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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.

Tribal unity essential to protect rights, identity of future generations: Pradyot Kishore Manikya

AGARTALA

Royal scion of Tripura and founder of the Tipra Motha Party, Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma, on January 16 said the ongoing movement in the state is not driven by party politics but by the need to safeguard the rights, identity and future of indigenous communities.

Addressing a programme organised by the Tripur Kshatriya Samaj at Herma Sports Ground in Charilam under Sepahijala district, Pradyot Manikya described the current struggle as a long-term commitment to coming generations. "This is not a speech and not politics. This is a commitment to our next generation," he told the gathering.

Stressing that unity is the foundation of tribal strength, he urged people not to allow divisions based on clan, community or religion. "Do not think who is Debbarma, Reang, Molsom or Uchoi. Do not think who is Hindu or Christian. First, we must love ourselves and each other. Unity (thansa) is the key," he said.

Referring to Tripura's royal legacy, Pradyot Manikya said that while Maharaja Bir Bikram once ruled the state, real power today lies with the people. He asserted that unity among indigenous communities could shape Tripura's future leadership. "If we remain united, the day will come when the king will be from our own tribal community. We can and we will make it," he said.

He cautioned against forces seeking to weaken tribal unity for political or personal gain. "Many will try to divide us for their own interests, but nothing will come out of it. We are not fools anymore. We understand everything now," he added.

WHO SAID WHAT



This is a very big achievement for us... On behalf of the people of Assam, I thank the Prime Minister and the Railway Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma Assam CM

GUWAHATI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday virtually flagged off India's first Vande Bharat Express equipped with sleeper coaches, marking a major milestone in Indian Railways' modernisation drive and significantly boosting long-distance rail connectivity in eastern and northeastern India.

The fully air-conditioned Vande Bharat Sleeper Express will operate between Howrah and Guwahati (Kamakhya) and was flagged off from Malda Town station in north Bengal. Designed as a semi-high-speed long-distance train, it is expected to reduce travel time on the busy Howrah-Guwahati corridor by around 2.5 hours.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, speaking at a press briefing at Kamakhya station in Guwahati, described the launch as a landmark moment for the region. "This train is equipped with several modern facilities, including CCTV cameras. Tomorrow as well, the Prime Minister will gift two more trains to the people of Assam. Generally, such



trains are launched in metro cities like Delhi or Kolkata, but now Assam has received India's first Vande Bharat sleeper train. This reflects the Prime Minister's affection for Assam and the Northeast," Sarma said.

The Chief Minister noted that the travel time between Kolkata and Guwahati will now be around 14 hours on the Vande Bharat Sleeper Express, offering passengers a faster and more comfortable alternative to existing

long-distance trains.

According to a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the sleeper version of the Vande Bharat has been developed to meet the evolving transportation needs of modern

India. The train aims to provide an airline-like travel experience at affordable fares, with enhanced safety, comfort and modern onboard amenities.

The PMO said the reduced travel time and improved comfort are expected to boost tourism as well as religious travel along the Howrah-Guwahati corridor, strengthening people-to-people connectivity between eastern India and the Northeast.

Prime Minister Modi is scheduled to visit Assam for two days, marking his second visit to the state in less than a month. Soon after arriving in Guwahati on the evening of January 17, he will witness a mass performance of the Bodo folk dance 'Bagurumba' by 10,000 artistes at the Arjun Bhogeswar Barua Sports Stadium.

On January 18, the Prime Minister will travel to Kaliabor to lay the foundation stone for the Rs 6,957 crore Kaziranga elevated corridor. He is also expected to virtually flag off two Amrit Bharat Express trains-Dibrugarh-Gomti Nagar (Lucknow) and Kamakhya-Rohtak-before addressing a public meeting at Kaliabor and concluding his visit.

Miscreants damage border fencing along Indo-Myanmar boundary



IMPHAL

A stretch of newly erected border fencing along the Indo-Myanmar boundary in Manipur's Chandel district was damaged by unidentified miscreants, allegedly from Myanmar's Chin State, officials said on January 16.

According to the Chandel district police and district administration, the incident occurred near the New Samtal area between Border Pillar (BP) 62 and Subsidiary Pillar 62/2 during the early hours of January 14 and 15. The region primarily borders Myanmar's Chin State and partly Sagaing State.

Officials said the miscreants cut down 47 hollow circular fencing poles, damaging around 150 metres of the newly constructed border fence. One fencing pole was also reported missing. The vandalism was carried out near Lh Zangnophai village.

The damage came to light around 9

am on January 15 when a 25-member Border Roads Task Force (BRTF) fencing construction team from New Samtal reached the site near BP 62 for routine work. The team immediately alerted the authorities after discovering the damaged fencing.

"This is the second such incident in the past two months. On December 4, miscreants had similarly damaged sections of the border fencing at Changpou village near Border Pillar No. 68," an official said.

Police suspect that the miscreants may have crossed over from the Myanmar side, though investigations are ongoing to ascertain their identity and motive.

An FIR has been registered at Molcham Police Station in Chandel district, and security has been strengthened along the affected stretch of the international border. Further investigation into the incident is underway.

SILCHAR

Silchar is set to witness a major push towards improved civic governance in 2026, with the Silchar Municipal Corporation (SMC) planning a citywide CCTV surveillance network and a compost-based biogas (CBG) plant to address the city's mounting waste management challenges.

Srishti Singh, IAS, Commissioner of the SMC, said CCTV cameras will be installed at 77 strategic locations across the city as part of efforts to bring greater accountability, order and sustainability to municipal administration. "CCTV surveillance has become a necessity to curb illegal garbage dumping, traffic violations and encroachments that continue to choke Silchar's streets," Singh said, adding that round-the-clock monitoring has been a long-standing demand of residents.

She noted that the surveillance system would play a crucial role in strengthening solid waste management, particularly in high-footfall commercial areas and vending zones where improper waste disposal remains a persistent problem. The system is also expected to help identify repeat offenders and improve enforcement.

Silchar currently generates nearly 100 tonnes of solid waste



every day, placing immense pressure on existing infrastructure. Singh said the corporation has intensified door-to-door waste collection, streamlined dumping zones, and over time cleared nearly 50 per cent of legacy waste from trenching grounds.

As part of long-term sustainability measures, the SMC is actively considering a compost-based biogas (CBG) plant proposed by Oil India. "Once operational, the plant will significantly reduce dependence on landfills while converting organic waste into clean energy," the commissioner said, adding that the process of identifying suitable land for the facility is underway.

She cautioned that it may take at least two years for the entire waste processing ecosys-

tem, including Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs), to become fully functional. Parallel efforts are being made to strengthen MRFs and improve compressed garbage handling systems to enhance waste segregation and recycling.

The commissioner said commercial waste collection has already been introduced and fines are being imposed on violators, although municipal taxes and user charges have not been revised due to financial constraints and public sensitivity.

Emphasising that technology alone cannot ensure cleanliness, Singh underscored the importance of public cooperation and behavioural change. "CCTV surveillance and waste processing plants are tools to support civic discipline, but their success ultimately depends on responsible citizen participation," she said. Beyond sanitation and surveillance, several beautification and urban maintenance initiatives are also in the pipeline. These include redevelopment works at Arun Chanda Park and Gandhi Bag Park, along with mechanised road sweeping, night-time cleaning drives and the introduction of incineration facilities to curb dust pollution.

Together, the measures form part of a broader civic roadmap for 2026 aimed at improving urban cleanliness, order and sustainability across Silchar.

