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**PERSPECTIVE**

Have you ever just stopped and realized that if you hadn't met a certain person in your life, your life would be completely different?

**NIA charges two more in Assam Independence Day bomb plot case**

GUWAHATI

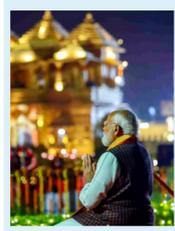
The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Friday filed a supplementary chargesheet against two more individuals in connection with the seizure of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) during Assam's Independence Day celebrations in 2024, raising the total number of accused in the case to five.

Bhargab Gogoi and Sumu Gogoi, both residents of Dibrugarh district, were arrested in June 2025 after investigators uncovered their alleged role in financing the bomb plot. The NIA invoked provisions of the Indian Penal Code, Explosive Substances Act, and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act while filing the chargesheet before the Special Court in Guwahati.

Investigators said the duo provided financial support to Jahnur Boruah, a previously charged accused who admitted to planting four of the 11 IEDs recovered by Assam Police in August 2024. The devices were reportedly part of a coordinated plan to disrupt Independence Day celebrations following a protest and boycott call by ULFA(I) chief Paresh Baruah. The case was initially registered by Assam Police at Dispur police station before being transferred to the NIA in September 2024. Authorities have described the incident as part of a wider ULFA(I) conspiracy aimed at targeting the Indian government through coordinated attacks across Assam.

Three other accused were charged by the NIA in June 2025. The agency continues to investigate the network responsible for terror financing and operational planning linked to the case.

**WHO SAID WHAT**



**Somnath's tale is the story of India; foreign invaders tried to destroy India many times, like this temple. The invaders thought that they had won by destroying the temple, but after 1,000 years, the flag of Somnath is still flying high**

**Narendra Modi**  
Prime Minister

**Assam Governor inaugurates 2nd Northeast Healthcare Management Conclave**

GUWAHATI

Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya on Saturday inaugurated the 2nd Northeast Healthcare Management Conclave in Guwahati. The conclave was organised by the Association of Healthcare Providers India (AHPDI), North East Chapter, on a theme "Strengthening Patient Care and Infrastructure for a Resilient Northeast."

Speaking on the occasion, the Governor said, "It was a matter of great pleasure to participate in a programme devoted to strengthening the healthcare sector. "In India's rich tradition, health has always been accorded the highest priority, and a healthy individual always forms the basis of a healthy society and, in turn, a healthy nation", he added. The Governor emphasised that healthcare goes far beyond the diagnosis and treatment of diseases.

"It is a vital mechanism for protecting human dignity, ensuring social justice, and fulfilling the constitutional responsibility of the state. An effective healthcare system, he noted, must be rooted in trust and compassion, while guaranteeing timely, accessible, affordable, and quality services for all citizens," the Governor said.

Highlighting the unique challenges



of the North Eastern region, such as difficult terrain and cultural diversity, the Governor underlined the critical importance of strengthening healthcare delivery systems in the region. In this context, he described the conclave as highly significant, as it brings together management and clinical excellence guided by scientific and patient-centric approaches.

Referring to the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Governor said, "Healthy citizens are the cornerstone of a self-reliant and empowered nation." He noted that the Prime Minister's vision of "Healthy India, Prosperous India" focus-

es on preventive, inclusive, and technology-driven healthcare.

"Initiatives such as Ayushman Bharat, Health and Wellness Centres, the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, and telemedicine services through e-Sanjeevani have substantially expanded access to quality healthcare, particularly in remote and underserved areas," the Governor said.

The Governor further stated that, in alignment with this national vision, the Assam Government has been undertaking extensive infrastructural and human-resource development to strengthen healthcare infrastructure.

"Schemes such as Ayushman Assam and the Chief Minister's Jan Arogya Yojana, expansion of medical colleges and nursing institutions, modernisation of district hospitals, and enhancement of critical care and advanced treatment facilities are reinforcing the healthcare ecosystem in the state," he said.

The Assam Governor observed that patient care and infrastructure development are the two strong and complementary pillars of the healthcare sector. "Infrastructure becomes truly meaningful only when supported by efficient management, skilled human resources, ethical practices, and humane sensitivity," he added.

**KOKRAJHAR**

Normal life came to a near halt across Assam's Kokrajhar district on Sunday as a 12-hour bandh, called in protest against the alleged rape of a mentally challenged woman, was observed peacefully amid tight security arrangements.

The shutdown, enforced from 6 am by the Kokrajhar District Committee of the World Hindu Federation, saw shops, markets and business establishments remain closed, while public transport services were largely off the roads. Streets in Kokrajhar town and surrounding areas wore a deserted look for most of the day, with educational institutions and private offices also affected. Only a few private vehicles were seen plying.

Essential services, including hospitals and medical facilities, were exempted from the bandh and continued to function.

Anticipating possible law and order challenges, the district administration imposed prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023. Po-



lice and security personnel were deployed in strength at key locations, marketplaces and other sensitive points to ensure that the protest remained peaceful.

Senior district officials closely monitored the situation throughout

the day, coordinating with law enforcement agencies to prevent any untoward incidents. The administration also issued public advisories urging residents not to spread or believe rumours and unverified information circulating on social me-

dia, warning that rumour-mongering would invite strict legal action. Citizens were encouraged to report misleading content to the district control room.

Officials confirmed that the bandh passed off peacefully till the

filing of this report, with no incidents of violence recorded.

The shutdown followed widespread public outrage on Saturday after the alleged sexual assault of a mentally challenged woman in the Patharghat area of the district. According to police, the incident occurred around 9.30 am and triggered protests, including a temporary blockade of the Kokrajhar-Bilasipara road, as demonstrators demanded swift justice and stringent punishment for the accused. Police said the accused, identified as Rafikul Islam, a labourer from Chapar in Dhubri district working at a construction site in Patharghat, was arrested shortly after the incident. Preliminary investigations suggest that the orphaned woman was allegedly lured into a shed and assaulted. Authorities said further investigation is underway, including the recording of the victim's statement and completion of necessary medical and legal procedures. Police have appealed for public co-operation, assuring that the case is being pursued with seriousness and that the law will take its due course.

**Union Minister Pushes Olive Farming, Water Storage During Kohima Review**

KOHIMA

Union Minister of State for Coal and Mines Satish Chandra Dubey on Saturday encouraged the exploration of olive cultivation and the expansion of water storage projects in Nagaland while reviewing the implementation of central government schemes in Kohima district.

Dubey's visit was part of the Centre's 'Fortnightly Visit of Union Ministers to the North Eastern Region' programme, aimed at assessing on-ground delivery of schemes and the utilisation of public funds. Addressing a welcome programme at the DC Conference Hall in Kohima, the minister said the initiative reflected Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of ensuring sustained focus on the North East, a region he said had long remained on the margins.

Emphasising the importance of district-level reviews, Dubey said such visits help determine whether schemes are being implemented effectively and if benefits are reaching intended beneficiaries. He acknowledged that gaps could exist in delivery, including administrative shortcomings, partial implementation or misuse of resources. "The objective is to identify these gaps, listen to concerns at the grassroots and take up issues with the concerned departments for corrective action," he said.

The minister praised Nagaland's social fabric, noting that the state required comparatively less heavy policing than many other parts of the country. He attributed this to strong community cohesion, social discipline and mutual trust. Dubey also highlighted the state's progress in organic farming, saying minimal use of chemicals in food grain production had placed Nagaland ahead in sustainable agricultural practices.

On infrastructure, he pointed to visible improvements in roads and highways and said

expanding railway connectivity was helping integrate the North East more closely with the rest of the country. Expressing optimism about the region's growth trajectory, he said development in Kohima and across Nagaland was expected to accelerate in the coming years.

During departmental presentations, officials from Health and Nutrition, Agriculture, Power, Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) and Education outlined the status of various central schemes and flagged implementation challenges. The Power Department briefed on works under the Kohima Electrical Division, while PHED officials detailed progress under the Swachh Bharat Mission, Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) 2.0 and the Jal Jeevan Mission. The Education Department presented initiatives under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan and sought additional funding support.

In discussions with officials, Dubey encouraged the Agriculture Department to examine the feasibility of olive cultivation in Nagaland and advised identifying more locations for water storage projects under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY).

