of the 'Barak Festival 2025'. Theme: 'One for All, All for One'.
 Media Conclave Awards: Journalism, Feature & Corporate Journalism, Sports, Print, Booklets, Booklets.



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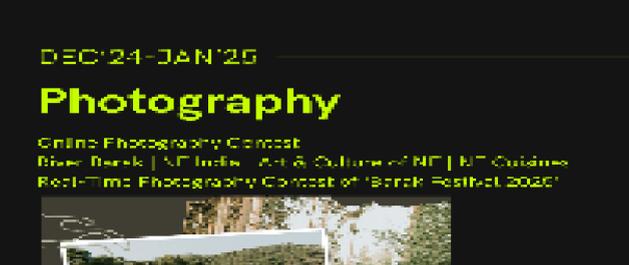
11 JAN
5E For Success Conclave
 The 4th 5E For Success Conclave is going to be held on the theme: 'From School to Campus to Corporate'.
 Schools, Educational Institutions and corporate houses can join the Conclave as sponsors.
 Quiz and Group Discussion for Barak valley Schools & Colleges, Extension School, Public Speaking (College).
 In the online event, various students of NE India Schools and Colleges can participate.



Barak Festival

Band Night | 10 JAN
Musical Night | 11 JAN

ACTIVITY PROGRAM



10-12 JAN
Science Studio
 Get a glimpse of Science to its new heights!
 Class VI-XI | Teachers | Seniors, Administrators | Parents.
Raw science out of textbooks into real-life experiences of students.



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



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



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



10-12 JAN
Book Bank
 #NoOneLeftBehind Campaign | Book Bank | Donate | Reuse | Recycle

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