Northeast India vital to Indo-Pacific vision, U.S. Consulate says at Kolkata dialogue

KOLKATA

Emphasising the growing strategic importance of India's Northeast in regional and global geopolitics, the U.S. Consulate General in Kolkata, in partnership with the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), hosted the "U.S. Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific: North Eastern Dialogue - Kolkata Chapter" at the American Center Kolkata on Thursday.

The dialogue highlighted the deepening U.S.-India partnership and its alignment with the Quad's vision of a free, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific, with Northeast India increasingly viewed as a critical bridge connecting South Asia to Southeast Asia and global markets.

Around 30 participants from various Northeastern states attended the discussion, which served as a national-level pre-dissemination dialogue ahead of a larger policy engagement scheduled to be held in New Delhi in March.

Discussions focused on strengthening connectivity through ports, railways, inland waterways, roads and digital corridors to better integrate Eastern and Northeastern India into global trade networks. Speakers noted that enhanced



connectivity would not only accelerate economic growth in the region but also reduce dependence on fragile or adversarial supply chains.

Addressing the gathering, U.S. Consul General Kathy Giles-Diaz said Kolkata was a natural venue for the dialogue, given its historic role as India's gateway to the Bay of Bengal and Southeast Asia. She said that as India's Indo-Pacific engagement deepens, the eastern and northeastern regions are once again becoming central to global trade, supply chains and economic growth.

Giles-Diaz reaffirmed the United States' commitment to a free and open

Indo-Pacific, stressing that such an order ensures free trade, respect for sovereignty, safe movement of goods and data, and shared prosperity. She described the Quad-comprising India, the United States, Japan and Australia-as a practical partnership delivering tangible outcomes in areas such as disaster response, infrastructure development, clean energy, supply-chain resilience and critical technologies.

Highlighting the strength of the U.S.-India relationship, she said the partnership is anchored at the highest political levels, creating momentum for cooperation across trade, technology and security domains.

She added that improved infrastructure in Eastern and Northeastern India would not only facilitate the movement of goods but also integrate the region more deeply into global markets, generating employment, investment and long-term economic resilience.

The Consul General also underlined the strategic importance of maritime security, pointing to the role of ports such as Kolkata and Haldia in regional trade and stability. Safe sea lanes, she said, are essential for reliable energy supplies, sta-

ble exports and uninterrupted commerce, and the U.S., through the Quad and other partnerships, remains committed to maritime domain awareness, port security, disaster response and tackling illegal activities at sea.

Giles-Diaz said insights generated through the Northeast-focused dialogues would feed directly into national-level policy discussions in New Delhi, ensuring that U.S.-India cooperation remains grounded in the economic and strategic realities of the region.

The sessions were moderated by Nilanjan Ghosh, Vice President - Development Studies and Project Director at ORF, along with Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury, Senior Fellow with ORF's Neighbourhood Studies Initiative and Project In-Charge, supported by their respective teams. The inaugural session also featured virtual presentations by U.S. State Department officials Abigail Bard, Quad Team Coordinator, and Jeffrey Wang, Quad Team Lead and Political Officer, who offered deeper insights into the U.S. strategic framework for the Indo-Pacific and highlighted the centrality of maritime security to regional economic stability.

Amit Shah to lay foundation of second Assam Assembly complex during Dibrugarh visit on January 30

DIBRUGARH

Union Home Minister Amit Shah will visit Dibrugarh on January 30 to lay the foundation stone of Assam's second Legislative Assembly complex and formally mark the completion of the first phase of the Khanikar Stadium redevelopment, Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma announced on January 17.

The Chief Minister made the announcement during a Facebook Live interaction, describing the proposed Assembly complex as a key step towards developing Dibrugarh as Assam's second capital. He said that once the complex becomes operational, two sessions of the Assam Legislative Assembly will be held in Dibrugarh every year, with the remaining two sessions continuing in Guwahati. Dr Sarma said the initiative reflects the government's commitment to decentralisation and to strengthening Upper Assam's role in the state's administrative

and governance framework.

During the visit, Amit Shah will also mark the completion of the first phase of redevelopment of Khanikar Stadium. The project aims to transform the existing facility into a modern, multi-purpose venue capable of hosting major sporting events as well as large public programmes.

According to the Chief Minister, the stadium's seating capacity will increase from around 5,000 to nearly 35,000 after full completion, making it the largest multi-sports stadium in Assam. The upgraded infrastructure is expected to give a boost to sports development while enhancing Dibrugarh's profile as an emerging administrative and infrastructural hub.

The January 30 visit is being viewed as a significant milestone for the city, underlining the state government's focus on balanced regional development and long-term infrastructure expansion across Assam.



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BUDGET 2026: RED INK, GREEN IMPACT

Time was when November was one of the most pleasant months in Delhi, with just the whiff of winter in a city of extreme weathers. Not anymore. Foul air has replaced the aroma of roasted peanuts and chhole bhature as conversation starters in the national capital. Citizens have traded their old Celcius talk for a new set of numbers to moan about. Today, the air quality index regularly announced on TV triggers sighs and protests.

Environmental issues have clearly hit India's political mainstream. Public protests erupted not only on the AQI that reached hazardous levels, but also on a new height-based definition of the Aravalli hills, sparking fears of illegal mining and environmental harm and forcing the government to backtrack despite a qualified Supreme Court sanction. A furore over water contamination deaths in Indore, showcased as India's cleanest municipal zone, followed.

The environment ministry faced howls as the new year dawned after it amended guidelines to allow forest zones to have commercial plantations by private entities. The death of environment crusader Madhav Gadgil rang a sombre note on the importance of sustainability.

As Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman meets various interest groups to craft her annual budget for the new financial year, it is time to ask if environmental outcomes should be highlighted in the budgetary numbers so that we can take note of what the government is doing (or not) for sustainability in the world's most populous and fastest-growing economy.

'Green budgeting' is unheard of in India despite decades of avowed political commitment to environmental issues. It tracks fiscal revenues and expenditure allocations by focusing on schemes and measures that affect the environment and sustainability. For starters, it is a sound way to measure public commitment to environmental goals. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development has been promoting green budgeting since 2017, when it launched the Paris Collaborative at its One Planet Summit.

Historically, progressive economists in India have been monitoring health, education and gender issues addressed and outlays allocated as part of their toothcombing of budgetary measures. Such a focused analysis is much needed. But such an effort can invite trouble. The prestigious Delhi School of Economics courted controversy a few weeks ago as the Delhi University's academic panel objected to its syllabus on 'Economics of Gender' that covered some historical and ideological issues.

Green budgeting may face similar pitfalls. But there has to be a beginning. Nearly 80 years after independence, India has seen two long spells of economic vision covering roughly 40 years each. The first four decades were a lot about socialist planning and government control, while the following years have seen an obsession with macro-economic stability and its attendant points: inflation, interest rates and GDP growth. Both these worldviews have unconsciously sidestepped the environmental side effects of growth. We are now looking at a scenario in which one kind of positive numbers results in an unfocused set of negative ones. An agricultural boom in some areas leads to the hazardous burning of stubble. Automobiles driven by a growing middle class result in traffic jams. Mountains of unregulated plastic and other waste pollute the air and water of our cities. The data centres powering the artificial intelligence boom currently under way will also leave a massive environmental footprint because of its humongous energy needs. Green budgeting should hopefully connect the dots between the highs and lows of the growth story so that we can frame laws and spend taxpayers' money that speak to a sustainable future. A beginning has been made in public consciousness over vehicle choice and use of public transport. But waste management, recycling and regulation of various economic activities that lead to unplanned urban growth need to be more formally analysed and integrated into policy-making.