Earlier in the day, the minister visited Rumsoma village to inspect development works. He also assured continued engagement with the people of the state, saying he would remain accessible and committed to contributing to Nagaland's development. During an interaction session, Angami Public Organisation vice president Vikehelielie Victor Khawakhrie raised concerns over reported attacks on Christians and incidents of church destruction in parts of the country. He said such incidents deeply affected sentiments in Nagaland and urged the Centre to ensure that no community was targeted on the basis of religion. Dubey said the concerns would be conveyed to the central government.

GUWAHATI

The Gauhati High Court Bar Association on Sunday began a four-hour strike to boycott the foundation stone laying of the new high court complex, to be done by the Chief Justice of India.

A new complex of the Gauhati High Court has been proposed as part of a judicial township at Rangmahal in North Guwahati and CJ, Justice Surya Kant, is scheduled to lay the foundation stone of it later in the day.

The members of the Gauhati High Court Bar Association (GH-CBA) took part in a four-hour hunger strike on Thursday and Friday in front of the old building of the Gauhati High Court.

"We are completely against shifting the high court from the present location, which is the heart of the city. We have begun our hunger strike from 10 am to 2 pm. None of our members will attend the function," GH-CBA vice president Santanu Borthakur told.

The GH-CBA has been opposing the move to shift the court complex from the beginning, but the government has unilaterally decided and is now going ahead to construct a new judicial infrastructure, he alleged.

"As it appears, the foundation stone will be laid today. After this, we are thinking of challenging this in court. Our executive committee will meet within the next few days and decide the future course of action," Borthakur said.

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The GH-CBA has been vehemently opposing the relocation of the high court complex to the northern bank of Brahmaputra from the existing place at the heart of Guwahati city.

Assam Advocate General Devajit Saikia on Saturday criticised the GH-CBA, claiming that there was a "nexus with political parties" behind the protest.

The government is planning to construct the new judicial township at Rangmahal, spread across 148 bighas (nearly 49 acres) of land.

In November last year, the state cabinet had approved Rs 479 crore in the first phase to construct a judicial township in North Guwahati.

Earlier, GH-CBA had demanded an immediate halt to the project in the interest of all stakehold-

ers and the public at large. The Gauhati High Court is presently located in the Uzan Bazar area of central Guwahati on the southern bank of Brahmaputra.

It has a historical building, while a state-of-the-art multi-crore modern multi-storey structure was constructed and inaugurated a few years ago.

Both the buildings are located face-to-face on two sides of Mahatma Gandhi Road and are connected through an underground tunnel, having escalator facilities.

The Assam government is seeking to develop the riverfront of Brahmaputra, for which it requires the high court land.

A new convention centre is also being built next to the old high court complex on the riverbank.



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# WORLD SILENT ON HINDU GENOCIDE IN BANGLADESH

## Why Washington needs to call Delhi

**G**reat nations rarely fall to foreign invasion. They corrode from within—when vanity overtakes vision and bluster replaces balance. That is the story unfolding in Washington, where Donald Trump, once again armed with his rhetoric of revival, is turning America's biggest democratic ally into a rhetorical punching bag. His new confrontation with India is not strategic audacity. It is a geopolitical folly.

Ever since his return to the White House, Trump has come back with his old instincts sharper and allies wearier. He sees diplomacy as a performance, not a partnership; deals as domination, not dialogue. Instead of rebuilding America's network of allies, he is dismantling it, one tariff and one insult at a time. Yet, in going after India, Trump has chosen an adversary he cannot intimidate. India is not a junior partner waiting for approval from Washington. It is a civilisational power, anchored in political stability, institutional maturity and economic resilience. The notion that Trump can browbeat such a nation into compliance reveals how outdated his imagination truly is. The current spiral began with a petty accusation dressed up as policy.

Last week, US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick made extraordinary remarks on the All In podcast. He claimed that a major trade deal with India had collapsed not because of policy differences, but because Prime Minister Narendra Modi had "refused to call President Trump" at an opportune moment. "I set the deal up," Lutnick declared, "and Modi was meant to call. India did not call. So the deal fell apart."

It was diplomacy reduced to schoolyard drama. Lutnick portrayed diplomacy as though it were a courtly ritual in which leaders must bow to secure favour. According to him, India had been given three chances in 2025 to complete the agreement, before the United States turned to other Asian nations like Vietnam and Indonesia. The narrative was clearly meant to humiliate New Delhi. The message was loud and clear. Proximity to Trump's ego, not parity of interest, determines access to Washington's trade benefits.

India's ministry of external affairs, however, demolished this spin with facts. Within hours, official spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal clarified that Modi and Trump had spoken eight times in 2025, covering trade, technology, and global security. "The way this has been described is inaccurate." The deal stalled not because of failed phone etiquette but because of Washington's fluctuating conditions and Trump's obsession with personal validation. That principle just can't be accepted by the new India—self-reliant, confident and unwilling to be dragged into narrow geopolitical games. But Trump pushed further. In late 2025, riding on bipartisan nationalism, he signed the Sanctioning Russia Act, threatening extreme tariffs up to 500 percent on countries that continued purchases of Russian energy including oil, gas and uranium. It was a blunt instrument aimed at India, China and Brazil under the pretence of "starving Moscow of resources". India has refused to blink. New Delhi's calm defiance exposed the hollowness of Trump's strategy. He mistook coercion for influence, forgetting that power today is not about pressure. It is about partnership.

Trump's retreat from global platforms has made matters worse. On January 7, he ordered the United States to withdraw from the International Solar Alliance. It's one of India's proudest multilateral initiatives, launched with France in 2015 to promote renewable energy for developing countries. Yet, the exit hardly slowed the project. India filled the void with funding from Japan, the European Union and the African Development Bank. America's retreat only underlined India's ascent as a dependable leader of the global energy transition.

What makes Trump's India obsession more incoherent is the way he treats adversaries differently. He has repeatedly claimed, falsely, that he personally halted "a war between India and Pakistan", a statement refuted by both governments. He repeats this myth on rally stages as proof of his diplomatic genius, as if India owes him a debt of gratitude. Meanwhile, his outreach to Pakistan's military leadership and the economic aid extended to Dhaka's new government has signalled an unsettling tilt against India's regional interests. By bending towards China and battering India, Trump is in effect eroding the strategic axis that can restrain Beijing's ambitions in the Indo-Pacific. In alienating India, Trump handicaps America's own ability to expand its influence in Asia's geopolitically-charged waters. This is where the equation turns unmistakably against him. The United States, for all its economic size, is facing strategic overstretch and demographic stagnation. India, on the other hand, is a rising continental power positioned at the crossroads of the Indian Ocean, capable of stabilising sea lanes and insulating global commerce from Beijing's coercive maritime designs.

Its market of 1.4 billion consumers provides the demand scale that sustains global innovation and manufacturing growth. Every major American technology company—Apple, Google, Amazon, Tesla—depends on Indian software architects, consumers and talent flows to keep its future alive. The geopolitical reality is simple: without India, America cannot sustain its competitive edge. If Trump truly wishes to make America great again, he must first make America wise again. Wisdom means recognising that the 21st century's balance of power depends on cooperation with nations that combine democratic values with demographic vitality. And there is no partner that fits this profile better than India. New Delhi offers Washington three priceless assets: a vast and youthful market that sustains corporate ambition, a strategic geography that buffers the Indo-Pacific from Chinese hegemony, and a political stability that most major democracies now envy.

America's future greatness depends on the strength and equality of its partnerships, not on the loudness of its commands. India represents that future—confident, collaborative, and consequential. If Washington chooses confrontation, it will isolate itself from the very power most capable of balancing China and ensuring a stable Asia. But if it chooses cooperation with India, it has a chance to renew its global relevance and moral leadership. The choice is Trump's to make, but the consequences will belong to America. Because in 2026, one truth stands taller than any rhetoric: the United States needs India far more than India needs the United States. The sooner Washington accepts this, the sooner both nations can take their rightful places as partners and not as rivals in shaping a sane and sustainable world order.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

When you have a dream, you've got to grab it and never let go."

—Carol Burnett



SUDERSHAN KUMAR

As the turmoil in Bangladesh escalates, the minority population there, is constantly under threat. The story of Hindus in Bangladesh is intertwined with the subcontinent's tumultuous history, demographic shifts, nationalist projects, and competing political ideologies. Since the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, the Hindu minority, once a substantial portion of the population has seen its numbers dwindle due to displacement, violence, discrimination, and emigration. Today, Hindus constitute roughly 7-8% of Bangladesh's population, down sharply from 22% in 1951. What raises urgent concern in recent years is not only this demographic decline but also reports of systematic and repeated attacks against Hindu communities, including homes, temples and individuals. Ever since the political shift in Bangladesh with mass uprising ousting Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in August 2024 and an interim installed government led by Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus, there have been claims of increasing communal violence often framed as targeting Hindus. If one goes by data available in open literature, there have been 2440 hate crimes between August 2024 to December 2025. These include killings, sexual assaults, arson, and attacks on places of worship etc. The lynching of Dipu Chandra Das, a Hindu garment worker on 18th December 2025 in Square Masterbari area in Bhakula Mymensingh, Bangladesh by a mob of 140-150 people (as per police report) has really shook the mankind around the globe. In-fact, Dipu Chandra Das, a 27 year old young man was beaten, hanged from a tree and set on fire by mob of 140-150 people after being accused of making derogatory remarks about Islam at a factory event. While nationalist groups in India and elsewhere describe these events as "genocide" or ethnic cleansing but unfortunately global diplomatic response remained muted. Even U.N. Office of High Commissioner for human rights noted that, after ouster of Sheikh Hasina, widespread attacks occurred on Hindu, homes, businesses, and places of worships in multiple districts such as Thakurgaon, Lalmonirhat, Dinajpur, Sylhet, Khulna, and Rangpur. Human rights documentation from 2025 also includes the Gongachora Hindu neighborhood attack, where looting and vandalism targeted Hindu Homes in July 2025. The pattern of attacks against Hindu communities in Bangladesh can broadly be categorized into several overlapping mechanisms

**Organized Communal Incitement**  
 i) It is often observed that some violent episodes involve politically organized groups, who capitalized ethnic and religious sentiments during the moments of political instability. Extremist groups like Jammata-Islami gained foot hold, post 2024 emboldening sectarian rhetoric and actions.  
 ii) Impunity and Enforcement Gaps: Human rights observers consistently point to a lack of effective protection or prosecution for perpetrators reinforcing, cycle in which violence can recur with minimal consequences. There have not been sustained effects to deter future violence.  
 iii) Blasphemy Allegations and Mob Violence: It is worth mentioning here that many attacks are triggered by religious offence or in local disputes, which then spark mob violence. Further the accusations of blasphemy even without substantiated evidence can quickly escalate into a collective punishment, including lynching and arson. Reports from late 2025 indicate at-least 71 blasphemy linked attacks across multiple districts. It will not be out of context to mention here that in response to this crisis, some global actors have expressed condemnation of violent acts and concern for minority rights, but there have been a noticeable disparity in intensity and framing international reactions.

**Targeted Condemnation by National Governments and Legislators:** Individual countries began to respond to specific incidents. For instance, the United Kingdom Government publicly condemned the murders of two Hindu youth in Bangladesh, marking the one of the direct foreign government statements addressing violence. In India, policy makers and Parliamentarians have raised the issue as well, with figures like Shashi Tharoor condemning the lynching of Hindu man and urging strong action. But at the same time the so called pseudo secularists chose to stay mum on the precarious situation in Bangladesh. These pseudo secularists have not uttered a single word on genocide of Hindu communities in Bangladesh. They are pretending as if nothing has happened. It is high time that they should come out of slumber and raise their voice against heinous crime on Hindu communities in Bangladesh especially after ouster of Sheikh Hasina in August 2024.  
**Civil Society and Diaspora Advocacy:** Various Diaspora groups, NGO's and human rights advocates have called for broader recognition with some urging the UN and global organizations to formally recognize the situation as ongoing "genocide" against Hindus in Bangladesh. These efforts underscore a call for greater international prioritization of the issue, yet they remain largely advocacy less led rather than official global policy positions.  
**International Institutions Statements on Violence:** It is unfortunate that the world body like United Nation has taken somewhat cautious approach: while it reiterated that it stands against racially based attacks and incitement violence, it has refrained from using stronger term "genocide" in official statements, focusing instead on calls to tamp down violence and protect human rights. Meanwhile Human Right office report documented attacks on Hindus in the aftermath of Sheikh Hasina's fall and highlighted authorities challenges in protecting the vulnerable communities, but stopped of labeling the situation "genocide". What prompted this world body to do so is not known. The definition of genocide as per 1948 genocide convention is an act committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national ethnic, racial or religious group. These acts include killing members, causing serious harm, imposing life conditions to cause destruction, preventing births or forcefully transferring children of this group. It is crime in both peace and war. Therefore it is the responsibility of the Bangladesh interim government, run by Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus to take strict action against the perpetra-

tors regardless whether they are private individuals, public, officials or political leaders with sovereign immunity. Hence the question arises, has interim government of Bangladesh failed to take adequate steps to prevent the violence against the Hindu Communities. The answer of this lies either on those, who are at the helm of affairs in Bangladesh or on the world body, which once again has disappointed the global community through its inaction against those, who are directly responsible for heinous crimes against the Hindu communities in Bangladesh. It is also essential to mention here that that India, being the largest Peninsula in south Asia, shares nearly 4085 km long land border with Bangladesh. Therefore the major catastrophes in Bangladesh would have spill over effects in India. This will lead to several inter connected challenges linked to how situation evolve in Bangladesh.

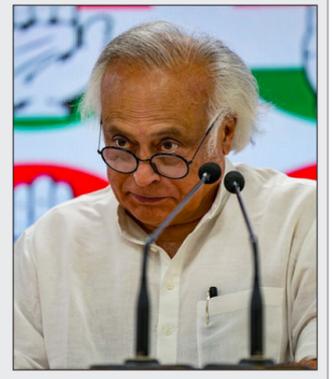
**Refugee and Migration Pressures:** The continued violence could prompt another wave of refugee seeking safety across the India Bangladesh border. This will strain resources and complicate domestic politics.  
**Diplomatic Balancing:** India must balance friendship with Bangladesh and its constitution, commitment to protect religious freedom while avoiding escalatory rhetoric that may harm bilateral relation.  
**Regional Stability:** The large scale unrest in Bangladesh has potential spill over effects varying from insurgency to economic disruptions. This will certainly impact the regional stability. Hence the way forward is to look for durable solution through multilayered engagement:  
 1) Strengthening the Rule of Law: International human right organizations and watch dog should be allowed independent monitoring of the precarious situation in Bangladesh. Bangladesh must ensure timely and impartial investigation and persecution of hate crimes.  
 2) Civil Society and Interfaith Initiatives: Grassroots peace building and interfaith dialogues can reduce the communal tension, and promote co-existence. Local leadership from within Bangladesh including minority voices should be amplified in policy discussions;  
 3) Diplomatic Engagement and Conditional Cooperation: India and other partners can insist on human right benchmark tied to economic or development cooperation. Further regional forums could be leveraged for minority protection standards;  
 4) Addressing Misinformation and Media Responsibility: Governments and Civil Society must work to reduce misinformation and build trustworthy reporting

mechanism to validate incidents and prevent inflammatory rumour. The author is of the opinion that the plight of Hindus in Bangladesh, as reported by various groups reflects deeper challenges related to communalism, state capacity, and political stability in South Asia. Whether, characterized as genocide, systematic discrimination or targeted violence, the real concern is about the systematic discrimination, targeted violence including lynching by mob, the minority communities need effective protection and justice. Global apathy, rooted in geopolitical prudence, legal standards, and calls for action un answered yet constructive engagement, principled

### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

**"The Government must drastically increase the funds made available under the NCAP. The current budget, inclusive of NCAP funding and the 15th Finance Commission's grants, is about Rs. 10,500 crores, spread across 131 cities! Our cities need at least 10-20 times more funding - NCAP must be made a Rs. 25,000 crore program and spread across the 1,000 most polluted towns in the country. NCAP must adopt the measurement of PM 2.5 levels as the yardstick for performance. NCAP must reorient its focus to key sources of emissions - burning of solid fuels, vehicular emissions, and industrial emissions,"**

Jairam Ramesh  
Congress leader



diplomacy and empowered civil society offers a path forward one, where human rights are upheld without destabilizing the regional voice.