Over the years, I have observed two peculiar intellectual obstacles in the path to green budgeting. On the one hand, a typical environmental expert talks little about money and how it influences human behaviour. On the other, growth-obsessed economists and industrialists routinely view environmental concerns as obstructionist. During the UPA years that preceded the current NDA rule, environment ministers ran into controversies over both obstruction and approvals for projects. Sustainable growth is a tricky subject that requires a connected view on various goals. But what we have had so far are people talking on growth and sustainability in separate silos.

Fortunately, new technologies and studies suggest that growth talk and green thinking can be more supportive of each other than previously assumed. That might help us do a reverse swing to a greener India that balances wealth and jobs, too.

The Council on Energy, Environment and Water, an independent think-tank, said in a recent study that India could attract as much as \$4.1 trillion in investments and create 48 million jobs across emerging 'green value chains' by 2047.

There is a parallel concern that conversations on the environment are often captured by business lobbies that try to focus on profitable capital-intensive projects rather than the welfare of ordinary people or environmental results. As they say, outlays need to be matched to outcomes. Let's begin with this budget.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Always do your best. What you plant now, you will harvest later." —

Og Mandino

RAID AND COUNTER-RAID IN KOLKATA



SHIKHA MUKERJEE

The routine of raids by the Enforcement Directorate or the Central Bureau of Investigation in search of evidence of crime and money laundering is not shocking. Not even when such raids are conducted on politically consequential persons from the opposition prior to an election.

But it is indeed shocking—if not scandalous—when a sitting chief minister is accused of "gross obstruction" and theft of crucial data, files and evidence by the ED. On January 8, when Mamata Banerjee stormed into a building an ED team was raiding because it housed an office of the Indian Political Action Committee or IPAC, a consultancy advising the Trinamool Congress, she had her reason ready: "I intervened as the TMC chairperson, not as chief minister. They came to steal my party data. I will expose everything if needed."

In response, the ED was compelled to issue a denial: "The search is evidence-based and not targeted at any political establishment. No party office has been searched. The search is not linked to any elections, and is part of regular crackdown on money laundering." The central agency went to the Calcutta High Court and then the Supreme Court, accusing Banerjee of "theft of digital devices and other evidence, and wrongful restraint and confinement of central government officers".

The court hearings as well as the West Bengal government's caveat—that "such targeted seizure amounts to an impermissible intrusion into TMC's right to privacy under Article 21 and its constitutional right to participate meaningfully in the democratic process under Article 19"—have set

the stage for a litigation that's likely to proceed at the regular pace of such contests.

There are, however, two sides to the incident—the legal and the political.

The ED is essentially saying that it acted independently and that its search of the IPAC office and its co-founder and director Pratik Jain's residence are "not linked to any elections". In other words, it is defending its action from the accusation levelled by Banerjee. To go on the defensive after an aggressive move is a sign of weakness.

Banerjee's counter-attack raises a fundamental question: are public institutions neutral or are they subject to pressures exercised by ruling regimes? The question is not limited to central institutions like the ED; it also addresses the role of the West Bengal police on the one hand and the impartiality of adjudicating institutions on the other. By broadening the context of the raid into an aggressive act violating free and fair participation in the democratic process under Article 19, the Banerjee government has questioned the role, responsibility and conduct of a number of public institutions including the Election Commission.

The CM's latest letter to the Chief Election Commissioner on the special intensive revision (SIR) of rolls, released on January 12 along with a petition by TMC MP Derek O'Brien, challenges the commission's role as a law-abiding institution. The petition demands that the EC "stop issuing instructions for compliance by the booth level officers (BLOs) and other officers in the SIR exercise through WhatsApp or other such informal channels". It also calls on the judiciary to declare all such instructions issued so far as illegal.

Banerjee's letter points to "internal re-

cord-keeping deficiencies" and complains: "Such administrative lapses are being unfairly forced upon citizens, causing severe harassment and resulting in the denial of their constitutional rights. This defeats the very objective of the SIR, which is intended to strengthen and purify the electoral rolls, not to exclude genuine and eligible voters."

Sections of voters, sportspersons who have represented India, and functionaries attached to the EC for SIR work have protested against what they perceive is wrong with the process. The support these complaints provide to Banerjee is the political context in which she has blamed the BJP and the Union home minister, whom she has called "nasty" and "naughty", for the timing of the ED raid. She has contended that IPAC's Kolkata office was effectively a TMC back-office where sensitive and confidential information as well as some SIR details were kept.

At the outset, by labelling the ED raid and the SIR as politically motivated, Banerjee has repositioned herself to represent victims. That list includes hapless voters required to prove their identity, protesting BLOs and electoral registration officers (EROs), as well the West Bengal Civil Service (Executive) Officers' Association, which pointed out that the "suo motu, system-driven deletion of electors" under SIR bypassed the legally-mandated role of EROs. In doing so, she has taken over the narrative and reset it.

Till the BJP comes back with an appropriate riposte that can counter the perception Banerjee has created of the Centre's victimisation of all things Bengali—from language, internal and cross-border migration, culture and identity to the sub-

tletries of its social and political past—the current score in the run-up to the state assembly battle indicates she has surged ahead. The ED raid, SIR process and the Bengali-Bangladeshi-ghuspathiya (illegal immigrant) conflation have not created the political advantages for the BJP they ought to have. Local party leaders are on the defensive. It is as though they are waiting for direction from the high command—which could come this weekend, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi visits West Bengal.

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

It is Congress versus Congress. Till now, we have seen it in Delhi. Rahul Congress versus Priyanka Congress. DK Congress versus Siddaramaiah Congress. Gehlot versus Pilot Congress. Now it is Bhai Jagtap versus Varsha Gaikwad Congress," he said.

Poonawala further argued that the internal blame game exposed a lack of confidence within the Congress leadership itself, particularly questioning Rahul Gandhi's claims of "vote-chori". "It is a no-confidence in Rahul's narrative that 'vote-chori' happened because the leaders are saying it is not 'vote-chori', it is 'kaam-chori', it is 'kamzori', 'sangathan ki kamzori'," he said, adding the Congress party has gone into a "self-destruct mode.

**Shehzad Poonawalla
BJP national
spokesperson**



“US-India Indo-Pacific Dialogue: Experts Highlight Northeast’s Tourism and Industrial Promise”

JAYANTA DEBNATH

Journalists, business leaders, and policy stakeholders from Tripura and other Northeastern states unanimously agreed that the Northeast does not suffer from a lack of potential in tourism, industry, or trade, but from a shortage of strong political will and effective national and international promotion. This consensus emerged during the US Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific: North Eastern Dialogue, Kolkata Chapter, jointly organised by the US Consulate General Kolkata and the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) at the American Center, Kolkata.

The dialogue, which brought together around 30 invited participants from across the Northeastern region, served as a national-level pre-dissemination consultation ahead of a larger policy dialogue scheduled in New Delhi in March. The event focused on advancing US-India cooperation under the Indo-Pacific framework, with special emphasis on connectivity, trade, supply-chain resilience, and regional development.

Representing Tripura in person were Jayanta Debnath, Editor of Tripurainfo.com journalist and independent re-

searcher Debaraj Deb, Anup Kumar Ray, President of the Tripura Chamber of Commerce, and Tushar Kanti Chakraborty, Secretary of the Tripura Merchant Association. All four highlighted Tripura's vast but underutilised potential in tourism development, bamboo-based industries, rubber production, natural gas, and cross-border trade with Bangladesh.