# Eight arrested after puja donation dispute sparks violence in Tripura's Unakoti; Section 163 imposed, internet suspended

AGARTALA/UNAKOTI

At least eight people were arrested on Friday after tensions over the collection of puja subscriptions escalated into violence in Tripura's Unakoti district, prompting the administration to impose prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) and suspend mobile internet services for 48 hours.

The unrest broke out in the Saydarpara-Shimultala area under Fatikroy police station, ahead of the annual Bhairab Mela scheduled to be held from January 24 to 26. According to local sources, the confrontation began near the Bhairab Thali on the Kanchanbari Main Road when members of the mela committee allegedly demanded puja



donations from a timber-laden vehicle owner, identified as Mosabbir Ali.

What started as a heated exchange reportedly turned into a scuffle and soon spiralled into widespread violence. Police said a mob blocked roads, vandalised vehicles and set fire to several shops. A timber shop and stacks of hay kept outside houses were gutted, while multiple vehicles were damaged or torched. Several civilians sustained injuries, triggering panic in the area.

As the situation deteriorated, security forces, including personnel from the Tripura State Rifles (TSR) and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), were deployed in large numbers. Police carried out a mild lathi-charge to disperse the crowd, while drone surveillance was

used to monitor movement and prevent further escalation.

Unakoti District Magistrate Dr. Tamal Majumdar and In-Charge Superintendent of Police Avinash Rai rushed to the spot to assess the situation. The district administration subsequently imposed Section 163 BNSS to curb unlawful assembly and suspended mobile internet services across the district as a precautionary measure.

"The situation is now peaceful and fully under control," SP Avinash Rai told. "Some youths had set fire outside a few houses. Forces were immediately deployed, Section 163 BNSS was imposed, and flag marches are underway. Eight persons have been arrested in connection with the violence," he said.

Reacting to the incident, local MLA and minister Sudhangshu

Das termed the unrest unfortunate but said the administration had acted swiftly. "Our local leadership and police responded with vigilance. Several arrests have been made. I urge people not to spread rumours or misinformation. Those responsible will be brought to justice," he said.

Tripura Police later issued an appeal on social media, urging restraint and caution. "The situation at Fatikroy under Unakoti district is completely peaceful. All are requested not to post or share any provocative content on social media," the police said.

Authorities said security deployment would continue, with flag marches and close monitoring in place to ensure normalcy ahead of the upcoming Bhairab Mela.

## UDP condemns Rajabala killing in Meghalaya, seeks speedy justice as police make arrests

SHILLONG

The United Democratic Party (UDP) has strongly condemned the killing of a man in Meghalaya's Rajabala area, describing the incident as a "heinous act" and calling for swift and decisive action to bring all those responsible to justice.

The incident occurred around 2 pm on January 9 at Goalgaon under the Rajabala Police Station in West Garo Hills district. The victim, identified as Dilseng M. Sangma, son of Gaban Ch. Marak of Amokgre village in the Phulbari area, was allegedly assaulted by unidentified assailants.

Sangma was initially taken to the Bhaibari Community Health Centre and later referred to Tura for advanced medical treatment. However, he succumbed to his injuries while being shifted.

Reacting to the killing, the UDP's Garo Hills unit said such acts of violence have "no place in a civilised society" and highlighted the need for stronger law-and-order mechanisms. The party expressed solidarity with the bereaved family and urged the authorities to ensure that justice is delivered without delay.

Police said multiple raids were conducted following the incident, leading to the arrest of three persons. Efforts are underway to identify and apprehend other suspects involved in the attack.

In the wake of the incident, the Deputy Commissioner convened a meeting with civil society organisations to constitute a peace committee and discuss measures to maintain communal harmony in the district. The UDP also appealed to the state government to strengthen preventive steps to avoid a recurrence of such incidents and to ensure peace in the region.

## Tripura Rural Livelihoods Mission bags SKOCH Award for Project TRIPTI

AGARTALA/NEW DELHI

The Tripura Rural Livelihoods Mission (TRLM) has been awarded the prestigious SKOCH Award for its flagship initiative, Project TRIPTI, recognising its impact in strengthening livelihoods among the state's most vulnerable rural households. The award was presented at the India Habitat Centre in New Delhi on Friday and was received by TRLM Chief Executive Officer Tarit Kanti Chakma, IAS. Launched in December 2023, Project TRIPTI is being implemented across the Ambassa, Ganganagar and Dasda blocks of Dhalai and North Tripura districts. With a total outlay of ₹15 crore over a 36-month period, the project targets 4,000 extremely vulnerable households, adopting the Graduation Approach to help families transition out of extreme poverty through sustainable livelihood support.

Officials said the project has made substantial progress since its inception, with ₹11.90 crore already disbursed directly to beneficiary households. This includes ₹1.60 crore provided as consumption support grants, ₹6.80 crore released as the first tranche of livelihood support grants, and ₹2.40 crore as the second tranche. An additional ₹1.10 crore has been utilised for capacity building, workshops and honorarium for community cadres involved in implementation.

The SKOCH Award, regarded as one of the highest independent civilian honours in the fields of governance and development, is conferred after a rigorous multi-stage, outcome-based evaluation process. The recognition highlights TRLM's contribution to social and economic development through targeted interventions aimed at poverty alleviation.

Officials associated with the mission said the award serves as an endorsement of Tripura's efforts to create sustainable livelihood pathways for its poorest households through community-led and inclusive development models.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a programme in Imphal, Khuman said Kukis who have long been residing in Manipur should continue to live in the state, but illegal immigrants must be identified through a proper institutional mechanism such as the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

"We do not consider every Kuki as our enemy. We want to

live together peacefully. However, issues such as demographic imbalance, drugs and illegal immigration cannot be ignored. There should be a mechanism like the NRC, with a defined base year, to identify illegal immigrants," Khuman said.

He described illegal immigration as a "known fact" rather than speculation, and said the related challenges of demographic change and drug trafficking must be addressed in a systematic manner to ensure lasting peace in the state.

Khuman also underscored the responsibility of political leaders, urging elected representatives to prioritise Manipur's interests above all other considerations.

On the role of Arambai Tenggol, he said the organisation remains committed to peace but would act when necessary. "We are prepared to exist in peace, but we will come out whenever required," he said.

Manipur has been gripped by ethnic violence between Meitei and Kuki communities since May 2023, a conflict that has claimed at least 260 lives and displaced thousands. The state is currently under President's Rule.

Manipur has recorded more than 3,000 road accidents and at least 834 fatalities over a seven-year period leading up to late 2025, with the state's road accident fatality rate far exceeding the national average, senior officials

## Manipur records over 830 road deaths in 3,000 accidents, fatality rate nearly three times national average



IMPHAL

said on Saturday.

Addressing a function in Imphal, Additional Chief Secretary Anurag Bajpai said Manipur's fatality rate-measured as deaths per accident-stands at around 29 per cent, nearly three times higher than the all-India average of 9.3 per cent. He described the

figures as a matter of serious concern for the state administration.

Bajpai said speeding emerged as the primary cause of road fatalities in 2022, while weaknesses in accident response systems continue to pose challenges. He noted that despite ongoing efforts, gaps remain in emergency response, coordination and preventive infrastructure. The official said the government would intensify its focus on road safety through a series of initiatives, including the observance of National Road Safety Month 2026. Workshops and training programmes will be organised for officials from the police, health and transport departments to strengthen inter-departmental coordination in accident management.

"Road Safety Month reminds us that most road accidents are preventable, and every life lost is a tragedy for families, communities and the state," Bajpai said, stressing that road safety must be treated as a priority across both valley and hill districts, alongside infrastructure development.

He also urged citizens to remain vigilant and flag road safety shortcomings, such as the absence of cautionary markings near school zones, to help prevent avoidable accidents. Such measures, he said, are critical for community welfare and public safety.

During January 2026, the Transport Department and the state government are stepping up efforts under the three Es-Engineering, Enforcement and Education-focusing on improved road design, signage, black spot rectification and pedestrian safety. Bajpai added that a series of educational programmes will be conducted in schools, while district collectors have been directed to organise road safety events in their respective districts.

The initiatives aim to raise public awareness about traffic rules, responsible driving and the protection of human lives, in line with the national road safety theme "Sadak Suraksha, Jeevan Raksha."

## Arambai Tenggol chief pitches peaceful coexistence in Manipur, raises alarm over demographic imbalance

IMPHAL

Korou Nganba Khuman, chief of Meitei outfit Arambai Tenggol, on January 10 called for peaceful coexistence between Meitei and Kuki communities in Manipur, asserting that not all Kukis are viewed as adversaries and stressing that a durable resolution to the ethnic conflict hinges on addressing concerns over demographic imbalance and illegal immigration.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a programme in Imphal, Khuman said Kukis who have long been residing in Manipur should continue to live in the state, but illegal immigrants must be identified through a proper institutional mechanism such as the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

"We do not consider every Kuki as our enemy. We want to



live together peacefully. However, issues such as demographic imbalance, drugs and illegal immigration cannot be ignored. There should be a mechanism like the NRC, with a defined base year, to identify illegal immigrants," Khuman said.

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Justice Revati Mohite Dere was sworn in as the Chief Justice of the Meghalaya High Court on January 10, ushering in a new phase of leadership for the state's judiciary.

The oath of office was administered by Governor C.H. Vijayashankar at a ceremony held at the Durbar Hall of Lok Bhavan in Shillong. Justice Dere succeeds Justice Soumen Sen, who has been transferred to the Kerala High Court.

Prior to her appointment, Justice Dere served as a judge of the Bombay High Court. Born in Pune, she completed her schooling at St Joseph's High School, Pashan, and her higher secondary education at Ferguson College, Pune, where she was awarded a National Merit Certificate. She graduated from Symbiosis Law College, Pune, securing first class with distinction in BSL and LLB, and stood second in the LLB merit list of the University of Pune.

Justice Dere went on to pursue an LLM at the University of Cambridge on a Cambridge Commonwealth Trust Scholarship.

## Justice Revati Mohite Dere sworn in as Chief Justice of Meghalaya High Court

SHILLONG

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Justice Dere went on to pursue an LLM at the University of Cambridge on a Cambridge Commonwealth Trust Scholarship.

On returning to India, she trained under senior advocate Vijayrao A. Mohite and later under barrister Raja S. Bhosale, before building a wide-ranging legal practice in criminal, civil and constitutional law before the High Court and Sessions Court.

Her career also included stints as assistant government pleader in the writ cell of the Bombay High Court, senior counsel for the Union of India and additional public prosecutor for the Union. She later served as government pleader and public prosecutor for the state of Maharashtra, appearing in several significant matters, including public interest litigations.

Justice Dere was appointed an additional judge of the Bombay High Court on June 21, 2013, and became a permanent judge on March 2, 2016. She was appointed Chief Justice of the Meghalaya High Court on January 10, 2026, and formally assumed office on January 10. Her appointment is expected to contribute to greater judicial efficiency in the state and marks an important step in strengthening gender representation in the higher judiciary.

## Manipuri folk-experimental band Ereimang set for first out-of-state show in Bengaluru

IMPHAL/BENGALURU

Manipuri contemporary folk-experimental band Ereimang is set to step onto a national stage for the first time with an out-of-state performance at BLR Hubba in Bengaluru on January 18, marking a significant milestone in the group's musical journey.

The band will perform under the banner "From Manipur with love, Ereimang", introducing its distinctive sound-rooted in indigenous Manipuri traditions and infused with elements of rock and metal to a wider audience.

Formed in 2015, Ereimang is known for blending traditional performative forms with contemporary experimental music. At the heart of its sound is the Pena, the traditional Meitei string instrument, which anchors the band's compositions in cultural memory while cutting through heavy, distorted arrangements.

Despite being active for nearly a decade, the band remained largely out of the public spotlight until 2025, choosing to wait for what its members described as the right moment. Their debut release, Kwakta Lamjel (The Race



at Kwakta), reinterpreted a Meitei folk ballad centred on power, injustice and moral decline, marking Ereimang's formal entry into the recorded music scene.

The band's follow-up track, Heirangkhoi, based on a popular folk song reflecting on life, loss and fate, drew widespread attention, garnering over four lakh views and likes on YouTube.

Another release, Ching (The Hill), presents hills as silent witnesses to history and continuity, featuring strong shamanic vocals and a ritualistic sonic texture.

Ereimang made its live debut at the 2nd Eikhoigi Imphal International Film Festival in February 2025, performing amid Manipur's prolonged unrest. The performance stood out for its intense,

ritual-driven stage presence, ceremonial attire and trance-like movements deeply rooted in Manipuri tradition.

The Bengaluru show carries added significance as the band will perform on the same stage on a night headlined by former Megadeth guitarist Marty Friedman, placing Ereimang alongside internationally recognised metal acts.

Calling the opportunity both exciting and daunting, percussionist and band manager Heisnam Shantanu said BLR Hubba represents a vast cultural space. "Stepping into it brings excitement, nervous energy and a sense of responsibility," he said.

Founder L. Kamal Singh said the band had consciously delayed its public emergence. "Everything was ready years ago, but we felt the timing wasn't right. There was a risk of being misunderstood, and some of us were very young. So we waited," he said.

Ereimang comprises L. Kamal Singh and Gajendra Laipubam on guitars, Kamlesh Khundrakpam on bass, Thoichanba on Pena and male vocals, Heisnam Shantanu on percussion, Nongshaba Okram on drums, Minerva Laipubam on female vocals, and Vandana Wahengbam as performer.

With its Bengaluru debut, Ereimang is poised to carry Manipuri folk-rooted experimental music beyond the state, signalling a notable moment for Manipur's contemporary music scene.

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## “Direct attack on Constitution”: BJP’s Suvendu Adhikari accuses Mamata Banerjee of interfering in ED raid

KOLKATA

West Bengal Leader of Opposition (LoP) Suvendu Adhikari on Friday strongly criticised Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee’s reaction to the Enforcement Directorate (ED) raid on Indian Political Action Committee (IPAC), calling it a “completely criminal offence” and a “direct attack on the Constitution.”

Speaking to the reporters, Adhikari said, “It is a completely criminal offence. The CM’s action is a direct attack on the Constitution.”

He further added that all central agencies, including the ED and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), follow established laws and procedures when taking action.

“When the BJP govt comes to power, our govt will take action against everyone...All agencies, including ED and CBI, follow laws and procedures to take any action. They did not take permission for the protest,” Adhikari added.

This comes after West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee allegedly interfered during an ED raid in Kolkata at the offices of political consultancy firm IPAC in connection with the coal smuggling case.

Banerjee questioned the legality of the raid, alleging that the central agency had seized party-related materials, including hard disks, candidate lists and strategic documents, and accused Amit Shah of misusing central agencies.

“Is it the duty of the ED,



Amit Shah, to collect the party’s hard disk, candidate list? The nasty, naughty Home Minister who cannot protect the country is taking away all my party documents,” Banerjee said while speaking to reporters.

“At 6:00 am, they arrived and seized the party’s data, laptops, strategies, and mobile phones. Their forensic experts transferred all the data. I believe this is a crime,” she said. Countering the Chief Minister’s allegations, the ED accused Mamata Banerjee of entering the residential premises of Prateek Jain, director of IPAC, during the ongoing search operation and taking away “key evidence”, including physical documents and

electronic devices.

“Banerjee entered the residential premises of Prateek Jain and took away key evidence, including physical documents and electronic devices,” the ED said, adding that her convoy then proceeded to IPAC’s office, from where “Ms Banerjee, her aides and the state police personnel forcibly removed physical documents and electronic evidence.”

Today, TMC MPs in Delhi staged a protest at the Home Ministry in Delhi, raising slogans against Amit Shah, alleging “misuse” of the probe agency. Delhi Police later detained the TMC MPs and took them to Parliament Street police station.

## India, being a Hindu nation, will have a Hindu PM: BJP counters Owaisi’s ‘hijab-clad PM’ dream

SOLAPUR

BJP leaders on Saturday slammed AIMIM President Asaduddin Owaisi’s controversial statement that one day a hijab-clad daughter will become the Prime Minister of India, framing his statement as divisive or unrealistic.

Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma responded to the statement, saying that even though it is constitutionally possible, India, being a Hindu nation, will see a Hindu person becoming the Prime Minister of the country.

“Constitutionally, there is no bar. Anyone can become the Prime Minister. But India is a Hindu nation, Hindu civilisation, and we will always believe, and we are extremely confident that the Indian Prime Minister will always be a Hindu person,” he said, while speaking to the media.