While acknowledging these opportunities, most participants stressed that the expansion of trade and connectivity, especially for Tripura, depends significantly on the early restoration of normal law and order conditions in neighbouring Bangladesh. Several speakers underlined the need for timely diplomatic engagement by India and the United States to ensure regional stability, which is critical for cross-border commerce and investment confidence.

Discussions during the dialogue repeatedly returned to the need for attracting both domestic and foreign capital to the Northeast, while simultaneously prioritising local entrepreneurship and indigenous initiatives. Participants from different Northeastern states pointed out that there is no shortage of development schemes under the Government of India led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

However, they raised serious concerns about the practical difficulties faced by new entrepreneurs in accessing these schemes due to procedural hurdles and administrative bottlenecks.

Infrastructure development also emerged as a key concern. While central government projects for road construction, railway expansion, and connectivity have been initiated across the region, representatives from several states complained about the slow pace of implementation, which continues to hinder economic growth and investor interest.

Another strong recommendation from the floor was the need for more such consultative dialogues, where the Government of India and state governments directly engage with people from the Northeastern states to listen to their ground-level problems and aspirations.

Addressing the gathering, US Consul General Kathy Giles Diaz emphasised the strategic importance of Eastern and Northeastern India in the Indo-Pacific vision. She reiterated the United States commitment to a free, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific, highlighting the role of the Quad-India, the US, Japan, and Australia, in strengthening infrastructure, clean energy, supply chains, and maritime security.

She noted that improved ports, railways, inland waterways, roads, and digital corridors could integrate the Northeast more effectively into global markets, while reducing dependence on fragile or adversarial supply chains. Referring to her recent visits to Kolkata and Haldia ports, the Consul General underlined the importance of maritime security for uninterrupted trade and regional stability.

The session was moderated by Nilanjan Ghosh, Vice President, Development Studies, ORF and Project Director, along with Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury, Senior Fellow, Neighborhood Studies Initiative, ORF. The inaugural session also featured virtual presentations by Abigail Bard, Quad Team Coordinator, and Jeffrey Wang, Quad Team Lead and Political Officer from the US State Department, who provided deeper insights into America's strategic vision for the Indo-Pacific and the centrality of maritime security.

The dialogue concluded with a shared understanding that meaningful development of the Northeast requires not just policy frameworks, but faster implementation, regional stability, global visibility, and continuous engagement with local stakeholders, so that the region's enormous potential can finally translate into sustainable growth.

Tripura tops national list, Meghalaya third as Assam features among Northeast leaders in Deregulation 1.0

GUWAHATI

Meghalaya has emerged as the top-performing state in the Northeast and secured third place nationally in the Compliance Reduction and Deregulation 1.0 initiative, according to the latest assessment under the programme led by the Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India.

Tripura clinched the top national rank, while Assam also figured among the leading states, underlining the Northeast's growing momentum in regulatory reforms and governance simplification.

The assessment shows that Meghalaya successfully completed all 23 priority areas identified under Deregulation 1.0, reflecting significant progress in reducing compliance burdens and streamlining administrative processes. The reforms span five key sectors—land, building and construction, labour, utilities and permissions—along with several cross-cutting priority areas.

Officials said the initiative aims to simplify regulatory frameworks, accelerate

approvals, improve transparency and enhance the Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) for entrepreneurs, businesses and investors. Meghalaya's performance places it ahead of most Northeastern states in implementing these reforms.

The state's achievement has been attributed to sustained administrative efforts and a coordinated approach to modernising governance systems. Officials believe the reforms will help boost investor confidence, attract private investment, generate employment and support long-term economic growth.

While Tripura and Meghalaya emerged as frontrunners, Assam's inclusion among the top performers also highlights steady progress in compliance reduction and deregulation efforts within the region.

Other Northeastern states—including Sikkim, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh—recorded moderate progress, reflecting varying levels of reform implementation across the region.

With Deregulation Phase II expected to be rolled out in the coming months, Meghalaya's performance is being seen as a benchmark for streamlined governance and inclusive development in the Northeast.

Meghalaya introduces community-integrated skill learning for Classes 6-10, allows private candidates for SSLC.

The Meghalaya government on Thursday approved the introduction of community-integrated skill learning for students from Classes 6 to 10 and cleared a provision to allow private candidates to appear in the Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) examinations, Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma said after a cabinet meeting on January 16.

Briefing reporters, Sangma said the Community-Integrated Skill Learning (CISL) programme would be introduced as a structured curricular component by integrating it with the existing Health and Physical Education subject. Currently offered as a sixth paper, the subject is largely

textbook-based with limited scope for practical engagement.

The Chief Minister said the new approach aims to shift learning from being predominantly theoretical to experiential, by encouraging students to acquire practical skills from their families and local communities and demonstrate them as part of academic assessment. Students will be encouraged to identify one or more skills based on their interests as well as their family or community background.

"If a parent is engaged in farming, the child can learn agricultural skills from the parent. Similarly, traditional skills available in the community can also be taken up. The student will actively learn, practise and demonstrate the skill," Sangma said.

He said the initiative seeks to develop productive life skills among students, preserve traditional occupations and strengthen family and community participation in education. Clarifying concerns, Sangma said the programme would not compel stu-

dents to pursue their parents' professions but would help them appreciate local livelihoods while building skills useful for the future.

The cabinet also approved a provision to allow admission and registration of private candidates for the SSLC examination under the Meghalaya Board of School Education. According to Sangma, the move would benefit individuals who were unable to clear the matriculation examination earlier or had dropped out after Class 8 due to various circumstances.

"We are streamlining the process to make it easier for anyone who wants to complete Class 10 to do so," he said, adding that the decision would expand access to secondary education in the state.

The Chief Minister also announced the Meghalaya Day Awardees for 2026. Renowned poet and writer Dr Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih has been selected for the U Tirot Sing Award for Arts and Literature, Father Benoy Joseph for the Pa-

Togan Sangma Award for Social Services, and Riiohlang Dhar for the U Kiang Nangbah Award for Sports and Games.

In addition, the cabinet approved the Meghalaya Border Areas Development Service (Amendment) Rules, 2025, and cleared the extension of services of several senior officials and advisers.

These include Kynpham Wahlang as Superintending Engineer (Headquarters) in the Directorate of Urban Affairs, Robert Lyngdoh as Officer on Special Duty and ex-officio Secretary in the Planning Department and Chief Administrative Officer of Meghalaya Age Limited, and Bruce P. Marak as Advisor to the Meghalaya Integrated Transport Project.

The cabinet also approved the Republic Day speech for 2026 and the nomination of VIPs to take the salute during the parade. Sangma said preparations for the Republic Day celebrations are currently underway.

Tripura earmarks Rs 57 crore to modernise Sepahijala Wildlife Sanctuary

AGARTALA

Tripura Forest Minister Animesh Debbarma on Thursday said the state has received over Rs 57 crore for the modernisation and further development of the Sepahijala Wildlife Sanctuary in Sepahijala district.

The minister made the announcement during a visit to the zoo on January 16, following complaints from foreign tourists about plastic waste and unhygienic conditions within the sanctuary premises.

"I personally inspected the area after receiving complaints from foreign visitors. Steps are being taken to collect and safely dispose of plastic waste. While some lapses may have occurred on that particular day, visitors are also expected to act responsibly," Debbarma said, adding that the administration and zoo authorities were making continuous efforts to maintain a clean and plastic-free environment.

He said an approved development plan from the Central Zoo Authority was already in place and that the funds, received under the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER), would be utilised to upgrade the zoo to international standards.