BJP National Spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla also sharply reacted to Owaisi’s remarks, challenging him to make a ‘Pasmanda’ muslim or hijab-clad woman the president of AIMIM.

“Hijabwali will become PM, says Miyaan Owaisi. Miyaan Owaisi - constitution stops nobody, but I challenge you to make a Pasmanda or Hijabwali as your president of AIMIM first,” Poonawalla said in a post on X.

Meanwhile, Congress leader Imran Masood disagreed with AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi’s “hijab-clad woman as PM” remarks and said that the latter’s statement is like “seeing stars during the day.”

Imran Masood said, “He is talking about things that are impossible, it’s like seeing stars during the day. Why is he talking about something that’s simply not possible? Everyone has rights within a democracy. Wearing or not wearing a hijab is a personal matter.”

Moreover, Shiv Sena spokesperson Shaina NC emphasised that leadership should be based on performance and popular mandate, not caste, creed, or community. She added that a woman Prime Minister could be supported in the future on merit.

“Asaduddin Owaisi, there is no vacancy for the Prime Minister’s slot. Narendra Modi’s popularity is known to one and all. First, let your members



of parliament be elected, then dream about a Prime Minister. Yes, at some stage, we too would want a woman Prime Minister, but not based on her caste, creed, or community, but on her good work and the popular mandate of the people of India,” Shaina said.

BJP MLA Balmukund Acharya slammed AIMIM Chief Asaduddin Owaisi’s statement that a hijab-clad daughter will become the Prime Minister of India. Accusing him of appeasement politics, he said Owaisi focuses on only one community.

Reacting to Owaisi’s recent statement, Acharya said that such remarks reflect a mindset driven by politics centred around a particular community. “This kind of nonsense will continue to run through the minds of those who practice appeasement politics and politics based on a particular community. Why don’t you talk about India?” he said, questioning Owaisi.

Acharya further alleged that Owaisi remains fixated on Pakistan, rather than contributing to constructive discourse within the country. “Why don’t you talk



about India?... You only seem to have Pakistan on your mind,” the BJP MLA said.

Taking his attack further, Acharya said that those who wished to choose a nation on the basis of religion had already done so in 1947. “Those who wanted to choose their country based on religion, who wanted to run their country based on Sharia law, made their decision and went with Jinnah,” he said.

“But even today, the ghost of Jinnah still haunts some people here, and it keeps resurfacing,” he added.

Owaisi’s remarks come amid intense campaigning for Mumbai’s upcoming civic elections, which are scheduled to be held on January 15. The results will be announced on January 16.

Political reactions intensified on Saturday following AIMIM President Asaduddin Owaisi’s controversial statement that one day a hijab-clad daughter will become the Prime Minister of India. Prominent leaders from the BJP, Congress and other parties shared their remarks on the statement, with many mocking the statement and accusing

Owaisi of appeasing the Muslim community.

Highlighting the inclusivity of the Indian Constitution, AIMIM President Asaduddin Owaisi said that one day a hijab-clad daughter will become the Prime Minister of India.

Speaking at the election meeting in Solapur, Maharashtra, on Friday, Owaisi argued that such inclusivity is not offered in Pakistan’s constitution, which restricts people of other religions from holding top posts.

“The constitution of Pakistan clearly states that a person belonging to only one religion can become the Prime Minister of the country. Baba Sahib’s constitution says that any citizen of India can become Prime Minister, CM, or mayor. It is my dream that a day will come when a hijab-clad daughter will become the Prime Minister of this country,” he said.

Owaisi further said that those who “spread hate against Muslims will come to an end” and when love becomes common, people will realise “how their people’s mind was poisoned.”

## INTERNATIONAL

### From ‘Zan, Zendegi, Azadi’ to a working-class revolt, has Iran’s tryst with destiny arrived?

TEHRAN

A woman holds a flame to a man’s face and uses it to light a cigarette. The man is not present, but his authority is. His portrait burns anyway. The gesture is small, almost casual—not a riot but a refusal—and that is precisely its power. Women across Iran have learned that defiance need not announce itself as revolution. Sometimes it inhales. Sometimes it exhales smoke.

This is where the present struggle begins: not with ideology, but with women reclaiming the right to inhabit their own bodies without permission. Long before economic protests returned to the streets, women had already declared the regime’s moral authority void. Hair removed, hijabs burned, portraits desecrated—these acts were not symbolic flourishes but ontological ones. They asserted a simple truth the Islamic Republic cannot tolerate: sovereignty begins with the body.

That truth was forced into the open by the killing of Mahsa Amini, a twenty-two-year-old Kurdish woman arrested in September 2022 by the morality police for allegedly violating hijab regulations. She died after violent detention, her body bearing the marks of state discipline exercised in God’s name. Her death detonated a nationwide uprising unlike any the regime had faced. The slogan that followed—“Zan, Zendegi, Azadi” (Woman, Life, Freedom)—was not rhetorical decoration but a reordering of political priorities. Life before doctrine. Autonomy before obedience.

The state responded as it always does: bullets, mass arrests, internet blackouts and confessions extracted under duress. But something had shifted. Fear fractured. Women did not retreat. Instead, their defiance became contagious.

Azar Nafisi once described this kind of quiet rebellion in Reading Lolita in Tehran, where women gathered in private apartments to read forbidden novels, not because literature could topple

a regime, but because it could preserve an interior life the state could not colonise. The Islamic Republic has always understood the danger of such spaces. A woman reading without permission, like a woman walking unveiled, announces that authority has limits. The regime’s war on women has never been about modesty; it has been about ownership.

What followed Mahsa Amini’s death did not end with the suppression of the 2022 uprising. Instead, it inaugurated a period of recurring unrest that has now culminated in the broadest and most socially expansive challenge the Islamic Republic has faced in years—and, by the breadth of its geographic reach and class composition, arguably the most serious popular mobilisation since the fall of the Shah. What began as a women-led revolt against bodily control has since spilled decisively into workplaces and markets: bazaars have closed, factories slowed, transport workers struck, and teachers walked out.

This shift matters because it marks the point at which moral defiance becomes material refusal. When protest enters the sphere of reproduction—wages, rent, food, work—it ceases to be containable as cultural dissent and becomes a direct challenge to how power is organised and sustained.

Iran today is a country where official inflation exceeds forty per cent, while food prices are rising faster still. Bread, eggs, dairy, cooking oil—the grammar of survival—have seen double-digit annual increases. The minimum wage covers barely a fraction of the cost of basic living in major cities. Rent consumes over half of household income for working families. Healthcare and education are rationed by wealth. Survival depends on debt, multiple jobs, or withdrawal from the formal economy altogether.

Nearly sixty per cent of working-age Iranians are excluded from secure employment. Youth unemployment is chronic. Graduates drive taxis, sell goods informally, or emigrate. Workers

do not labour to advance but to postpone collapse. This is not temporary hardship. It is structural immiseration.

That distinction matters. Hunger existed under the Shah, but it was the by-product of uneven development and authoritarian modernisation—brutal and politically explosive, but not sanctified. Under the Islamic Republic, hunger has become a governing instrument. It is no longer collateral damage. It is leverage.

At the centre of this system stands the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), now less a military institution than an economic sovereign. Through a labyrinth of foundations, holding companies, and quasi-private firms, the IRGC dominates construction, energy, telecommunications, logistics, and heavy industry. Conservative estimates place between a quarter and a third of Iran’s GDP under its influence. Sanctions do not weaken this structure; they harden it, rewarding those best positioned to evade them while wages erode and workers absorb the cost.

This is why the working-class character of the revolt matters. Middle-class protest can be dismissed as cultural deviance or foreign influence. Working-class revolt cannot. When shopkeepers close bazaars, when transport workers strike, when teachers and labourers walk out, the regime loses its foundational claim to rule in the name of the dispossessed. Its mythology collapses under lived experience.

Iran’s exceptionally gifted film directors, the likes of Abbas Kiarostami, understood this form of power long before it erupted into open revolt. In Taste of Cherry, a man drives through Tehran searching for someone willing to bury him after his suicide. Authority barely appears. There are no sermons, no slogans, no police raids. What weighs on the film is something quieter and more devastating: isolation, exhaustion, the thinning of meaning under invisible constraints. Power does not need to shout. It merely narrows the space

in which life can be lived.

This is how the Islamic Republic endures. It does not require belief, only compliance. It governs by making silence feel like safety and obedience feel like relief. Over time, survival becomes submission.