"In every aspect, the zoo will be developed. We are also exploring the possibility of introducing new species from outside the state," the minister added. Sepahijala Wildlife Sanctuary is one of Tripura's major tourist attractions and also serves as an important centre for wildlife conservation, research and environmental education.

Authorities, child rights panel chart coordinated plan to protect IDP children in Kakching

IMPHAL

A one-day district-level convergence meeting on the "Issues of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Children" was held on January 16 at the conference hall of the Deputy Commissioner's Office in Kakching district, with a focus on strengthening coordinated interventions for the protection and welfare of displaced children.

The programme was organised by the Manipur Commission for Protection of Child Rights (MPCPR) in collaboration with the Kakching district administration and the District Child Welfare Committee.

The meeting was attended by MPCPR chairperson Keisam Pradikumar, Deputy Commissioner Uppuluri Chaitanya (IAS), Superintendent of Police Priyadarshini Laishram (IPS), Additional Deputy Commissioner P Shantikumar Singh, besides sub-divisional officers, sub-divisional police officers, district-level officials and other members of the district administration. Addressing the gathering,

Pradikumar said the primary objective of the Commission was to ensure effective and timely interventions for internally displaced children, with particular emphasis on child protection and mental health. He noted that the Commission had been actively engaging at the grassroots level and had already conducted several consultations on the issue. Explaining the concept of convergence, the MPCPR chairperson said it involved coordinated efforts by multiple departments and agencies working towards a common goal. Such an approach, he said, enables officials at different levels to collaborate effectively to safeguard the rights and welfare of children affected by displacement. Pradikumar also lauded the initiatives undertaken by officials in Kakching district, particularly the efforts of the District Child Welfare Committee. He said the opening of bank accounts for children reflected a strong commitment to securing their future and supporting their education.

Assam announces Silpi Awards 2026; late Samar Hazarika, Dhanada Pathak among honourees

GUWAHATI

The Assam government on Friday announced the recipients of the prestigious Silpi Awards for 2026, with renowned singers late Samar Hazarika and Dhanada Pathak named among those to be honoured for their contributions to the state's cultural life.

The awards, conferred by the Cultural Affairs Department, recognise outstanding work across Assamese art, literature, music, theatre, cinema and journalism. The announcement was made ahead of the annual Silpi Divas observance on January 17.

Cultural Affairs Minister Bimal Borah unveiled the list of Silpi Award recipients, along with beneficiaries of various cultural pensions and honours, at a press conference. He said the awards reflected the state's continued commitment to recognising and supporting artists who have enriched Assam's cultural heritage.

Alongside the Silpi Awards, the department also declared re-



ipients of several state-level cultural honours for 2025. Eminent litterateur Moneswar Deori has been selected for the Krishna Kanta Handique Memorial Award, while veteran journalist Dr Amalendu Chakraborty will receive the Gopinath Bordoloi Award for National Integration and Contribution.

Noted theatre personality Karuna Deka has been chosen for the Natasurya Phani Sarma Award, acclaimed filmmaker

Arup Manna for the Bhabendra Nath Saikia Award, and Abani Ranjan Pathak for the Biju Phukan Award.

The government also announced financial assistance for artists under multiple welfare schemes. A total of 83 artists and three differently-abled artists will receive the Regular Silpi Pension, while 170 artists and differently-abled persons will be conferred the Barxik Silpi Sanman. In addition, 26 artists will be granted

Regular Family Pension, and five families of deceased artists will receive one-time special financial assistance.

Silpi Divas, observed annually on January 17, marks the death anniversary of Rupkonwar Jyoti Prasad Agarwala-poet, playwright, filmmaker, composer and freedom fighter who passed away in 1951. The day is dedicated to celebrating Assam's artistic spirit and creative legacy.

Among this year's awardees, the posthumous recognition of Samar Hazarika holds particular emotional significance.

The acclaimed singer, who passed away recently, was the younger brother of legendary cultural icon Dr Bhupen Hazarika. Samar Hazarika began his musical career in the 1960s, released his first album in 1968, and went on to sing for several popular Assamese films, including Uppath, Bowari and Prabhati Pakhri Gaan. His albums and film songs have left a lasting imprint on Assam's musical landscape.

Assam igniting startup revolution, committed to strengthening ecosystem: Himanta Biswa Sarma

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday reaffirmed the state government's commitment to building a strong and vibrant startup ecosystem, asserting that innovation and entrepreneurship are key to shaping India's future.

Marking National Startup Day, Sarma said Assam is focused on empowering young entrepreneurs by providing the right support, opportunities and an enabling environment that encourages innovation and impact-driven ventures.

"In Assam, we remain committed to nurturing a vibrant startup ecosystem, enabling young entrepreneurs with the right support, opportunities and an environment to innovate and grow," the Chief



Minister said in a post on X. Highlighting the progress

made so far, Sarma said 615 startups have been incubated under

the Northeast Entrepreneurship and Startup Training (NEST) programme through the Assam Startup initiative since 2021.

He also noted that the state has set up a Rs 200-crore Assam Venture Capital Fund to provide financial backing to emerging startups and help them scale their ideas into sustainable businesses.

In addition, the Chief Minister said the Chief Minister's Atmanirbhar Assam Abhijan (CMAAA) is supporting thousands of young entrepreneurs across the state by offering institutional support and resources.

Sarma said the government's startup-focused policies are aimed at igniting a startup revolution in Assam, empowering youth to innovate, generate employment and contribute meaningfully to the state's economic growth.

'Easy money' crypto scam dupes two in Gangtok; police issue fresh cyber alert



GANGTOK

Two residents of Gangtok district have fallen prey to an online "easy money" scam involving cryptocurrency trading, prompting police to issue a fresh warning against cyber frauds that promise quick and guaranteed returns.

According to police sources, the victims were lured through social media messages and calls from unknown, including international, phone numbers that offered lucrative investment opportunities in Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies.

In the first case, reported from the Ranipool area, the victim was contacted on a social media platform with an offer to earn "easy money". After showing interest, he was asked to share his WhatsApp number, following which he received a call explaining an alleged cryptocurrency investment scheme. The caller assured him that the invested amount would be doubled within a short period.

To gain his trust, the victim was initially asked to invest a small

sum, which he transferred as instructed. He was later persuaded to make a second, larger payment to unlock the promised returns. Soon after the second transfer, the caller stopped responding and blocked all communication. The victim later realised he had been cheated, suffering losses of over Rs 36,000.

In a similar incident, another Gangtok resident received a call from an unknown international number offering high-profit cryptocurrency trading. The caller later shifted communication to WhatsApp and followed the same pattern—asking for a small initial payment before demanding a larger amount. Despite transferring the money, the victim received no returns. Instead, further demands were made, alerting the victim to the scam. The loss in this case exceeded Rs 23,000.

Police said complaints in both cases have been registered on the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal, and the victims have been advised to approach their respective police stations for further investigation. Reiterating their advisory, police officials urged citizens not to respond to unsolicited calls, messages or social media offers that promise guaranteed or unusually high returns, particularly those linked to cryptocurrency and online trading. People have been strongly advised against sharing personal details, phone numbers or transferring money based on information from unknown or unverified sources.

Himanta accuses Congress, Gaurav Gogoi of compromising Assam's identity for political gains

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday mounted a sharp attack on the Congress and its state president Gaurav Gogoi, alleging that the party was compromising the welfare of Assam and the identity of its people by "kneeling before a particular community" for vested political interests.

Addressing the public through a Facebook Live broadcast on January 16, Sarma claimed that such political conduct posed a serious threat to Assam's social fabric and cultural identity. He also said that details relating to an Assam Member of Parliament allegedly maintaining secret contacts with Pakistan and showing "special affection" towards a specific community would be made public before the end of the month.

While Sarma did not name Gogoi directly, the BJP has repeatedly accused the Congress MP from Jorhat—who is also the party's deputy leader in the Lok Sabha—of having links with the neighbouring country.

"The Congress has knelt before a particular community. If this were done for the good of society, it would have been different. But it is happening at the cost of the welfare of our motherland and the identity of our people," Sarma said. "This cannot be accepted."

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"The Congress and Gaurav Gogoi must understand this."

The Chief Minister asserted that what he described as "special affection for a specific community" and "secret contact with Pakistan" were dangerous for the state. "Our jati is in danger, and we are trying to protect it. But a section driven by vested interests is attempting to weaken us," he said, calling for unity among the people to win what he termed a "war of identity".

Sarma also referred to the controversy surrounding remarks made by former All Assam Minority Students' Union (AAMSU)

president Rejaul Karim Sarkar while joining the Congress on January 11 in the presence of Gogoi. Sarkar resigned from the party three days later, on January 14, following widespread criticism.

"When someone joins the Congress, we usually do not comment, as it is their internal matter. But on that day, a controversial statement was made about turning Sivasagar into Dhubri and Dhubri into Sivasagar," Sarma said.

The Chief Minister claimed that nearly 80 per cent of Dhubri's population comprised people of Bangladeshi origin and alleged that

Assamese culture was gradually diminishing in the western Assam district. In contrast, he described Sivasagar as the cultural and historical heart of Assam, citing its legacy as the first capital of the Ahom dynasty, the birthplace of the first Assamese newspaper Orunodoi, and the presence of the UNESCO World Heritage site Charaideo Maidam and the iconic Shivadol.

"It is impossible to turn Sivasagar into Dhubri or Dhubri into Sivasagar because both places have their own distinct characteristics," Sarma said, adding that objections arise when statements are made suggesting demographic changes in culturally significant regions like Sivasagar.

He further alleged that Sarkar had spoken about concepts such as "education jihad" and suggested that deputy commissioners in districts like Sivasagar, Jorhat and Guwahati should be from Bangladesh-origin communities. Sarma questioned Gogoi's silence at the time, saying the Congress leader should have expelled Sarkar immediately if such remarks were not withdrawn.

"Instead, Sarkar resigned on his own and is now being projected as a hero among minority communities. Gogoi allowed this at the cost of the asmita and pride of Sivasagar," the Chief Minister claimed.

Sarma also criticised Gogoi for allegedly failing to act against another Congress leader who had recently demanded reservation on the basis of religion, asserting that such inaction reflected a lack of leadership accountability within the party.

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Republic Day 2026 to turn Kartavya Path into live battlefield-style military showcase



NEW DELHI

Bringing a sense of the battlefield to Kartavya Path, Republic Day 2026 will transform India's ceremonial boulevard into a dynamic display of how the armed forces operate in real combat conditions. In a significant departure from tradition, missiles, artillery systems and soldiers will move not as static showpieces but in formations that mirror battlefield deployment, offering spectators an immersive view of modern military sequencing. At the heart of the parade is a new "phased battle array formation", under which key Army assets will roll out in operational order. Reconnaissance elements will lead the column, followed by logistics units and

combat platforms, with troops moving alongside in full battle gear. Defence Secretary R K Singh said the 77th Republic Day celebrations would see "many firsts this time". He said that key indigenous assets would advance in sequence, beginning with reconnaissance elements, followed by logistics units. "This new format seeks to make the parade-watching more engaging for spectators. The aerial component will also be shown in battle array formation," he said. Cutting across the boulevard will be some of the country's most formidable indigenous systems, including the BrahMos, Akash air defence system, medium range surface-to-air missiles, advanced towed artillery gun system, Dhanush artillery gun,

and Shaktiban, alongside a display of select drones.

The spectacle will extend into the skies. The flypast will feature frontline fighters and support aircraft flying in coordinated formations. Rafale and Su-30 fighters will share the airspace with MiG-29s, P-8 maritime patrol aircraft, Apache attack helicopters, light combat helicopters, advanced light helicopters, Mi-17 helicopters, and the C-130 and C-295.

There will also be 18 marching contingents, 13 military bands, animal units, and Bhairav battalion debut. Traditional "VIP" labels for enclosures have been dropped in favour of river names. Beating Retreat seating will be named after musical instruments.

MUMBAI

When Bengaluru Central MP P C Mohan posted on X "Ordered some rasmalai. #BMCResults", it was a sweet dig at the firebrand Mumbai leader Raj Thackeray in the fight for civic polls in Maharashtra that had turned bitter and personal between Raj and Tamil Nadu BJP leader K Annamalai. Raj had ridiculed Annamalai by addressing him with consonance "rasmalai".

Raj must have waited for the Friday counting of the state-wide corporation results with anticipation of engineering another of his umpteenth attempts at political revival. However, the day turned out to be one of his many disappointments. At the time of going to the press, his Maharashtra Navnirman Sena had scored a paltry 17 victories and leads in 2,869 wards in Maharashtra. Nine of these results are from Mumbai, where he managed to convince cousin Uddhav to drop the Congress for an alliance with him and contest on the parochial principle of Marathi mannos.

Mumbai was always central to everything that the Thackeray cousins stood for. Whenever the Shiv Sena made a serious bid at state leadership, Mumbai was the launch pad. Right from the days of Bal Thackeray, or even before that, when the senior Thackeray's father Prabodhankar Thackeray became a big leader of the Samyukta Maharashtra movement, which sought a separate state for Marathi-speaking people, it was always about Bombay or Mumbai.

The BJP of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani couldn't imagine a future in the city, or the state, without an alliance with the Sena.

However, the BJP is finally warming up to the idea of having its own mayor in the city, even as Uddhav is nowhere close to being a spent force. His is not the single largest party in the BMC anymore. With 67 corporators—at the time of going to press—his is the second largest, just 20 behind the BJP in the 227-member house. His appeal among the city's Marathi

Uncertain future ahead of Maharashtra dynasts as Thackerays, Pawars lose ground at home turf



voters stays intact, but his grip over the city's power structures seems to have loosened to the point of no return, since the opponent is a new BJP under Devendra Fadnis.

The Thackeray legacy is in a crisis of mortality now, since Uddhav has tried everything from the left to the right, from the Marathi pride to the Hindu pride, from the family appeal to the city appeal. With cousin Raj reduced to dust, Uddhav stands alone, abandoned by ideology, rejected by Realpolitik, & ignored by money power.

The results of civic body elections in Maharashtra have come as a big blow to seasoned state stalwart Sharad Pawar and his nephew Ajit Pawar, who were planning to merge their respective factions of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and emerge as a consolidated force against the dominance of the BJP. However, they have lost Pune and Pimpri Chinchwad corporations, which were known as bastions of the Pawars, badly to the BJP. The Pawars decided to test the

waters for the merger with the alliance in these civic polls. However, the results are not encouraging for them. In Pune, the BJP secured a landslide victory with 123 seats out of 165, while the Ajit Pawar's NCP won only 21 seats, while the Sharad Pawar-led faction won merely three seats. The Congress, the ally of the Sharad Pawar faction in the state and national elections, performed much better by securing 16 seats. In the Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporation election also, the NCP lost badly, where the BJP secured 86 seats, while Ajit Pawar's NCP got 37 and his uncle drew a zero.

The twin defeats signal a big jolt to the dynastic politics of the Pawars, which was replicated throughout the state. In the prestigious battle of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, Ajit Pawar could get only two corporators elected, while Sharad Pawar could manage only one.