But women broke that logic. By refusing compulsory hijab, they revoked consent. By burning portraits, they stripped authority of its aura. The economic protests that followed were not separate from this defiance but its extension. Women demanding bodily autonomy, workers demanding wages, students demanding futures—these are not competing agendas but converging refusals.

To understand how Iran arrived here, one must reject the false binary of Shah versus Supreme Leader, secular tyranny versus religious tyranny. The catastrophe is not that Iran moved from modernity to theocracy, but that it was repeatedly denied democratic sovereignty.

The 1953 coup against Mohammad Mossadegh foreclosed that path. The Shah’s repression prepared the ground. The clerics exploited the revolution, used the left to seize power, and then butchered it—culminating in the 1988 prison massacres, where tens of thousands were executed and erased.

This history is not past. It governs the present. And it is routinely obscured by geopolitical campism. On one side, the regime demands silence in the name of anti-Zionism. On the other, reactionaries invoke Iranian suffering to launder imperial or monarchist fantasies. Both reduce Iranians to instruments. Both erase the working class.

The woman lighting a cigarette from a burning portrait is not thinking about Washington or Tel Aviv. A worker striking over unpaid wages is not auditioning for anyone’s camp. They are asserting something more dangerous: that life should not require permission, that survival should not depend on obedience, that dignity is not negotiable.

## ‘Sham election’: Myanmar holds second round of polling amid armed conflict

YANGON

Myanmar resumed voting Sunday in the second round of its first general election in five years, expanding polling to additional townships, including some areas affected by the civil war between the military government and its armed opponents.

Polling stations opened at 6 am local time in 100 townships across the country, including parts of Sagaing, Magway, Mandalay, Bago and Tanintharyi regions, as well as Mon, Shan, Kachin, Kayah and Kayin states. Many of those areas have seen clashes in recent months or remain under heightened security, underscoring the risks surrounding the vote.

The election is being held in three phases due to armed conflicts. The first round took place on Dec. 28 in 102 of the country’s total 330 townships, followed by the second phase on Sunday. A final round is scheduled for Jan. 25, though 65 townships will not take part because of fighting.

Myanmar has a two-house national legislature, totaling 664 seats. The party with a combined parliamentary majority can select the new president, who can name a Cabinet and form a new government. The military automatically receives 25% of seats in each house under the constitution.

Critics say the polls organized by the military government are neither free nor fair and are an effort by the military to legitimize its rule after seizing power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021.

On Sunday morning, people in Yangon, the country’s largest city, and Mandalay, the second-largest, were casting their ballots at high schools, government buildings and religious buildings.

While more than 4,800 candidates from 57 parties are competing for seats in national and regional legislatures, only six parties are competing nationwide with the possibili-



ty of gaining political clout in parliament. The first phase left the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party, or USDP, in a dominant position, winning nearly 90% of those contested seats in that phase in Pyithu Hluttaw, the lower house of parliament. It also won a majority of seats in regional legislatures.

The military government claimed more than 6 million people—about 52% of the more than 11 million eligible voters in the first phase of elections—cast ballots, calling the turnout a decisive success.

Suu Kyi, Myanmar’s 80-year-old former leader, and her party aren’t participating in the polls. She is serving a 27-year prison term on charges widely viewed as spurious and politically motivated. Her party, the National League for Democracy, was dissolved in 2023 after refusing to register under new military rules.

Other parties also refused to register or declined to run under conditions they deem unfair, while opposition groups have called for a voter boycott.

Tom Andrews, a special rapporteur working with the UN human rights office, urged the international community Thursday to reject what he called a “sham election,” saying the first round exposed coercion, violence and political exclusion. “You cannot have

a free, fair or credible election when thousands of political prisoners are behind bars, credible opposition parties have been dissolved, journalists are muzzled, and fundamental freedoms are crushed,” Andrews said.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, which keeps detailed tallies of arrests and casualties linked to the nation’s political conflicts, more than 22,000 people are detained for political offenses, and more than 7,600 civilians have been killed by security forces since 2021.

The army’s takeover triggered widespread peaceful protests that soon erupted into armed resistance, and the country slipped into a civil war.

A new Election Protection Law imposes harsh penalties and restrictions for virtually all public criticism of the polls. The authorities have charged more than 330 people under new electoral law for leafleting or online activity over the past few months.

There were no reports of major interference with the polls on Sunday morning, though opposition organizations and armed resistance groups had vowed to disrupt the electoral process. During the first phase, attacks were reported in 11 of the 102 townships holding polls, according to the military government.

## Cross-Border Unrest: Are Political Forces Fueling the Violence?

In recent months, a disturbing pattern of violence has been unfolding across Bangladesh and India. Though these incidents appear scattered and disconnected-occurring in different regions, involving different communities-their cumulative effect is deeply unsettling. Acts of torture, intimidation, arson, and targeted killings are steadily eroding the foundations of humanity, coexistence, and democratic values in both countries.

Across the world, peace-loving and progressive citizens have condemned these developments. Yet what is most alarming is not merely the violence itself, but the visible reluctance-or failure-of state administrations to respond decisively. In several cases, law enforcement agencies have delayed investigations, hesitated to register complaints, or acted selectively, further deepening public distrust.

The systematic spread of hatred in the name of religion, caste, language, and region threatens consequences far beyond isolated incidents. For many conscientious citizens, this trend signals something more troubling: the possibility of a deliberate political design aimed at destabilising social harmony and reshaping power structures through fear and division.

**Bangladesh: A Crisis of Governance and Minority Security**

At present, Bangladesh stands without a truly democratic government. The extremist nationalist-backed caretaker administration has shown itself incapable of protecting the lives and properties of all citizens, particularly those belonging to minority communities.

A series of horrifying incidents illustrates this failure. False accusations of blasphemy led to the brutal burning alive of Dipu Das-an act that shocked even those accustomed to political violence in the region. In places such as Chittagong and Pirojpur, young men were shot, beaten to death, or forced to flee as their homes were locked and set ablaze. In one such fire in Chittagong, even a child lost their life. In Shariatpur's Damudya area, a sudden terror attack by three criminals resulted in the death of Khokan Das after he succumbed to his injuries in hospital. While police eventually registered cases, the delay and lack of visible urgency sent a chilling message to vulnerable communities: their safety is negotiable.

This pervasive atmosphere of insecurity has had a profound psychological impact. When minorities live in fear in Bangladesh, the



consequences do not remain confined within its borders. History has shown that such instability inevitably spills over into neighbouring regions, especially India's eastern and northeastern states.

**India's Troubling Response: Law, Borders, and Collective Punishment**

The reaction within India has been equally concerning, though manifested differently. In Arunachal Pradesh, some residents have openly threatened to drive out people labelled as "Bangladeshis," blurring the line between citizenship, ethnicity, and suspicion. In certain states, police have assumed the role of judge and executioner-detaining individuals without due process and abandoning them at the Bangladesh border.

In Assam, the situation is particularly grave. Individuals declared "foreigners" by tribunals are reportedly being pushed back across borders without allowing them the right to appeal. This raises serious moral and legal questions. Over the years, numerous tribunal-declared foreigners have been cleared by the High Court and even the Supreme Court, exposing the fallibility of such quasi-judicial bodies. To deport or "push back" individuals without exhausting legal remedies is not merely administrative overreach-it is inhumane. Citizenship cannot be reduced to paperwork errors or bureaucratic suspicion, especially when lives, families, and generations of belonging are at stake.

**Anti-Bengali Sentiment and the Politics of Division**

A growing anti-Bengali sentiment appears to be spreading across parts of India, suggesting a deeper and more dangerous conspiracy.

This hostility does not discriminate between religion; it targets both Hindu and Muslim Bengalis alike. Language, culture, and identity are increasingly being weaponised to serve political ends.

If those in power believe that aggression and intimidation will help them assert control over West Bengal or margin-

alise Bengali-speaking populations elsewhere, they may be gravely mistaken. Bengalis have never been expansionist or aggressive by nature, but history shows that when attacked, they are capable of fierce and principled resistance.

India's freedom struggle is replete with examples of Bengali bravery, sacrifice, and intellectual leadership. To ignore or erase that legacy is not merely historical ignorance-it reflects a narrow, exclusionary mindset incompatible with India's pluralistic ethos.

**Language, Identity, and Constitutional Guarantees**

The attempt to impose the dominance of a single language-particularly Hindi-over India's vast linguistic diversity is unlikely to succeed. The Indian Constitution guarantees dignity, equality, and protection to all regional languages, many of which have earned classical status through centuries of literary and cultural contribution.

It is worth noting that even RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat recently urged citizens to speak in their mother tongues and preserve their linguistic heritage. This acknowledgment, coming from within the ideological ecosystem often accused of linguistic centralisation, underscores an important truth: cultural uniformity cannot be enforced without damaging the nation itself.

**Assam and the Neglect of Barak Valley**

In Assam, efforts to political corner Bengalis have taken on a regional dimension, particularly in the Barak Valley. Emotional and historical grievances are being exploited rather than addressed. One long-standing demand-renaming Silchar Railway Station as "Language Martyrs Station" to honour those who died defending linguistic rights-has repeatedly been ignored by the state government. At the same time, unemployment among educated youth in the Barak Valley continues to worsen. Many graduates now survive by driving e-autos or running

small roadside businesses. The irony is stark: if Barak's talented youth can find employment across India and even globally, why are opportunities denied to them within Assam itself?

This disparity reflects a deeper neglect-a mindset that views the region as peripheral rather than integral. Development cannot be selective, and dignity cannot be conditional.

**Majority Responsibility and Moral Accountability**

In every nation, the responsibility of safeguarding minorities rests squarely on the shoulders of the majority. This is not merely a political obligation but a moral one. India and Bangladesh are no exceptions. Any attempt to curtail a person's right to live with dignity-based on religion, language, or ethnicity-is fundamentally inhumane. History teaches us that forces driven by terror, hatred, and division never achieve lasting success. Violence may yield short-term control, but it ultimately invites resistance-and retribution. Nature, society, and conscience have a way of correcting injustice, even if slowly.

**External Forces and Internal Fault Lines**

The shadow of imperialist intervention has often loomed large over such divisions. Powerful global actors have repeatedly exploited internal unrest to weaken nations and assert dominance. From U.S. aggression in Venezuela to destabilisation elsewhere, the pattern is well documented.

South Asia is no stranger to such interference. Yet external manipulation alone cannot succeed without internal collaborators-those willing to trade social harmony for political gain.

**Hope Beyond the Present Crisis**

Despite the bleakness of the present moment, despair is not inevitable. India and Bangladesh were once bound by deep ties of friendship, shared history, and cultural exchange. That relationship has been damaged-by internal unrest in Bangladesh, by rising intolerance in India, and by external conspiracies seeking to exploit both. But history also reminds us that broken relationships can heal. If Bangladesh succeeds in forming a truly representative and democratic government, the foundations for renewed friendship may emerge. With stability and justice, moral consciousness among citizens of both nations can rise again.

When people feel secure, when law prevails over fear, and when humanity is placed above politics, violence loses its grip. That future may seem distant today-but it remains possible.

For now, hope and vigilance must walk together. Humanity, in the end, has always outlived hatred. Everything else eventually fades.

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## Loktak Lake: Where Floating Forests, Endangered Wildlife, and Manipur's Living History Converge



ternational importance, with its area fluctuating between 250 and 500 square kilometres depending on the season. That fluctuation is natural, or at least it used to be. The lake once expanded and contracted freely, fed by multiple rivers and drained by the Manipur River system. The phumdis followed this rhythm, absorbing nutrients during floods and regenerating when waters receded. This cycle sustained fish populations, water birds, and the livelihoods of thousands.

Fishing here is not an industry imposed from outside. It is a way of life shaped around the lake's movements. Phumsangs, floating huts anchored to phumdis, dot the water. Families live on them, fish from them, raise children on them. Nets are cast at dawn. Canoes glide through narrow channels cut between floating masses. The lake feeds, shelters, and employs.

Loktak also powers. The Ithai Barrage, built for hydropower and irrigation, altered the lake's natural cycle by maintaining a high water level year-round. The consequences have been profound. Phumdis no longer touch the lakebed often enough to regenerate. They thin. They fragment. Fish breeding patterns change. What was once a breathing ecosystem risks becoming a stagnant one.

This tension between development and ecology defines Loktak's modern story. The lake supplies water for agriculture across the Imphal Valley. It generates electricity. It supports fisheries. At the same time, these interventions threaten the very processes that make the lake viable. Conservation here is not

**L**oktak Lake does not announce itself quietly. It spreads out, shifts shape, breathes with the seasons, and refuses to stay still. Near Moirang in Manipur's Bishnupur district, about 48 kilometres from Imphal, it holds the distinction of being the largest freshwater lake in Northeast India. But size is the least interesting thing about it.

What makes Loktak singular is its surface. Floating across the water are phumdis, thick, spongy masses of soil, vegetation, and organic matter that drift, settle, break apart, and re-form. Some are small and transient. Others are vast enough to support huts, fishing platforms, and even forests. These floating islands are not decorative accidents of nature. They are the lake's living architecture.

At the heart of this architecture lies Keibul Lamjao National Park, the world's only floating national park. Spread across the southwestern part of Loktak, it rests entirely on phumdis. This is not a metaphor. The park literally floats. And within it survives the Sangai, the brow-antlered deer, known locally as the dancing deer for its delicate gait on the yielding surface. Endangered and deeply symbolic, the Sangai is inseparable from Loktak's fate. If the phumdis weaken, the park sinks. If the park sinks, the Sangai disappears.

Loktak is a Ramsar wetland of in-



about freezing the lake in time. It is about restoring its ability to change.

Beyond ecology, Loktak carries deep cultural weight. It is sometimes called the Lake of Tears, a phrase rooted in local legends of loss, longing, and survival. Stories passed down through generations tie the lake to identity and memory. This is not a backdrop. It is a participant in Manipur's emotional landscape.

History, too, runs along its shores. In nearby Moirang, the Indian National Army hoisted the tricolour in 1944, a moment that still resonates in the national imagination. Loktak watched that moment unfold, as it has watched centuries of change, conflict, and continuity.

Tourism has found its way here, cautiously. Sendra Island offers sweeping views of the lake's floating geometry. Thanga village provides a glimpse into lake-based life. Ithing and other spots attract visitors drawn by the quiet drama of water and sky. But Loktak resists spectacle. It rewards patience more than cameras.



## 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**  
**Barak Valley Conclave**  
 Potential Issues and Challenges of Barak Valley by different sector stakeholders. Includes: KCCs, and D'gongal and can register for free. (patent, research, case law, environment, and present and future). Participation through invitation only. Different rewards are provided.

**11 JAN**  
**Adventure Sports**  
 Trekking & Canoe, Obstacle Navigations, Sport Climbing, Disaster Management Techniques, Water Sports. [www.krcfoundation.org](http://www.krcfoundation.org)



**10 Jan**  
**Barak Festival: Peace Progress & Prosperity**



### 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.

### 12 JAN

## River-Climate Conclave

State leaders will deliberate on Climate Change, pollution and river flooding. The Conclave will focus on the importance, technical and practical of River Basin Planning & Geography, river pollution and degradation. River Barak, Climate Change.





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### 10 JAN

## Media Conclave

Media Conclave: Media Experts, Weblogs, and the Hand, Talks and Conferences are part of the 'Barak Festival 2025'. Theme: 'One for All, All for One'. Media experts, bloggers, journalists, media & corporate PR, speakers, panel, speakers, members.



### 10-12 JAN

## 5E For Success Conclave

The 4th 5E Success Conclave is going to deliberate 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) Colleges. In an online event, where students of NE India Schools and Colleges can participate.



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 RACE MARATHON | CONCLAVES

### 10-12 JAN

## Science Studio

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



### 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'.



### 10-12 JAN

## E-Sports

Full-Blown Competitive | CASH-PRIZES | Trophy



### 11 JAN

## film festival

Award-Giving Ceremony | Film from Mizoram. Short Films from Barak Valley, NE India, W's. Media Talk | Exhibitions | Meet & Greet.



### 10-12 JAN

## Book Bank

Anti-Book Campaign | Book Bank | e-books | e-audio | e-video

### Book Club

Meet Authors, Publishers, Read & Discuss, Buy and Sell Books

### Painting Carnival

Water Colour painting and Draw Race Campaign

### 10 JAN

## Barak Festival Band Night

Musical Night | 10 JAN



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