In hindsight, the Pawar family coming together for the civic polls seems to be a mistake, through which

both the uncle and the nephew have lost their bargaining power. While Sharad Pawar stands to lose his hold in the INDIA bloc, whenever he seeks to revive it for any future elections, the nephew stands to lose immediately. It can be expected that in the coming days, state Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis will also start giving less importance to Ajit Pawar and continue to expand his party base in the NCP bastion, even if it antagonises Ajit Pawar. During the campaign, Ajit Pawar had tried to outsmart the BJP by making several freebies to voters, such as free bus and metro services, but the voters of Pune and Pimpri Chinchwad did not buy the promises. What this means is that if he tries to go with the BJP for the 2029 state polls, the BJP will definitely drive a hard bargain. On the other hand, Sharad's move has jeopardised the future of his daughter Supriya Sule, who is a Lok Sabha MP, who may find it difficult to revive the party at the grassroots on her own, or even with the help of the power of her cousin Ajit.

INTERNATIONAL

Trump says he may punish countries with tariffs if they don't back US controlling Greenland

COPENHAGEN

U.S. President Donald Trump suggested on Friday that he may punish countries with tariffs if they don't back the U.S. controlling Greenland, a message that came as a bipartisan Congressional delegation sought to lower tensions in the Danish capital.

Trump for months has insisted that the U.S. should control Greenland, a semi-autonomous territory of NATO ally Denmark, and said earlier this week that anything less than the Arctic island being in U.S. hands would be "unacceptable."

During an unrelated event at the White House about rural health care, he recounted Friday how he had threatened European allies with tariffs on pharmaceuticals.

"I may do that for Greenland too," Trump said. "I may put a tariff on countries if they don't go along with Greenland, because we need Greenland for national security. So I may do that," he said.

He had not previously mentioned using tariffs to try to force the issue.

Earlier this week, the foreign ministers of Denmark and Greenland met in Washington with U.S. Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

That encounter didn't resolve the deep differences, but did produce an agreement to set up a working group — on whose purpose Denmark and the White House then offered sharply diverging public views.

European leaders have insisted that it is only for Denmark and Greenland to decide on matters concerning the territory, and Denmark said this week that it was increasing its military presence in Greenland in cooperation with allies.

President Donald Trump speaks during an event to promote investment in rural health care in the East Room of the White House, Friday, Jan. 16, 2026, in Washington.



In Copenhagen, a group of senators and members of the House of Representatives met Friday with Danish and Greenlandic lawmakers, and with leaders including Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen. Delegation leader Sen. Chris Coons, a Delaware Democrat, thanked the group's hosts for "225 years of being a good and trusted ally and partner" and said that "we had a strong and robust dialog about how we extend that into the future."

Sen. Lisa Murkowski, an Alaska Republican, said after meeting lawmakers that the visit reflected a strong relationship over decades and "it is one that we need to nurture." She told reporters that "Greenland needs to be viewed as our ally, not

as an asset, and I think that's what you're hearing with this delegation."

The tone contrasted with that emanating from the White House. Trump has sought to justify his calls for a U.S. takeover by repeatedly claiming that China and Russia have their own designs on Greenland, which holds vast untapped reserves of critical minerals. The White House hasn't ruled out taking the territory by force.

"We have heard so many lies, to be honest and so much exaggeration on the threats towards Greenland," said Aaja Chemnitz, a Greenlandic politician and member of the Danish parliament who took part in Friday's meetings. "And mostly, I would say the threats that we're seeing right

now is from the U.S. side."

Murkowski emphasized the role of Congress in spending and in conveying messages from constituents.

"I think it is important to underscore that when you ask the American people whether or not they think it is a good idea for the United States to acquire Greenland, the vast majority, some 75%, will say, we do not think that that is a good idea," she said.

Along with Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, a New Hampshire Democrat, Murkowski has introduced bipartisan legislation that would prohibit the use of U.S. Defense or State department funds to annex or take control of Greenland or the sovereign territory of any NATO member state without that ally's consent or authorization from the North Atlantic Council.

The dispute is looming large in the lives of Greenlanders. Greenland's prime minister, Jens-Frederik Nielsen, said on Tuesday that "if we have to choose between the United States and Denmark here and now, we choose Denmark. We choose NATO. We choose the Kingdom of Denmark. We choose the EU."

The chair of the Nuuk, Greenland-based Inuit Circumpolar Council, which represents around 180,000 Inuit from Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Russia's Chukotka region on international issues, said persistent statements from the White House that the U.S. must own Greenland offer "a clear picture of how the US administration views the people of Greenland, how the U.S. administration views Indigenous peoples, and peoples that are few in numbers."

Sara Olsvig told The Associated Press in Nuuk that the issue is "how one of the biggest powers in the world views other peoples that are less powerful than them. And that really is concerning."

Indigenous Inuit in Greenland do not want to be colonized again, she said.

India, Japan unveil economic security plan to de-risk economies



NEW DELHI

India and Japan on Friday launched a major partnership on economic security, strengthening their "Special Strategic and Global Partnership" beyond traditional diplomatic and defence cooperation.

The initiatives were announced during a strategic dialogue in New Delhi between External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi. The two sides unveiled a Working Group on Critical Minerals and agreed to put in place a formal mechanism focused on economic security.

Highlighting the changing global situation, Jaishankar said economic security has become central to national sovereignty and global stability. "Economic Security today is particularly paramount. I think both our countries attach enormous importance to it, and how to de-risk our own economies, and how to de-risk the international economy are both very important. So, we will

be discussing resilient supply chains, critical minerals, how to address energy, health, and maritime security in our talks today," Jaishankar said.

The dialogue focused on building resilient supply chains to protect both countries from what officials described as uncertain international economic conditions. The new Working Group on Critical Minerals is expected to help secure access to rare-earth elements crucial for semiconductors and green energy, areas where both nations are seeking to reduce dependence on single-source suppliers. India and Japan also agreed to step up cooperation in the field of Artificial Intelligence.

Japanese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Toshimitsu Kitamura said Japan plans to export the UNICORN integrated stealth antenna system to India for use on Indian naval vessels. The UNICORN system combines multiple communication functions into a single mast, significantly reducing a ship's radar signature, and

is seen as an important step forward in defence technology transfer between the two countries. Kitamura also spoke about cooperation between the two sides in India's North East.

Speaking about the broader strategic outlook, Jaishankar said, "We are leading democracies, we are the major economies of the world, and we have today not just an opportunity, but also an obligation, a duty to shape the global order." He added that the convergence between India and Japan now stretches from the Philippines to West Asia, reflecting shared interests in energy security and maritime stability.

The two ministers also discussed preparations to mark the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between India and Japan, which they said would be celebrated in a "fitting manner" as bilateral ties continue to grow.

Kitamura noted that while the talks were wide-ranging, there were "no concrete talks" during this meeting on the timing of the next Quad summit.

MANY ROOTS ONE RHYTHM: THE LIVING CULTURES OF NORTHEAST INDIA



The Northeast of India is a land that feels old and young at the same time. Old in memory. Young in spirit. When the North East Integration Rally 2026 moved across the hills and valleys under the leadership of Biswadeep Gupta, CEO and managing trustee of KRC Foundations, it did more than travel roads. It touched stories. It carried cultures. It reminded people who they are.

This region has eight states. Each one feels like a world of its own. Yet they breathe together. The cultures here are not loud. They speak softly through songs, clothes, food, and daily life.

Nagaland stands tall with pride. The Naga tribes have strong roots. Each tribe has its own language and dress. Shawls are not just cloth. They tell stories of courage and clan. Festivals like Hornbill bring all tribes together. There is dance with strong steps. There is log drum music that feels like a heartbeat. Community matters here. The village is family.

In Assam, culture flows like the Brahmaputra. Bihu is the soul of the people. It comes with dance, drum, and joy. Young and old dance together. Women wear mekhela chador. Men wear dhoti and gamosa. The gamosa is simple but sacred. Assam also carries old Vaishnavite traditions from the satras. Mask making, drama, and music live there quietly.

Meghalaya feels like a song in rain. The Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo



people live close to nature. Music is part of life. From folk tunes to rock bands, sound travels easily. Festivals like Wangala celebrate harvest. Traditional homes are warm.

Manipur has grace in every move. Manipuri dance is gentle and deep. It tells stories of devotion. Ras Leela feels like prayer in motion. The people love sports too. Football



Matrilineal life gives women a strong place in society. It feels balanced and calm.

grounds are full. Handloom work is fine and colorful. Festivals mix faith and tradition

in quiet harmony.

Mizoram is a land of discipline and warmth. The Mizo people value honesty and order. Their dances are graceful and group based. Everyone moves as one. Festivals like Chapchar Kut celebrate spring. Bamboo plays a big role in life. Music has a clean, soulful sound. Churches are central to community life.

Tripura carries royal memory and tribal rhythm. The influence of old kingdoms blends with tribal traditions. Dances like Hojagiri show balance and skill. Handicrafts speak of patience. Bamboo, wood, and cloth turn into art. There is a feeling of quiet strength.

Arunachal Pradesh feels vast and sacred. Mountains watch over many tribes. Each tribe has its own customs. Losar, Solung, and other festivals mark seasons and faith. Masks, feathers, and beads fill their costumes. Life here respects the spirits of land and sky.

Sikkim, small and serene, blends Buddhist calm with local tradition. Monasteries stand like guardians. Prayer flags move with the wind. Festivals like Losar and Pang Lhabso bring people together. Food is simple and warm, like the people.

Across the Northeast, food tells its own story. Rice is common. Fermented flavors are loved. Bamboo shoot, herbs, and smoked meat appear often. Meals are shared. Hospitality is natural, not forced.

What ties all these cultures together is respect. Respect for elders. Respect for land. Respect for community. There is pain too. Years of conflict and neglect have left marks. But there is hope. Strong hope.

The North East Integration Rally 2026 carries this hope. As it moves through states, it speaks of peace, work, and unity. It reminds people that culture grows when there is dignity and opportunity. Identity becomes stronger when youth have jobs and purpose.

This rally is not about one group. It is about all. It is a call to stop fighting and start building. To protect culture, not freeze it. To let it grow with time.

The Northeast is not one story. It is many voices singing together. Sometimes

soft. Sometimes bold. Always real. The rally only shows a glimpse. The real beauty lives in the people, every single day.

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A Rally for Peace and Purpose at NEIR Fest 2026



OUR CORRESPONDENT

DIMAPUR

Dimapur witnessed a rare moment of shared hope and unity during the Community Cultural Programme held on January 16 as part of NEIR Fest 2026. The event was organised by the North East Zone Cultural Centre at its Stone Sculpture Garden campus in Dimapur, Nagaland. People from different walks of life, cultures, and states came together with one clear message. Peace first. Progress next.

The programme turned into a powerful space for memory, emotion, and vision for the future of the North East.

Biswadeep Gupta, Managing Trustee and CEO of KRC Foundations, delivered one of the most heartfelt speeches of the day. Standing on the NEZCC campus, he called it his "second home." He shared that he studied from Classes 6 to 12 there and said the place carried deep personal memories. His bond with NEZCC, he said, also came from his family. His mother had organised many cultural events through the centre in earlier years.

Speaking about the rally, Gupta said it stood for the integration of brothers and sisters from all communities of the region. He made a strong appeal to end divisions. He said the time had come to move away from fights, chaos, and conflict. What the region needs now is peace to prevail.

He gave a clear call to elders and leaders of society. He urged them to stop fighting among themselves and instead focus on creating job opportunities for the youth. Young people, he said, should not be forced to beg for jobs. They should be guided to become entrepreneurs. According to him, identity comes with employment. Dignity comes with work. Peace, progress, and prosperity can only grow when the youth are empowered.

Gupta stressed that the rally was not a class movement but a mass movement. It belonged to everyone. He also praised the six-member HAM Radio team for their dedication and service, calling their work valuable for the community.



During his address, Gupta also spoke on the immense contributions of NEIR advisor Prof (Dr) Sukamal Deb and advocate Kh. Gajendra Singh. He acknowledged their long-standing role in guiding social and cultural initiatives in the region.

Biswadeep Gupta said that NEIR and KRC Foundation will work closely together in Kolkata in the coming days.

He spoke about strengthening collaboration for community work and youth engagement.

Adding strength to the message, Prof. A.K. Aditya lauded the organisers for their vision. He said organising such a rally to unite all the states of the North East was both bold and timely. He described the initiative as visionary and highly commendable, especially in a region known for its diversity.

Youth voices were also heard at the programme. Dimapur Lotha Students Union president Mhonbemo M. Kikon said he felt excited and inspired by the event. His brief words reflected the enthusiasm among young participants who see unity and peace as the way forward.

Kh. Gajendra Singh highlighted the serious drug problem facing the region. He said drug mafias cannot be fought alone and called for

joint action by inter-state agencies to tackle the challenge.

Prof (Dr) Sukamal Deb praised the initiative taken by KRC Foundation. He also thanked NEZCC for its support and for showcasing the rich cultural heritage of Nagaland.

The Assistant Director of NEZCC felicitated the members of NEIR and said the programme marked the beginning of an initiative that will grow stronger in the future.

Waluniba Jamir, President of the Naga Students Union Kolkata, was also present at the programme.

The event featured vibrant and colourful cultural performances that captivated the audience. KRC Foundation also felicitated members of NEZCC and distributed

participation certificates to the performing artists.

The Community Cultural Programme at NEIR Fest 2026 was more than a celebration.

It became a platform for reflection and resolve. Amid songs, speeches, and shared memories, one idea stood tall. A peaceful and united North East is possible when culture, dialogue, and opportunity walk together.





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 Navigation, Sport Climbing, Disaster Management Technique, Water Sports.
www.krcfoundation.org



11 JAN
Barak Valley Conclave
 Potential Issues and Challenges of Barak Valley to be discussed by stakeholders.
 Includes: MOU, and 20 general discussion topics for Barak valley. (Workshop, Case Study, Seminar, and presentation) available. Participation through invitation only. 5 different awards are provided.



12 JAN
River-Climate Conclave
 Climate change will accelerate on Global Change, pollution and over-exploitation. The Conclave will focus on the importance, technical and practical of River Barak, Planning & Geography, environment and development in River Barak, Climate Change.

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 Conclave, Workshops, and the Fund, Talks and Conferences are part of the 'Barak Festival 2025'. Theme: 'One for All, All for One'.
 Workshop: Journalism, Photography, Editing & Content Creation, Sports, Games, Chess, Badminton, Table Tennis.



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 FILM FESTIVAL | EXHIBITION
 BOOK CLUB | WORKSHOP | TALKS | RACE MARATHON | CONCLAVES

10-12 JAN
Science Studio
 Real 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.

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'

Barak Festival
Band Night 10 JAN
Musical Night 11 JAN

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



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



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Painting Carnival
 Water Colour and Oil and Sawdust Painting Campaign